

Hebrews 10:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

Analysis

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. The author contrasts the Levitical priesthood's endless work with Christ's finished work. "Every priest standeth" (pas hiereus hestēken, πᾶς ἱερεὺς ἔστηκεν) emphasizes their perpetual standing posture. Unlike kings or judges who sit, priests stood while serving because their work was never finished. The perfect tense "standeth" indicates their continuous state—they remain standing day after day, year after year, generation after generation.

These priests serve "daily" (kath' hēmeran, καθ' ἡμέραν), offering "oftentimes the same sacrifices" (tas autas pollakis prospheron thysias, τὰς αὐτὰς πολλάκις προσφέρων θυσίας). The repetition underscores futility—the same sacrifices, offered repeatedly, achieving the same temporary result. The morning and evening sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-42), plus offerings for specific sins, plus annual Day of Atonement sacrifices created an endless cycle of ritual that could never finally resolve the sin problem.

The devastating conclusion: these sacrifices "can never take away sins" (haitines oudepote dynantai perielein hamartias, αἵτινες οὐδέποτε δύνανται περιελεῖν ἀμαρτίας). The double negative oudepote ("never at any time") absolutely excludes any possibility of these sacrifices actually removing sin. The verb periaireō means to completely remove or strip away—not merely cover or defer, but eliminate.

Animal blood could symbolize atonement and ceremonially purify, maintaining covenant relationship and access to God's presence, but it couldn't effect the conscience's true cleansing or sin's actual removal (10:2-4). Only Christ's blood accomplishes what bulls and goats could never achieve.

Historical Context

The Levitical priesthood operated continuously from Sinai until the Temple's destruction in 70 AD (except for the Babylonian exile period). According to rabbinic tradition, about 18,000 priests served in rotation, with each course serving two weeks per year plus major festivals. Daily sacrifices alone consumed hundreds of animals annually at the Jerusalem Temple. Including sin offerings, guilt offerings, peace offerings, and festival sacrifices, the Temple processed thousands of animals yearly.

This massive sacrificial industry formed Judaism's economic and spiritual center. Priests' standing posture while ministering (as prescribed in Deuteronomy 18:5, 7) symbolized servants ready for ongoing duty. The Temple contained no chairs for priests in the holy place because their service was never complete. This contrasted with kings, judges, and rulers who sat on thrones, their judicial or executive functions capable of completion.

The author's original audience likely still witnessed these sacrifices at the Jerusalem Temple. The argument wasn't theoretical—they could see priests standing, offering animals daily, yet Hebrews declares this system "can never take away sins." This teaching required readers to reinterpret what they observed: the impressive, ancient, God-ordained Temple ritual was provisional, not ultimate. Christ had accomplished what 1,500 years of sacrifice couldn't achieve. Within a few years (70 AD), the Temple's destruction would physically demonstrate what Hebrews taught theologically—the old system was finished.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding the inadequacy of repeated sacrifices deepen your appreciation for Christ's once-for-all atonement?
2. In what areas might you be caught in religious cycles of repeated rituals rather than resting in Christ's finished work?
3. What assurance does Christ's complete removal of your sins provide when battling guilt or condemnation?

Interlinear Text

καὶ πᾶς μὲν ἱερεὺς ἔστηκεν καθ' ἡμέραν λειτουργῶν

And **every** G3303 **priest** **standeth** **daily** G2250 **ministering** G3008

καὶ τὰς αὐτὰς πολλάκις προσφέρων θυσίας αἵτινες

And G3588 **the same** **oftentimes** **offering** **sacrifices** **which** G3748

οὐδέποτε δύνανται περιελεῖν ἀμαρτίας

never **can** **take away** **sins** G266

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 10:4 (Sin): For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Hebrews 5:1 (Sin): For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

Numbers 28:3 (Sacrifice): And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering.

Hebrews 7:27 (Sin): Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Isaiah 1:11 (Sacrifice): To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

Hebrews 10:1 (Sacrifice): For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

Daniel 11:31 (Sacrifice): And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.

Daniel 9:21 (Parallel theme): Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

Daniel 8:11 (Sacrifice): Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.

Daniel 12:11 (Sacrifice): And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.