



The first major section of the book of Revelation is a description of seven churches. Leading up to this, John first “saw seven gold lampstands, and among them there was what looked like a human being...The seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:12,20). Of course, this individual is Jesus, symbolically described as dwelling in the Holy Place with his church.

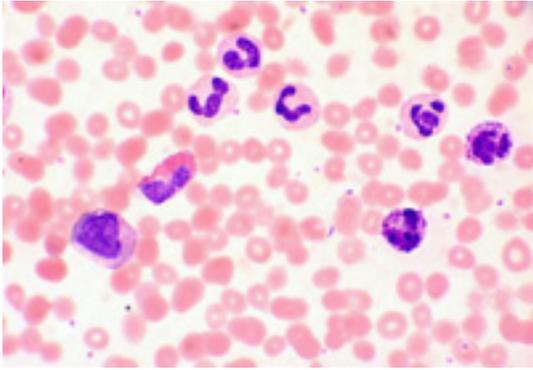
We are spending quite a bit of time on the sanctuary symbolism since this forms an important foundation for understanding much of the book of Revelation. As we move into a description of the seven churches, we will see that what Jesus is trying to accomplish with his “church” (i.e. – his friends) is to bring them into a closer relationship and intimacy and in the process to transform them from within.

We have said that our job as priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10) is to copy what we see our High Priest doing. Just as Jesus’ mission on earth and now as our High Priest was/is to reveal the truth about God’s character, our mission as priests is precisely the same.

As a child, my picture of what the priests actually did in Old Testament times seemed pretty dreary – and messy. Killing animals and sprinkling blood on various pieces of furniture day after day never sounded like a desirable job description! For a time I remember thinking, “Oh well, at least that whole bloody system is irrelevant now, for Christ was the end of the sacrificial system.” But the “it’s done away with so let’s not worry about it” line of thought doesn’t hold up very well since the book of Revelation (and other New Testament writings like Hebrews) have frequent and unavoidable references to the sanctuary system.

First, let’s deal with the subject of blood and then next time the furniture in the sanctuary. This discussion will absolutely help us to understand several important points later on in the book of Revelation.

Several years ago I watched a panel discussion among several well-known evangelical pastors. One of the questions they were asked was this: “What is the single most important word in the Bible?” I was surprised to hear at least 2 of the pastors choose the word “blood.” It’s true that Christians do talk a lot about “the blood” but what do we really mean by this? Just last week I heard a pastor on the radio say, “The blood of Jesus satisfied God’s righteous wrath against sin.” He went on to clarify that, “Jesus gave his blood so that God doesn’t have to punish me.” The church service then concluded with the hymn, “Saved by the blood” which I thought was very fitting!



To my ears, sound bites like this all suggest that Jesus is our Friend, but leave some doubts about the Father. Several years ago a medical student who wasn't sure whether or not he believed in God challenged me with a question, "Are we saved by red blood cells or platelets?" What a great question! To him, it seemed ridiculous that the spilled blood of Jesus would somehow get us off the hook and into heaven. He was honest and said, "What kind of a God demands blood? Why can't he just forgive?"

How would you answer that question? Is there intrinsic power in Jesus' blood? Did the Father need to see a certain number of Jesus' neutrophils and eosinophils in order to sneak us sinners into the backdoor of heaven?

Too often our description of "the blood" makes it sound like God (or at least the Father) is somehow being appeased. But listen to how Jesus explained the meaning of his blood:

"I can guarantee this truth: If you don't eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have the source of life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will bring them back to life on the last day. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them." (John 6:53-56)

Jesus is certainly not talking about cannibalism! Notice the important relationship in this verse. First Jesus said that to eat his flesh and to drink his blood results in eternal life. Then we went on to clarify the meaning by saying that to eat his flesh and to drink his blood is to "live in me, and I live in them."

The symbolic statement is to "eat my flesh and drink my blood." The real and tangible meaning of all this is to be in relationship and friendship with God. Of course, eternal life is to know God (John 17:3) and the words "to know" in the Bible consistently describe an intimacy much like a marriage ("Adam knew Eve" and they had a son).

Jesus, "the word" and "the unique one and only", was God in human form. God Himself – the Almighty God – condescended to become a flesh and blood embryo and to spend 9 months in the womb of one of his sinful creatures. So when we talk about the blood of Jesus and being saved by the blood of Jesus the meaning of that blood, includes THE LIFE. We should not associate the blood only with the death, but also with the life and the life was necessary for our salvation/healing. The death of Jesus was the culmination and the climax of his life.

In other words, to eat the flesh and to drink the blood of Jesus is to internalize the truth about God that Jesus came to reveal. We are to drink deeply of every detail about the life and teachings of Jesus and based on this evidence about God we are now given confidence to enter in a very special intimacy with him.

When Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" we are now assured that the Almighty God is just like Jesus in character. When Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble" we now believe that the Father is also gentle and humble. Jesus washed the feet of Judas and now we know that the Father would have done the same. Jesus hung out with the low-life of society and our picture of the Father should be the same. Jesus died forgiving those who tortured him to death, so would the Father. In other words, in every action of Jesus we need to rehearse in our minds the concept that "God is just like that!"

Had God not become flesh and blood, there is no way we would have ever believed that God's heart is really this good. In our minds God would have always been "big and powerful" but never could we picture him as being equally gracious, gentle and humble. This knowledge about God is represented by the blood which we are to drink in, and when you drink something it permeates and becomes a part of your entire body. Likewise, as we internalize the blood (the truth about God) we live in Jesus and he lives in us. The relationship is restored.

Next time I will describe the important meaning of the furniture in the sanctuary, but for now, what appeals to me is that the 3 main compartments represent individuals at three different stages in relationship to God. The brazen altar in the outer court represents the unconverted mind, the altar of incense in the Holy Place represents the converted mind, and the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place represents the "sealed" mind of an individual who is fully "at-one" with God and experiencing a joyful relationship with God (represented by the Shekinah glory).

As priests, we go around sprinkling blood on these pieces of furniture which represents spreading the truth about who God is. We are to bring people through the veils of lies and distortions about God and to lead them on a journey from the outer court (brazen altar), to the Holy Place (altar of incense), and finally into the very presence of God (Ark of the Covenant). When Jesus died that curtain was ripped from top to bottom and I think the meaning is to say, "The glorious and powerful One in the Most Holy Place is the same as Jesus in character. Now, why don't you come in? Come closer and experience a joyful marriage relationship with me?"

But, there is another way of looking at this system and that is to picture the blood as somehow appeasing God's wrath against sin. This is a counterfeit view of things and there is not one verse in scripture that describes God as being appeased by the death of Jesus. In fact, appeasement theology is the hallmark feature of paganism. Even the animal sacrificial system which clearly pointed forward to the death of Jesus does not describe appeasement. Even though most Christians would reject the word "appeasement" our words sometimes imply that "Now we have better blood! The blood of animals never satisfied the Father, but the blood of Jesus certainly will." But is God happy when we bring him the blood of his Son?

Let's consider a number of Old Testament verses that describe blood and the animal sacrificial

system. To stimulate thought, let's substitute the blood of Jesus in these verses for the blood of animals. It's rather shocking, but do you think it works?

"What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him the blood of Jesus to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is right, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God." (Micah 6:6-8)

"What is more pleasing to the Lord: to bring him the blood of his Son or to offer obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering him the blood of his Son." (1 Samuel 15:22)

"Do what is right and fair; that pleases the LORD more than bringing him the blood of his Son." (Proverbs 21:3)

"You do not want the blood of your Son; you did not ask for the death of your Son or for sacrifices to take away sins. Instead, you have given me ears to hear you, and so I answered, 'Here I am; your instructions for me are in the book of the Law. How I love to do your will, my God! I keep your teaching in my heart.'" (Psalms 40:6-8)

"I do not reprimand you because of the blood of my Son which you always bring me. But yet I do not need blood. Do I eat flesh and drink blood? Here is what I want: Let the giving of thanks be your sacrifice to God, and give the Almighty all that you promised." (Psalms 50:8-14)

"You do not want the blood of your Son, or I would bring it to you; The sacrifice that you desire is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart." (Psalms 51:16-17)

"I will praise God with a song; I will proclaim his greatness by giving him thanks. This will please the LORD more than offering him the blood of his Son." (Psalms 69:30,31)

"The LORD says, 'I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me the blood of my Son, I will not accept it; I will not accept all this blood you bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your music any longer. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.'" (Amos 5:21-25)

"I want your constant love, not the blood of my Son. I would rather have my people know me intimately and as a Friend than all this talk about being covered by blood." (Hosea 6:6)

Of course, the death of Jesus was absolutely necessary! (For a much more detailed discussion of this, [Click here](#)). But was it necessary for our benefit or for God's benefit? Did Jesus change the mind of the Father or rather did he change our mind about who God is? And, of course, who is God but the One who died on Calvary?

Finally, some will quote this verse to on the subject of blood:

“In fact, according to the Law, practically every purification takes place by means of blood; and if there is no shedding of blood, there is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22)

Notice that the result of the shed blood is “purification” and “remission.”

Not too long ago I saw a man who was diagnosed as having lung cancer about 10 years earlier. He went through surgery, radiation therapy and a number of other treatments and has now been cancer free for at least 3 years. His cancer is in “remission” and he has experienced a “purification” of sorts. In other words, he used to be in a cancerous state but because of the treatment which was applied, he is now in remission and has experienced healing.

Likewise, as the blood/truth about God as revealed in Jesus Christ is applied to our minds, we experience healing and our selfish hearts and minds are put in remission.

- Written by Dr. Brad Cole