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September 18th: 1 Kings 9 & Hebrews 9:1-14

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Solomon's second dream. Entrance into a new sanctuary.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings 9. As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said to him, I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built by putting my name there forever.

My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel. But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel

from the land that I have given them.

And the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight. And Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins.

Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house? Then they will say, Because they abandoned the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them. At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house, and Hiram king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee.

But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. Therefore he said, What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother? So they are called the land of Cable to this day. Hiram had sent the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold.

And this is the account of the forced labour that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the Lord, and his own house, and the millow and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Giza. Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Giza and burned it with fire, and had killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. So Solomon rebuilt Giza, and lower Beth-horon, and Baalath, and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land of Judah, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.

All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel, their descendants who were left after them in the land, whom the people of Israel were unable to devote to destruction, these Solomon drafted to be slaves, and so they are to this day. But of the people of Israel Solomon made no slaves. They were the soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, his chariot commanders, and his horsemen.

These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty who had charge of the people who carried on the work. But Pharaoh's daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her. Then he built the millow.

Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the Lord, making offerings with it before the Lord. So he finished the

house. King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezeongiba, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom.

And Hiram sent with the fleet his servants, seamen who were familiar with the sea, together with the servants of Solomon. And they went to Ophiah, and brought from their gold four hundred and twenty talents, and they brought it to King Solomon. First Kings chapter 9 follows Solomon's prayer of dedication and could be read as, in part, God's response to it.

There was an earlier dream in chapter 3 when Solomon received the gift of wisdom, and now he is given a second dream in which the Lord answers the prayer that he made in the preceding chapter. Solomon's prayer had been that the Lord would make the temple that Solomon had built his dwelling place. And the Lord says that he will place his name there, also his eyes and his heart, consecrating the temple as his own.

Placing his name there was a form of identification with the temple. It was his own, and a site of his honour and his glory. As the place of his eyes and his heart, perhaps the Lord expresses his relationship to the house in an even fuller way than Solomon requested.

The Lord judges with his eyes, and the presence of his heart in the house implies more intimate form of identification. These are conditional promises that Solomon is given. He and his sons must walk faithfully before the Lord.

If they do, David will never lack a man on the throne of Israel. If they do not, however, they will be cut off from the land. Israel will become a proverb and a byword among the peoples, and the temple a heap of ruins.

The temple will be cast out of the Lord's sight. It is a sort of bridal house, and the sin of Israel could lead to a kind of divorce. The judgment upon the temple would be a symbolic judgment upon the people as the bride of the Lord.

Israel always lived their life in the sight of the nations, and if they were so severely judged by the Lord, the other nations were supposed to draw a lesson about the Lord's justice from the curse of the covenant falling upon his people. In verses 8 and 9, everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss and they will say, Then they will say, Solomon, as we have already seen, is like a new Adam in a far more glorious and extensive Eden. He is no longer just like a young child.

He is the grown son, ruling in the name of his father. He is sending out into the world and gathering from surrounding lands, like the lands that surrounded the Garden of Eden. He is getting gold from the land of Ophia, perhaps associated with the land of Havila.

He is sending out vessels out upon the seas. He needs to be faithful, however, lest he be expelled. As Peter Lightheart notes, the description of Solomon's great works in this

chapter should make us think of Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verses 4-9.

I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold, and had the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.

Also my wisdom remained with me. Solomon is constructing a new Eden, and much as in the case of the first Eden, the success of this endeavour will depend greatly upon whether or not Solomon will be faithful. His creation is finished in much the same way as the Lord's was finished on the seventh day of creation, and now Solomon and the people are entering into a great Sabbath.

The building of the two houses took twenty years, the temple which took seven years, and then the palace of Solomon which took thirteen years. In light of 1 Kings 6, we know that this was the five hundredth year after the Exodus. This is a great jubilee, ten times fifty years.

However, at this point some clouds start to appear on what had once been a gloriously blue sky. The relationship with Hiram of Tyre that had been so wonderful back in chapter five is now weakened. Solomon seemingly gives Hiram substandard cities in reward for his assistance and his provision of materials in the building of the temple.

Rather than giving him the handsome reward that he ought to have done, strengthening the bond between their lands, Solomon gives him a poor gift in return for his generous assistance, maybe playing more to his dominance over Hiram as his vassal, rather than upon a healthy relationship as a friend. We should almost certainly also be troubled by Solomon's willingness to treat Israelite territory as something to be given to a Gentile king in payment for something. The land is not Solomon's to dispose of.

It is the inheritance of the Lord and should not be alienated from his sons. In this great jubilee there is an unsettling reversal of jubilee themes. The land is being alienated from the people.

The conquest of the land had never fully been achieved. Canaanites remained in it. However, Solomon subjected remaining Canaanites to forced service.

In a somewhat ironic event, Pharaoh destroyed the Canaanites of Giza, a city that the Israelites had failed to capture back in Judges 1, verse 29, and then he gives it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Israel was originally a people dwelling alone and not counting itself among the nations, as they were described in one of the oracles of Balaam. Under Solomon they are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and with that

there is the insistent temptation to become more like the surrounding peoples and nations.

Towards the end of this chapter we see Solomon's failure to maintain the distinctiveness of Israel. He is starting to develop characteristics reminiscent of Pharaoh. He is developing a large body of forced labour and building store cities with them.

The last time that we saw this was back in Exodus 1, verse 11, when Pharaoh was subjecting the children of Israel to harsh labour. Solomon is also accumulating troubling quantities of gold, considering that the Lord had warned the king not to accumulate excessive quantities of silver and gold, back in Deuteronomy 17, verse 17. He is also assembling great numbers of chariots, another thing which the Lord had warned about.

However, while these threatening clouds are starting to gather, much else is encouraging. We hardly ever read of seafaring in the Old Testament. The sea is associated with the Gentiles and Israel is associated with the land.

However, now Israel is learning the ways of the sea from surrounding Gentiles. They are developing skills from more technologically and culturally advanced peoples. They are venturing forth onto the sea and as a result the influence of Israel is growing, as is their affluence.

A question to consider. There are a number of different Gentiles in this chapter with different sorts of relationships with Solomon. Hiram, the remaining Canaanites in the land and Pharaoh.

What are the differences between these figures and the ways that Solomon relates to them? In what ways does he fail to relate to them appropriately? Hebrews chapter 9, verses 1-14. Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence.

It is called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the most holy place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold. In which was a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff that budded and the tablets of the covenant.

Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age. According

to this arrangement gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Having already contrasted the old and the new high priesthoods, and the covenants corresponding to them, in chapter 9 the author of Hebrews describes the old and the new sanctuaries and the priestly service corresponding with them. He begins by roughly describing the order of the tabernacle that was constructed according to the plans that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Moving from the high place, with the lampstand, the table and the bread of the presence, he takes us into the most holy place. The attentive reader of the Old Testament might scratch his head at some of the details here. The golden altar of incense is not in the most holy place, nor are the manna or Aaron's rod in the Ark of the Covenant.

In Exodus chapter 16 verse 34 the manna was seemingly placed before the testimony. In Numbers chapter 17 verse 10 Aaron's rod was also placed in the same location. In 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 9 we read, There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

We have a number of problems here then, before we move on to consider the meaning of these things. First, how can the author of Hebrews say that the golden altar of incense is inside the most holy place? Second, how can he say that the manna and Aaron's rod are inside the Ark of the Covenant? Most commentators simply say that the details are inaccurate. However, it is usually the case when reading scripture that seemingly inaccurate or imprecise details are clues to the fact that something more is going on.

To the first question concerning the location of the golden altar of incense, some have suggested that it is to an incense burner rather than to the golden altar of incense that Hebrews is referring. This seems tenuous to me. While it was not unlikely that there was an incense burner in there for the incense brought in, the far more significant piece of furniture was the altar of incense.

Another intriguing suggestion is that, with texts such as 1 Kings 6, verse 22 in mind, the author of Hebrews is recognising that, although the golden altar of incense is part of the

furniture of the holy place, it is especially tied to the Ark of the Covenant, and in some sense belongs to that part of the tabernacle. It is by means of the altar of incense that one ascends to the most holy place. You might think of it this way, to which room does the ladder belong, the lower room from which it goes up, or the upper room to which it ascends.

Leviticus chapter 16 verses 12-13 gives us some sense of this. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil, and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. The incense, then, is the means by which one ascends from the lower part, which is the holy place, to the upper part, which is the most holy place.

The second question, concerning the location of the manna and the rod, is also challenging. However, even if there is technically imprecision here, it is instructive. For instance, the golden altar of incense is very clearly connected with the Ark of the Covenant, even though divided from it by the veil, it has to be placed before it.

The rod and the manna are placed before the testimonies, connecting them with the tablets of the covenant, not merely the Ark itself, but its contents. The relics of the rod and the manna were not present in the Ark when it was placed in the inner sanctuary in 1 Kings chapter 8. However, the relics of the rod and the manna might also make us think of the furniture of the holy place. The holy place contains the altar of incense, which connects to the Ark of the Covenant, with the lampstand and the table of showbread.

The most holy place contains the Ark of the testimony, with the rod and the manna. The rod, with its almond blossoms, connects with the lampstand with its almond blossoms. The manna, the heavenly bread that God provides in the wilderness, connects with the showbread.

However, after this teasing glimpse into the tabernacle, the author of Hebrews takes us out once more. Having briefly described the tabernacle, he describes the way that the service of the priest related to the sections of it. The key term here is first.

The priest's service was overwhelmingly in the first section, not in the second. The high priest was the only one who served in the second section, and then only once a year, to take blood on the day of atonement. The limited access to the second section, though only a replica of the heavenly temple, represented the truth of the lack of access enjoyed by the people to God's special presence.

The day of atonement was a feast with eschatological symbolic import. It was an anticipation of the great day of the Lord, when there would be a great division, with

some being expelled and others granted full access. It symbolized the movement from the present age of the first section to the age to come of the second section, when the sins of Israel would be dealt with decisively.

The first section of the tabernacle represented the state of the people in the age prior to the work of Christ, a realm of limited access. The day of atonement was essential to the functioning of the entire sacrificial system. It rebooted it every year.

Yet its reality was an eschatological one, a reality awaiting the future, where it would be confirmed and enacted. The entire sacrificial system is contingent upon the future time when, with some greater sacrifice, the Lord would open the way for a passage into His very presence. This would be achieved not just in some symbolic building, but in heaven itself.

The tabernacle order was characterized by fleshly rituals, which couldn't deal with the root problem of the people's hearts, the problem of the old covenant described in the preceding chapter. The symbols of offering always anticipated a greater work to come, and their efficacy rested upon this. Christ is the one in whom this movement from the first section to the second section, from this present age of the flesh to the age to come, is finally accomplished.

He accomplishes this movement not in an earthly model of the true temple, but in the heavenly reality itself. He enters by means of His own blood, by means of His own self-sacrifice. It isn't merely the blood of goats and calves, but the true self-offering that the law and its ceremonies always anticipated and awaited.

This redemption is not merely a symbolic entry once a year, anticipating some future reality. It is a once-for-all, decisive and complete entry into God's presence. The author concludes by contrasting the efficacy of the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer, referring to the rite of Numbers chapter 19, which could cleanse and render people richly holy with the blood of Christ.

Christ's blood is not merely related to the symbolic cleansing or sanctification of bodies. Such fleshly cleansing or sanctification through sacrifice and washing served as a ritual framework for self-offering to God. However, Christ performs the perfect self-offering as the mediator of a new covenant.

He offers himself up without blemish to God through the eternal spirit, and in the process he deals with the deep downroot problem of the covenant, the sinfulness of human hearts, and successfully brings us into God's very presence. A question to consider, what positive purpose did the tabernacle serve in the author of Hebrew's understanding?