

Theodicy of Sacrifice and High Priestly Ministry of Christ in Hebrews 9:11–28: A Call for Faithfulness and Perseverance

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ABSTRACT

There is a claim that the Book of Hebrews lacks a true theodicy, focusing solely on the eternal plan that molds Jesus Christ’s disciples into His likeness and encourages them during difficult times. This study uses the historical-biblical method of exegesis to explore the idea of theodicy. It focuses on Christ’s sacrifice and His role as high priest in heaven in Hebrews 8–10, especially 9:11–28, as the most important parts of theodicy. This study seeks to answer the question: “How does the author of Hebrews attempt and justify that God is gracious and just with the believers and the unjust world through the sacrifice and the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ to solve the sin problem and thus call the believers to persevere and remain faithful until the Second Coming?” The author of Hebrews exemplifies that God justifiably deals with the sin problem and restores humanity to Himself through the death and the heavenly priestly ministry of Jesus. These redemptive acts in Jesus are a revelation of true theodicy. They show the believers and the world how God is putting away sins and reconciling the people to Himself, culminating in the Second Coming, as exemplified in Heb 9:11–28. Such revelation calls on believers to persevere and remain faithful to God for their spiritual sustainability today until Jesus comes.

Keywords: theodicy, sanctuary, priest, sacrifice, suffering

INTRODUCTION

Various studies on theodicy have been an ongoing enterprise for centuries to explain or dispute God’s goodness, love, justice, and all-powerful nature in the face of evil. According to scholars, the Book of Job is known as the Book of Theodicy. Some other OT and NT books (e.g., Ecclesiastes, Psalm, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Revelation) also exemplify the concept of theodicy (Brook and Neal, 2016). However, there is a lack of in-depth study on theodicy in the Book of Hebrews. There is a claim that “according to the author of Hebrews, there is no real theodicy, only an eternal plan and wise discipline of truly making his people be like Christ in every way” (Biggs, 2004, para. 3). As a result, there is a knowledge gap in the book regarding theodicy.

However, this study exegetically explores the concept and implications of theodicy in Hebrews by focusing on Christ’s sacrifice and His role as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary in Hebrews 8–10, especially in 9:11–28, as the fundamental components of theodicy. It answers the question, “How does the author of Hebrews justify that God is gracious and just with the believers

and the unjust world through the sacrifice and the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ to solve the sin problem and thus call the believers to persevere and remain faithful until the Second Coming?”

METHODS

This study utilizes the historical-biblical method of exegesis to explore the concept and implications of theodicy in the Book of Hebrews in the context of Christ’s sacrifice and heavenly sanctuary ministry in Heb 9:11–28. This method presupposes the Bible alone, the totality and harmony of Scripture, and “spiritual things spiritually discerned” (see Davidson, 2000, pp. 60–68). The investigation explains the study’s background, problem, purpose, and method. Next, it delves into the definition and elements of theodicy, providing a foundation for exploring the concept of theodicy in Heb 9:11–28. It explains the passage’s historical and literary setting. It analyzes and discusses the three main roles of Christ as Priest-King, Sacrifice, and Mediator of the New Covenant. It then describes the sanctuary as the center of divine justice. Finally, it summarizes, concludes, and draws some theological implications of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theodicy’s Definition and Elements

“Theodicy” (from *theos*, “god” and *dikē*, “justice”) is a term that deals with divine justice amidst the existence of sin and suffering. It is an “explanation of why a perfectly good, almighty, and all-knowing God permits evil” (Sherry, 2023, para. 1). It is “the attempt to defend the justice of God in the face of the problem of evil in general and the suffering of the righteous in particular” (Newsom, 2010, p. 1303). “The attempt to defend God’s omnipotence and goodness in the face of the problem of evil in the world” (Brooks and Neal, 2016). Hence, it answers “the following problem, which in its most basic form involves these assumptions:

1. God is all good and all powerful (and, therefore, all knowing).
2. The universe/creation was made by God and/or exists in a contingent relationship to God.
3. Evil exists in the world. Why?” (Mitchell, 2023, para. 1).

In short, theodicy deals with God’s justice and goodness in solving the problem of sin and its existence (Laato and de Moor, 2003). The controversy between good and evil provides a context for understanding theodicy (Pfundl, 2015).

Some theodic elements revolve around, for example, God’s justice and judgment, His nature/character, creation, sin, suffering, and death, according to the definitions of theodicy. The problem of theodicy deals primarily with sin and suffering in God’s creation, particularly among the people. The Book of Hebrews also illustrates these elements, such as sin, sacrifice, suffering, and judgment, as well as the parties involved in the existence and resolution of the sin problem. The author of Hebrews demonstrates and explains the reality and existence of sin and how God (through Jesus’s incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement as both King and Priest who mediate before God on people’s behalf) responds to and solves the sin problem in the context of His covenantal relationship with His people and the heavenly sanctuary as the place of resolution (de Souza, 2015). Inevitably, such a demonstration of love is an expression of theodicy (Peckham, 2018).

The Setting of Hebrews 9:11–28

The Book of Hebrews is an epistolary sermon that addresses the spiritual needs of the readers, focusing on the supremacy of Jesus (Elwell and Yarbrough, 2013). The hostile society around them seriously challenges and undermines the readers’ faith (12:2–4; 13:3, 13, 18–19). Hence, the author exhorts them to remain faithful and warns “them against the danger of total apostasy (6:4–8; 10:26–31; 12:15–17)” (Dybdahl, 2010, p. 1599), that is, to return to the old temple ritual system of worship (Papaioannou, 2014) that challenges Jesus’s sacrificial death and high priesthood. He not only addresses their spiritual concerns but also demonstrates Jesus’s superiority and mission to solve the sin problem and reconcile His people to Himself.

Hebrews 9:11–28 belongs to the central theological section of Hebrews (8:1–10:18)—“the heart of the Christological exposition of Hebrews” (Attridge, 1989, p. 216). The section focuses on the exposition of “the effective sacrifice of the Son as high priest” (O’Brien, 2010, p. 286), with the faultlessness and superiority of the new covenant over the faulty first covenant serving as the overarching theme. In particular, Heb 8:1–6 serves as the hinge and center of the book “that summarizes the main point and theme of Jesus’s supremacy as well as the premise and springboard unit to the exposition of the covenant motif in Heb 8:7–10:18” (Mariano, 2019, p. 107).

Based on the two quotations from Jer 31:31–34 that summarize the main exposition of the covenant, it can structure the covenant motif section as *a-b-a'* (Mariano, 2019, p. 107):

- a* Statements and quotation on the first and new covenants (Jer 31:31–34/ Heb 8:7–13)
 - b* Main theological exposition of the First and New Covenants (Heb 9:1–10:14)
- a'* Statements and quotation on the new covenant (Jer 31:33–34/Heb 10:15–18)

The main theological exposition of the first and new covenants (*b*) expounds on the superiority of the new covenant cultic system over the first covenant cultic system. It is a comparison between the two cultic systems on how worshipers achieve perfection and true forgiveness of their sins, and that is only through the perfect and sufficient sacrifice of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.

Mariano (2019, p. 232) explains, “Hebrews 9:11–28 contrastingly describes the perfect heavenly sanctuary and the ritual service of the new covenant to attain eternal salvation through the sacrifice, high priesthood, and ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.” An *a-b-a'* structure (with linguistic and thematic parallelism) can outline the passage, highlighting the significance of Christ’s death (blood) in the establishment of the new covenant, the forgiveness/cleansing of sin, and His entry into the heavenly sanctuary before God/s presence, in contrast to the conventional old covenant ritual system of worship:

- a* Christ, the high priest, entered the heavenly sanctuary by His blood to secure eternal redemption and purify the worshipers’ conscience (vv. 11–14)
 - b* Christ’s blood (mediator’s) established the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins (vv. 15–22)
- a'* Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to appear before God and to purify it by His blood until His second return to save those who wait for Him (vv. 23–28)

Thus, Heb 9:11–28 highlights the mediator’s sufficient sacrifice (death/blood) to obtain eternal redemption and for covenant-making with the worshipers (*b*), enabling Him to enter and purify the perfect heavenly sanctuary before the presence of God as their new covenant high priest and mediator until He comes again to save them (*a* and *a'*). Such works by Christ on behalf of the sinners reveal God’s justice in an unjust world.

Jesus Christ: The High Priest-King, Sacrifice, and Mediator of the New Covenant

Three main roles of Jesus Christ contribute to understanding theodicy in Heb 9:11–28 for God speaks vividly through His Son in the last days (1:1): high priest-king, sacrifice, and mediator of the new covenant. This paper discusses each role to illustrate how God addresses sin issues through Jesus’s creation/sonship, incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

The High Priest and King. The high priesthood of Jesus, one of the vital themes in Hebrews, plays a critical role in solving the sin problem in the heavenly sanctuary. In Heb 9:11–28, the word ἄρχιερεύς, “high priest” occurs twice (vv. 11, 25): the first refers to Christ (v. 11) and the second to the Levitical high priests (v. 25). How, why, and when did Jesus become a high priest? The Epistle to the Hebrews explicitly describes Jesus Christ as both ἱερεύς, “priest” (5:6; 7:14, 15, 17, 21; 8:4; 10:21) and ἄρχιερεύς, “high priest” (2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11). The Epistle to the Hebrews designates him as “a priest/high priest (forever) according to the order of Melchizedek” (both priest and king) (5:6, 10; 6:10; 7:11, 17), placing him above the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods.

Hebrews 2:17 explains the necessity for Christ to become like “His brethren” (through incarnation—with “flesh and blood,” v. 14), a “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (NASB) to atone for the people’s sins and assist those who are in temptation. The preceding chapters (1 and 2) present His divine being (as the Son of God, the radiance and exact presentation of God, creator, God, Lord, etc.) before He became human and made Himself lower than the angels. He became a human being to suffer and “taste death for everyone” (2:9). He suffered and died to bring “many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation” (v. 10), “render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (v. 14), and free the slaves of fear of death (v. 15), which were the main purposes of His incarnation and suffering. Johnsson (2022) concludes, “Thus, it is because Christ is Son that He may be designated as High Priest after becoming human and being made perfect through sufferings (2:10)” (p. 1833).

Hebrews 3:1 is about summoning the readers to consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest of their confession because of His sufferings and faithfulness to God and His household (vv. 2–6). In the context of entering God’s rest, Jesus is the great high priest, who passed through the heavens (4:14). So, the believers should hold fast their confession on Him who sympathizes with their weaknesses (v. 15) and can come boldly (enter) to God’s throne of grace (place of rest) to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (v. 16).

Christ’s high priesthood is a divine appointment. Such appointment is primarily on the sonship/kingship of Christ by quoting Ps 2:7 (a description of the Son of God as King, Heb 5:5) and, secondly, on His eternal priesthood by citing Ps 110:4 (a description of the eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek, Heb 5:6). Citing the passages in Psalms, Johnsson (2022) reasons out

that “it is because Christ is Son that He may be designated as High Priest after becoming human and being made perfect through sufferings (2:10)” (p. 1833). He also states,

Christ alone is the true High Priest, for only He combines, in His person, Sonship and humanity. Because Christ is Son, He has access to the very presence of God. Because He became human, He connects irrevocably to us. He is sympathetic, merciful, and helpful in our struggles. (p. 1833)

In Heb 6:19–20, it points out the hope of the believers in the person of Jesus, who becomes the high priest in the order of Melchizedek (king and priest of Salem), who enters the heavenly sanctuary as their forerunner. Chapter 7 discusses the superiority and perpetuity of Jesus’s high priest in his order over the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood because Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, their ancestor, who paid him tithes. The foundation of Christ’s eternal and perfect priesthood is not the Levitical law, but rather the tribe of Judah (a change in law), “according to the power of an indestructible life” (v. 16), and the divine oath (vv. 20–21, 28). This makes Him the “guarantor of a better covenant” (v. 22) and an intercessor for those who draw near to God (v. 25) (Johnsson, 2022, p. 1840; Guthrie, 1983, pp. 169–170). Being in the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is both Priest and King; hence, He is superior with dual functions. The qualities of Christ’s high priesthood are “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (v. 26). He does not need to offer sacrifices daily; He did so by offering Himself once and for all (v. 27). His nature, position, qualities, sacrifice, and ministry are excellent.

In the central section of Hebrews, Heb 8:1 and 4 use the terms ἱερεύς and ἀρχιερεύς (both used synonymously) to Jesus’s becoming High Priest. Hebrews 8:1 explicitly states the κεφάλαιον, “main thing, main point” of Heb 7 about Jesus’s high priesthood and superiority over the Levitical priesthood. The phrase “we have such a High Priest” emphasizes the present reality of having believers’ High Priest. The description of such a High Priest states that he sat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. Contextually, the relative pronoun ὅς, “who” refers back to Jesus, the Son (of God) (6:19; 7:22, 28). Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, or His throne. The aorist verb ἐκάθισεν, “he sat down” points to a single act in the past when Jesus ascended and exalted in the heavens—behind the veil. However, the aorist verb ἐκάθισεν does not imply whether Jesus became High Priest only after He sat down at God’s right hand in heaven. The main point of writing is that “we have a High Priest.” It suggests that after serving as the High Priest, He began to minister in the true tabernacle that the Lord Himself had erected (v. 2). His sitting on the throne also denotes His kingship as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, according to Ps 110 (Koester, 2001).

Hebrews 8:4 states a second-class conditional statement (“the assumption of an untruth for the sake of argument” [Wallace, 1996, p. 450]) regarding Jesus’s priesthood in heaven, not on earth. “If he were on (but he is not), he would not be a priest (although in fact he is a priest)” (Koester, 2001, p. 377). The context signifies that the idea of Jesus’s priesthood is not about the timing of His priesthood *per se*. Instead, it pertains to the priest’s role, specifically in providing sacrifices (vv. 3, 4b). Jesus is the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tabernacle (v. 2), who has a better sacrifice to offer, namely, “Himself” (7:27). “His gift is not according to the law by which the earthly (high) priests offered their sacrifices. He is utterly unique; His sacrifice is His own life and body” (Evans, 1985, p. 147).

Also, Christ’s uniqueness is that His sacrifice, which He offered on the cross, took place first on earth (“once for all”) before His actual priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. He will

never repeat His sacrifice, as His single act already encompasses everything for His entire excellent priestly ministry in heaven (see v. 6). His self-sacrificing act on the cross was an act or function of the high priest. Hence, He was called both the (High) Priest and the Victim even at the time of His crucifixion (White, 1999, p. 14). But it should be contextually understood in Hebrews that His designation as High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary and its ministry took place at His resurrection before His final ascension in heaven, for He could not be a priest on earth (v. 4).

In the context of the better sacrifice (theological argument), Heb 9:11 summarizes the new cultus (9:11–14). The passage mentions the term ἀρχιερεύς, which is applied to Jesus as High Priest. In Heb 9:25, ἀρχιερεύς is also used for the Levitical high priest as a comparison in entering the sanctuary with the animals' blood; but Christ, the real High Priest, entered the heavenly sanctuary with His blood.

According to Heb 9:11, Christ is the High Priest (ἀρχιερεύς) of the coming good things who appeared through the greater and perfect tabernacle, which is not manmade. Through His blood, He entered into the holy places (namely, "heaven itself" [v. 24]) once and for all to secure eternal salvation (v. 12). The passage and its immediate context indicate that He, as the High Priest of the greater and perfect tabernacle, entered heaven with His blood. Thus, it implies that He was *already* a High Priest when He entered the heavenly tabernacle.

The Sufficient Sacrifice. Jesus, too, is the sacrifice. His sacrifice is the crux of the covenant theme in Heb 8–10. In Heb 9:11–28, the word θυσία, "sacrifice" (used 15x in 5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9, 23, 26; 10:1, 5, 8, 11, 12, 26; 11:4; 13:16, 16) occurs twice, which refers to Christ as the "better sacrifices" (v. 23) and "sacrifice of Himself" (v. 26) in comparison to the animal sacrifices offered by human. Outside this section, the word θυσία is used (13x) for the sacrifice/s of/for the Aaronic/Levitical priests (5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 10:1, 5, 8, 11), the worshipers (9:9; 10:26; 13:15, 16), Abel (11:4), and Jesus (9:23, 26; 10:12). Jesus's sacrifice of Himself surpasses all their sacrifices, for they all pointed to Him as the typological fulfillment as elaborated in 10:1–18.

Some related words of sacrifice that are used in Hebrews are προσφορά (n.), "offering"; προσφέρω (v.), "to bring/offer"; αἷμα, "blood"; πάθημα (n.), "suffering"; πάσχω (v.), "to experience, suffer, endure"; θάνατος (n.), "death"; ἀποθνήσκω (v.), "to die." These words are also used in connection to Christ's sacrifice, priesthood, entrance and cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, mediation, and forgiveness of sins. Priests need something to offer for sins even to enter the sanctuary (5:1–4; 8:3a, 4b–5; 9:6–7). Likewise, Jesus has something to offer (8:3b), namely, Himself (7:27, 9:26, 10:10), not for Himself but to bear the sins of others (9:28).

The purpose of Jesus's incarnation is that He was made lower than the angels and be like His brethren to suffer death, namely, to "taste death for everyone" and be "crowned with glory and honor" (2:9). While He was in the flesh, He offered prayers and supplications with agony (5:7), "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (v. 8), was perfected through sufferings (2:10), "became the author of eternal salvation" (5:9), and "called by God High Priest" (v. 10). He died by offering Himself to sanctify the believers (2:11; 10:10, 14), destroying the devil, the power of death (2:14) (Peckham, 2018, p. 107), releasing those slaves of fear and death (v. 15), and becoming "merciful and faithful High Priest . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (v. 17) and "to the aid of those who are tempted" (vv. 17–18). Hebrews 9:11–14 (a) and 23–28 (a') describe that the eternal Spirit offered the sinless sacrifice of Christ once and for all, enabling Him to enter the heavenly sanctuary and communicate with God for the first time (v. 14). The purpose of that act was to purify the believers' consciences, enabling them to "serve the living God" (v.

14), and to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary by eliminating sin (vv. 23, 26). His ascension and high priestly ministry fully fulfill the purposes of His sacrifice on the cross.

The sacrifice is vital in approaching God and solving sin problems in the heavenly sanctuary. The priest/s, worshiper/s, or anybody cannot approach God without sacrifices to offer before Him. Sacrifices are purposely and ritually required for the forgiveness/expiation of sins, cleansing the worshipers' conscience, redemption, and entrance and purification of the sanctuary. Jesus's sacrifice satisfies all of the insufficiencies of the old covenant ritual sacrifices and offerings that solve the sin problem.

The Mediator of the New Covenant. Jesus also functions as the mediator of the new covenant (9:15). He became a mediator when He became human to bridge “the chasm between a holy God and sinful creatures” (Davidson, 2022, p. 717). Yet, His full function as the mediator of the new covenant took place after He died, became a high priest, and entered into the heavenly sanctuary. In the center of the *a-b-a'* structure, Christ/mediator's blood established the new covenant to forgive sins (vv. 15–22). Verse 15 explicitly states that Jesus is “the mediator of a new covenant.” The middle section begins with the phrase *καὶ διὰ τοῦτο*, “and for this reason/cause.” “The introductory clause *καὶ διὰ τοῦτο*, ‘and for this reason,’ establishes a strong causal relationship between vv 11–14 and the result stated in v 15” (Lane, 1991, p. 241). The phrase shows that the section is directly dependent on the previous discussion about Christ's death as a sufficient sacrifice. For that reason, He is worthy to become the mediator of the new covenant, which corresponds to His high priesthood (Vincent, 2004, para. 19108; Guthrie, 1983, p. 192). As the high priest, His death is the prerequisite that qualifies Him to enter the heavenly sanctuary and be the mediator of the new covenant.

The following verses (vv. 16–22) explain what verse 15 is talking about Christ's mediatorship, which is already introduced in Heb 8:6 (*κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης*, “mediator of a better covenant”) and concluded in 12:24 (*διαθήκης νέας μεσίτης*, “mediator of the new covenant”). The phrase “mediator of a new/better covenant” is also connected to the phrase *κρείττονος διαθήκης . . . ἔγγυος*, “a surety of a better covenant” in Heb 7:22. Hence, Jesus is the surety, high priest, and mediator of the new covenant based on a divine oath (7:21). Believers are truly assured of their eternal inheritance.

Becoming a mediator is explained in the context of the high priesthood and the death of the covenant-maker in connection to the inauguration of the covenant (9:16–17) (see Hahn, 2004, p. 431). The entrance of Jesus the high priest into the heavenly sanctuary through His blood (vv. 11–14), *τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης (αἰωνίου)*, “the blood of the (eternal) covenant” (9:20; 10:29; 13:20) to appear before the presence of God (9:24) is related to the establishment or inauguration of the new covenant through His blood (O'Brien, 2010, p. 327) just like inaugurating the first (Sinaitic) covenant with the blood as stated in 9:19. Thus, Jesus's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary with His blood in the passage deals with the inauguration of His high priestly ministry to do mediation between God and humanity (Davidson, 2022, pp. 376–391). That is, to intercede and connect the believers to God for the (a) cleansing of conscience to serve/worship God (9:14), (b) receiving of the eternal promise—redemption (v. 15), (c) remission of sins (v. 22), (d) cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (v. 23), (e) putting away sin (v. 26), and (f) divine judgment (v. 27). Then, He will come again for the salvation of those who are waiting for Him (28). These mediatorial works are the benefits of His death. Christ's death applies the benefits of His atoning sacrifice on the cross to the

believers through His high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, from His inauguration to His second coming.

Heavenly Sanctuary: Center of Divine Justice

The sanctuary is vital in solving the sin problem. The word “sanctuary” (which consists of two apartments—Holy Place and Most Holy Place) is derived from the Greek expression τό ἅγιον (sing.) or τὰ ἅγια (pl.) for both earthly and heavenly sanctuaries, depending on the context. The expression occurs 10 times in the NT, which are all found in Hebrews (8:2; 9:1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; 13:11). Consistently, the expression should be translated as “sanctuary” in general (see Salom, 1989, pp. 219–227). This “sanctuary” is called σκηνή, “tent/tabernacle,” which is also used 10 times in Hebrews (8:2, 5; 9:2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 21; 11:9; 13:10). Both “sanctuary” and “tabernacle” (used interchangeably) are often mentioned and discussed in the context of the ritual services for either earthly or heavenly sanctuary in Heb 9. The sanctuary is the dwelling place of God (Exod 25:8, Ps 102:19), the center of worship and services.

The entrance of Jesus to the heavenly sanctuary is significantly pointed out in Heb 9:11–28. The verb εἰσέρχομαι, “to move into, to come into, to go into, to enter” (used 17x in Hebrews with different inflections, 3:11, 18, 19; 4:1, 3 [2x], 5, 6 [2x], 10, 11; 6:19, 20; 9:12, 24, 25; 10:5) is mentioned three times in this section: (a) εἰσῆλθεν ἐφάπαξ εἰς τὰ ἅγια, “He [Jesus] entered the holy place” (9:12); (b) οὐ γὰρ εἰς χειροποίητα εἰσῆλθεν ἅγια Χριστός, “for Christ did not enter a holy place” (9:24); and (c) ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ ἅγια, “the high priest enters the holy place [sanctuary]” (9:25). The verb εἰσέρχομαι denotes a movement “into a space, either two-dimensional or three-dimensional” (Louw and Nida, s.v. “εἰσέρχομαι”). This three-dimensional sanctuary is not manmade (9:11) or copy of the true one in heaven (9:22). Rather, it is true (8:1), greater, and more perfect tabernacle (9:11), which is heaven itself (9:24). So, these entering passages in Hebrews (including 6:19, 20; 10:5) refer to the entrance of Christ into the true heavenly sanctuary to secure eternal redemption through His blood (6:19, 20; 9:12, 25). In this sacred place, God’s throne (4:16, 8:1; 12:2) and His presence (9:24) are located where Jesus, the forerunner of the believers (6:20), passed through (4:14, 9:12), and removed the barriers before God’s presence. Hence, they can come boldly to the throne of grace (4:16; 10:19–25), namely, to enter His rest (κατάπαυσις, 4:11).

Moreover, the cleansing of the sanctuary (9:23), the judgment (v. 27), and the second appearance of Christ (v. 28) are the culmination of the works of redemption. The purification of the sanctuary through the blood, which is done by the high priest (Christ), can be easily understood in the context of the typological meaning of the Day of Atonement as expressed in v. 25 (i.e., yearly service). Rodriguez (2000) explains,

Here is a clear indication that Christ performs in the heavenly sanctuary a work of cleansing that is the typological equivalent of the work of the high priest in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. The passage does not state that this cleansing takes place immediately after Christ’s ascension, but that the heavenly sanctuary is also in need of cleansing. (Vol. 12, p. 394)

The cleansing of the sanctuary is connected to judgment (κρίσις) in v. 27. It is a pre-advent judgment (Davidson, 2022, p. 397; Moskala, 2022, p. 456) because it precedes Christ’s second appearance. From the Adventist perspective, this judgment began in 1844. Both cleansing and

judgment are in between the two appearances of Christ: the first (by putting away of sins on the cross, v. 26) and the second comings (v. 28). Yet, in between these two appearances, Jesus appears before God’s presence in the heavenly sanctuary (v. 24). He is cleansing the heavenly things that are related to the work of judgment (v. 27), namely, intercession and purification of the human defilement of the heavenly realities by putting “away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (v. 26) (Johnsson, 1989, pp. 4:79–103). That is a clear picture of divine justice and love toward heaven and earth. In sum, His purification work of the heavenly sanctuary includes the application of His atoning sacrifice on the cross to the believers that is to be done until His second coming (Knight, 2003, pp. 277–284).

Finally, Christ’s second coming signifies the completion of His heavenly ministry. The time element of His high priestly ministry in heaven is evident: from the ascension and entrance to the heavenly sanctuary to the second coming of Christ. He will return—not to address sin, as the heavenly sanctuary has already settled and resolved it—to bring salvation to those eagerly awaiting His arrival (v. 28). That is “the climax of human history” (Johnsson, 2022, p. 1848), the end of sin and sufferings for the righteous. Many, especially those who wait for Jesus, will reveal and fully understand God’s justice and love. Hence, between now and the second coming of Christ (the time of suffering), the believers must persevere and remain faithful to Him for their spiritual sustainability in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The concept of theodicy in the Book of Hebrews, particularly in Heb 9:11–28, is apparent and indisputable. Theodicy deals with divine justice amidst the existence of sin and suffering. The book portrays how God deals with sins through the salvific works of Jesus. In the covenantal perspective, God justifiably and squarely deals with the sin problem by restoring humanity to Himself through Jesus’s incarnation, once-for-all sacrifice, and mediatorial priestly ministry (as King and High Priest) in the heavenly sanctuary for judgment and salvation of humanity. Such redemptive acts are a revelation of true theodicy. They show how God is removing sins from the sanctuary and reconciling the people to Himself, which will culminate in Jesus’s second coming, as exemplified in Heb 9:11–28. God is true and just in dealing with the sin problem. That is an expression of His unending love.

While Jesus is performing His high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary until He returns, it necessitates believers’ perseverance and faithfulness for their spiritual sustainability in times of crisis. This period of heavenly ministry is full of challenges for His people; they are still subject to pain, sickness, trial, temptation, and death. Therefore, they must maintain constant communication with God through Bible studies, prayers, and ministries, demonstrating that God also loves them and will benefit from Jesus’s salvific works. In times of need, they must believe they can come boldly to God’s throne of grace in the heavenly sanctuary through Jesus. They should remember that sin, evil, and suffering will cease in due time for God and their vindication. Hence, they should be vigilant, hopeful, strong, courageous, faithful, patient, obedient, and loving while waiting for the victorious and glorious appearance of their Savior, Jesus Christ, to fully realize peace, joy, and eternal life with glorified bodies.

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