

Jesus Entered In

Easter 2024

Introduction

If you browse the toy aisle at Walmart or go on Amazon and look at all the toys they make (especially for kids under 10), you'll see a fairly consistent trend: We use fake things to teach about real things. To put this another way, we use copies to teach about something real and substantive. What do I mean by this?

Let's take a trip down memory lane to our childhoods. Do you remember the Fisher-Price first aid kit? It was a miniature doctor's office with a toy stethoscope, a reflex hammer, an otoscope (to peek into your ear), some pretend bandaids, a blood pressure cuff that twirled in a circle when you pumped it, and more. It was a fascinating way to learn about the human body and health.

This is a good example of using something fake to teach about something real or using a copy (in this case, a plastic copy) to teach about something of substance. Baby dolls teach little girls about being a mommy. Stuffed animal dogs teach kids about being responsible pet owners. A toy Nerf gun or bow and arrow is given to a young son to learn proper care and responsibility before someone hands him his first bolt action .22. Plastic saws, wrenches, and hammers are used to work alongside mom and dad as they build something more permanent with their tools.

These copies can be instructors for us. No adult thinks he will build a barn with his son's Fisher-Price plastic saw, but if his son comes out alongside him and wants to "help", only a cruel dad would mock his feeble attempts. These copies teach real skills and real truths.

God uses copies too

Throughout Scripture, we see numerous examples of real-life stories that become spiritual object lessons down the road, and I don't just mean as examples of how someone should or shouldn't behave. God is far more creative and in control than that. He crafts real-world scenarios and then revisits them 1,000 years later to show that he was pointing towards a deeper reality, an unseen truth.

The Exodus, when God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt through a series of plagues and miracles before leading them across the Red Sea, points to another rescue that Jesus inaugurates, not from slavery to a nation, but from slavery to sin. David and Goliath, the

story of the shepherd boy who stands on behalf of a nation to fight a giant and secure victory for his people, points to another champion, Jesus, who would fight a much larger giant – sin and death – on behalf of his people.

God uses historically true stories to teach us about something unseen and less tangible. So, when we read things in the Bible that seem confusing or weird, maybe it's because we are missing out on the truth. We are so focused on the plastic copy that we forget something greater is the focus. As a matter of fact, the New Testament tells us that the sacrificial system, which the Old Testament explains at great length, was a copy of a solution that was needed in the unseen realm in the heavens. The copy could never fix the unseen problem, just as my Fisher-Price plastic hammer could not timber frame an Amish barn.

Hebrews 8:5 explains, *“They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: “Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain.”* Let's look at exactly what the author of the Book of Hebrews means by this.

Hebrews 9

Hebrews 9 begins with a description of the earthly tabernacle.

1 That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. 2 There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. 3 Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. 4 In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.

When the author of Hebrews says the First Covenant or the Old Covenant, he refers to the agreement or contract God made with the ancient Israelites. It was a set of laws and regulations given to them through Moses, primarily recorded in the first five books of the Bible.

The Old Covenant outlined rules for worship, moral conduct, societal organization, and procedures for sacrifices and rituals.

The Old Covenant established a special relationship between God and the people of Israel, with God promising to bless and protect them if they obeyed His laws. It included rituals such as animal sacrifices performed by priests in the Tabernacle or later in the temple. These sacrifices were meant to atone for [or cover] sins and maintain the special relationship between God and the people.

Within that Old Covenant, there were directions for worship and a specially designed place of worship called the Tabernacle, which one day became a permanent building called the Temple. Regardless of the name shift, the purpose and daily happenings remained the same. As you approached the Tabernacle, there was a courtyard and a large outer tent. Within the courtyard, you would find a washing basin and an altar. The outer tent had a special lampstand, table, and bread for religious rituals. This larger tent was called the Holy Place. Within the larger tent was a curtain and a smaller tent called “the Holy of Holies.”

In that second tent were the gold incense altar and the gold-covered ark of the covenant containing a gold urn of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the ten commandment tablets. On top of the ark of the covenant was a lid with angels flanking both sides. This lid was also called the mercy seat because it represented the footstool of God’s throne where one would come and beg for forgiveness and mercy from the King of the Universe.

Hebrews 9:6-10 continues:

6 When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. 7 But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8 By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use. 9 This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. 10 For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.

If you were a priest, all your duties took place in the courtyard or the first, larger tent. This is where the morning and evening sacrifices were made, and where people would come to meet with you. A non-priest never entered the tents; even a regular priest couldn't go into the second tent, the holy of holies. The only person allowed to enter the holy of holies was the High Priest (Chief Priest), who could only go in once a year. The holy of holies was where God's invisible throne was said to be. To approach his throne uninvited was to invite death upon your own head!

Remember that we said this is a copy. Of course, God doesn't live in a little tent! He is the King of the Universe. The heavens cannot contain his splendor; they can barely proclaim it! But God provided this plastic copy, if I may, to show a spiritual reality to the people of God: this is where my glory dwells.

Only the high priest could enter the smaller tent, and he could only do so once a year during a very special holy day called the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On this day, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle/Temple to make atonement (covering) for the people's sins. He would perform the sacrifice out in the courtyard, for himself and the people, and then carry the blood into the throneroom of God and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. This sacrifice was for the people's accumulated sins over the last 12 months.

Within this first covenant, we see insufficiency in the earthly system. That is not to suggest that God did a poor job, but that he was instituting a copy that would reflect a spiritual, unseen truth in heaven. The copy is weak, fleeting, and inferior.

First, we see that the copy was littered with **inferior sacrifices**. There was no power to accomplish any lasting impact or change within the constant flow of blood. Over the course of years, millions of animals were sacrificed by the nation of Israel, but not a single one had the power to cleanse the conscience of the worshipper. Could they satisfy the law for a period of time to avoid punishment? Yes. What they couldn't do, however, was make a way for a person, littered with guilt and shame, to feel clean on the inside.

Second, the old system offered an **inferior high priest**. The high priest was still a sinful man. He had his own issues, family problems, ailments, and iniquity for which to atone. To walk into the holy place without first sacrificing for his own sins meant certain death.

Third, we see that the old system offered **inferior access**. Although the tabernacle was meant to remind the people that God dwelt among them, they could not enjoy a relationship with him without fear and dread. The fellowship offerings given every day were incapable of enabling a worshipper to see the face of God. The regular worshipper could never enter the holy place, and even the most skilled priest would never enter the holy of holies. The high priest would

enter once a year and still do so with dread - wondering if he would drop over dead because of some unconfessed sin. The old system offered inferior access.

Why would God give a copy that seems so broken, inferior, and powerless? The old, religious, inferior system is an object lesson to teach the people one main idea: The problem isn't necessarily the system or the design. The problem is that **an inferior priest brings an inferior sacrifice to an inferior access point**. It is, therefore, unable to cleanse the conscience. If you want true cleansing and change, you are going to need a superior high priest bringing a superior sacrifice into the true throne room of God and not just a copy.

Jesus entered in

Hebrews 9:11-14 tells us what Jesus did.

*11 So Christ has now become the High **Priest** over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect **Tabernacle in heaven**, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. 12 With his own **blood**—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. 13 Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. 14 Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.*

Jesus came to initiate and inaugurate a new, superior system. He came to mediate a New Covenant. In this paragraph, we see that Jesus is superior in all the ways the previous system was inferior. He is a superior high priest who made a superior sacrifice and brought the blood into the true throneroom of God (not just a copy).

First, **Jesus is a superior High Priest**. Unlike the Levitical priests bound by their own sinfulness, Jesus is flawless and holy, making Him the perfect mediator between humanity and God. He does not have to worry or wonder if he will be heard because he has no sin impeding his intercession. Beyond that, Jesus' priesthood is eternal, contrasting with the temporal nature of the Levitical priests, ensuring continuous intercession on behalf of believers.

Second, **Jesus' sacrifice is superior**. Jesus didn't sacrifice a lamb or a goat; he was the Lamb of God - perfect and without blemish - who was offered for the sins of the world.

Whereas the blood of bulls and goats could never actually take away sins, Jesus offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin, once-for-all. Whereas the blood of animals flowed continuously in Jerusalem (even to the point of needing to carve a channel to carry the blood from the temple), Jesus' work is finished and final. He secured eternal forgiveness and sat down.

Third, Jesus' **access is superior**. This is what blows my mind more than anything else in this passage. On the cross, in what is seen, Jesus dies as the sacrifice for sin. In the unseen realm, Jesus - the divine High Priest - then carries his own blood into the very real Tabernacle in the heavenly places and pours it out on the very real Mercy Seat before the throne of God in order to secure a very real redemption for his people. As the Son of the King of the Universe, he has access. As the High Priest, he has access. Jesus entered into the throneroom of God and his sacrifice was accepted. His petition was heard. What a superior savior we have!

As the author of Hebrews explains, *"That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant* (Hebrews 9:15)." Only Jesus can mediate the new covenant. Only Jesus can enter into the throneroom and mediate on our behalf. Only Jesus.

Continuing in verse 23 we read:

...the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals. 24 For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. 25 And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. 26 If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice. 27 And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, 28 so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

The Tabernacle and its contents, including the altars and the items used in worship, were mere copies or shadows of heavenly realities. The purification rituals performed in the earthly Tabernacle, such as the sprinkling of blood from animal sacrifices, were necessary to symbolically cleanse the earthly sanctuary and make it suitable for God's presence. However, these sacrifices were ultimately insufficient to fully cleanse sin and provide ultimate access to God. They were like trying to clean up the Exxon Valdez oil spill with a paper towel.

In contrast, Jesus Christ, as the true high priest, did not enter a man-made sanctuary but entered heaven itself, the true and ultimate holy place, to intercede on behalf of humanity. His sacrifice, far superior to the blood of animals, was not offered repeatedly like the sacrifices of the earthly high priests. Instead, Jesus offered Himself once and for all as the perfect sacrifice for sin. If repeated sacrifices were necessary, it would imply that Christ's sacrifice was insufficient, but His sacrifice was deemed perfect and complete, capable of redeeming humanity for all time.

Jesus' superior sacrifice effectively removes sin and brings salvation to those who believe in Him. Just as all people face death and judgment once, Christ was offered once for all time to atone for the sins of many. His sacrificial death is the ultimate fulfillment of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, bringing salvation to those eagerly awaiting His return. Thus, we can conclude with confidence the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the Old Testament sacrificial system and the hope of eternal salvation through Him.

Therefore...

At the climax of Jesus' crucifixion, a significant event unfolded in the temple in Jerusalem. The veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, a thick barrier symbolizing the division between humanity and the divine presence, tore dramatically from top to bottom. This tearing of the veil at the precise moment of Jesus' sacrificial death marks the removal of any barrier between God and humanity. Jesus has been heard. His sacrifice was received. Now, through faith in his name (not in any dead religious work that YOU do), you have direct access to God's presence through faith. Jesus, the superior high priest provided that access. Hebrews explains so beautifully:

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest

who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

That superior, great High Priest has sprinkled us clean with his superior sacrifice, and now - for the first time in history - we can have our guilty consciences cleansed. No guilt, shame, curse, or chains can hold your heart anymore. He offers you new life in Christ if you just receive it by faith. You need to believe that he is who he said he is, did what he said he did and will do what he says he will do.

We turn from our life of sin to Jesus. We turn from our life of religiosity to Jesus. We stop trusting in our good efforts, works, and sacrifices, and we turn to Jesus. On that cross, Jesus secured a new and life-giving way to be made right with your Heavenly Father; with that empty tomb, he proved it.

So what do we do? Hebrews 9:23 tells us: *"Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise."* Who is our hope? Jesus! Let us hold tightly to Jesus. He is all we have!

One day each of us will stand before the gates of heaven and will need to explain why we deserve to be there. If you say anything about what you've done during your life, you are simply trying to come in your own name. The only reason any of us will enter into the presence of God is because Jesus gave us permission. We come with an invitation in hand and we show it to the guards at the front gate. Jesus did all the work. He made a way, and he proved it by conquering death. Now we can know and say with confidence that *"there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)."* He is risen. He is King. Now, we may live!