

The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Yeshua, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:23–25)

----- *Excursus: The Intercessory Work of Yeshua as High Priest* ----

In our verse (Heb 7:25) we have one of two explicit mentions in the Apostolic Scriptures of Yeshua's intercessory work at the right hand of the Father. The other is what F. F. Bruce rightly calls "one of Paul's great lyric out-bursts,"<sup>1</sup> namely, Rom 8:33–34.

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom 8:33–34)

Other texts in the Apostolic Scriptures which give implicit mention or theological suggestion of Yeshua's heavenly intercession are:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Yeshua Messiah the righteous; (1Jn 2:1)

For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; (Heb 9:24)

but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. (Lk 22:32)

And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; (Lk 12:8)

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1 F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 154.

and he [Stephen] said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56)

In John's epistle, the fact that Yeshua is said to be an "Advocate with the Father" implies mediation or intercession. Likewise, the words of our Lord to Peter, that He had prayed for him, gives us a picture of Yeshua's role as intercessor. Further, as Stephen was being stoned and leaving this life for life in the presence of Yeshua, he sees the Messiah "standing," which is symbolic of activity. Since Yeshua is also said to "sit at the right hand," a picture of work completed, the standing must represent His on-going work as intercessor while His sitting emphasizes that His self-offering as a sacrifice is forever finished and need never to be repeated.

These texts from the Apostolic Scriptures undoubtedly flow from the words of Isaiah in His description of the Servant.

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. (Is 53:12)

Paul, in Rom 8:24, lists "intercession" as one of the four pillars of salvation, the other three being Messiah's death, resurrection, and His session or sitting at the right hand of God. It is typical in believing communities of our times that most are able to give some good explanation why the death and resurrection of Messiah are necessary in order to gain salvation for sinners. Unfortunately, precious few are able to give definitive answers as to how the session and intercession of Messiah are equally necessary. A study of the whole concept of "atonement" and the manner in which God declares a person righteous will offer the best background for understanding the session and intercession of Messiah as they relate to our own salvation.

"Intercession" means "to intercede, mediate, plead, or pray on behalf of another or others." As our High Priest, Yeshua intercedes for us through His prayers on our behalf. This position of High Priest is not granted to Him only on the basis of His being divine, that is, being one with the Father. Rather, He has proven His right to be High Priest through His obedience to death, His resurrection by which He conquered death, His ascension, and His session.

As sacrifice, He offered Himself up as the spotless lamb before God,

taking upon Himself the sins of those for whom He died. His substitutionary death paid the penalty for all who believe, satisfying the absolute justice of God, Who, by His very nature, must exact the prescribed penalty for sin, i.e., death. His resurrection on the third day, on the other hand, proves the full acceptance of the price paid by His death, assuring all, that the Father was entirely satisfied with the payment which was made. Indeed, it was by the resurrection that Yeshua was declared to be the “Lord with power” (Rom 1:4), that is, power over sin and death.

The “session” of our Messiah refers to His being “seated” at the right hand of God (cf. Heb 1:3; 10:12: 12:2). Now this posture of sitting is full of symbolism as it pertains to His work as High Priest. Sitting implies that His sacrificial work is finished—the sacrifice has been offered once and for all time.

Unlike the Tabernacle or Temple, in which there were no articles of furniture for sitting, the true Tabernacle in heaven has a throne and a place for the King to be seated. In the Tabernacle and Temple there were no places to sit, for the simple reason that the work was never finished. When one sacrifice was offered, another was waiting to be offered. The work of the priests was never finished. But Yeshua, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice, once for all time, sat down as a demonstration of the complete and finished nature of His sacrifice. Clearly, any religious ceremony or ritual which pretends to re-enact the death of Messiah, or teaches that Messiah is sacrificed many times over is a blatant disregard for the glory of Yeshua’s current session in heaven.

The “right hand” is a symbol of honor and power in Hebrew thought (cf. 1Ki 2:19; Ps 45:9; 110:1). Yeshua’s sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high is simply to teach us that He carries out His work for us in an entirely efficacious manner. Being seated at the right hand means He is in the position of privilege and power, and this means that His requests are not only heard but they are likewise always granted.

The session of Messiah implies His ascension. If He is now seated at the right hand of God but was, at one time, living here on the earth, this necessitates His leaving our sphere and moving into the heavenly realm. This we call the “ascension.” Luke, in the book of Acts, clearly declares the ascension of Yeshua into heaven:

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood

beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Yeshua, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9–11)

Paul also teaches this doctrine explicitly in Ephesians:

Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Eph 4:8–10)

As noted above, Paul combines these four "pillars of salvation":

who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom 8:34)

Here, the session of Messiah (which implies His ascension) and His work of intercession are put on equal footing with the death and resurrection of Messiah. Yet neither here nor elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures do we find the session or intercession of Messiah clearly spelled out as to what it is or why it is so essential. The Apostles simply presume that all will be acquainted with the Tabernacle and Temple, and understand that the ceremonies commanded therein spell out both the meaning and the value of Yeshua's work as High Priest. When the people of God are deprived of teaching from the Tanach, they no longer have the very foundation upon which a proper understanding of Yeshua's saving work is founded.

In the plan which God gave to Moses on the mountain, the altar upon which the sacrificial animal was slain was the first ceremonial object one encountered when entering the courtyard of the Tabernacle. Here the animals were slain, the blood poured out, and the meat burned upon the fire.

Furthest from the single opening of the courtyard, and enclosed in an elaborate tent of gold-laden pillars and ornately woven fabrics was the Ark of the Covenant, the very place where God manifested the outshining of His glory and met with man (as represented by the High Priest). It becomes apparent that if the goal of atonement is to commune with God, the sacrifice of the outer altar must somehow make its way

into the Most Holy place.

Of the various ceremonies enacted, the ritual of Yom Kippur, “Day of Atonement,” is the most significant for our present study. The High Priest, on that day and that day alone, entered the Most Holy place, there to apply the blood from the Altar of Sacrifice to the Ark of the Covenant, upon the top of that box, called the Mercy Seat.<sup>1</sup> Constructed above this “mercy seat” were golden figures representing Cherubim, angelic guardians of God’s holiness.

Peering down into the Ark, as it were, they gazed upon the objects within, the tablets of the Torah, Aaron’s rod which budded, and the memorial pot of manna. Each of these three objects symbolized at once the faithfulness of God and the rebellion of Israel. For the first tablets were smashed as Moses descended the mountain and saw the idolatry of the people. Likewise, Aaron’s rod that budded was given as a sign to those who were rebelling against God Who appointed him as priest. And finally, the manna was given as test to Israel and in time, Israel grumbled about it. Thus, the sin of Israel was constantly before the watchful eye of those who guard God’s holiness.

It was on this day of Yom Kippur that the High Priest brought the blood and, sprinkling it seven times upon the mercy seat, symbolically wiping away Israel’s sin, symbolized by the objects in the Ark. Instead of the Cherubim seeing the sin of God’s people, they rather gazed upon the blood, itself the cleansing agent of atonement. And in seeing the blood, they likewise saw the righteousness of God fully met, so that those made clean by the blood were fully welcomed to commune with their God.

But it was not merely that the High Priest came into the Most Holy place with the blood and the blood alone. Let us consider the text itself which describes the High Priest’s activities on this most holy day:

Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself. And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before ADONAI, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring {it} inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before ADONAI, that the

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1 The Lxx used the Greek word *ἱλαστήριον*, *hilastērion*, meaning “means of expiation” or “place of propitiation.” In 1Jn 2:2 we read: “and He Himself is the propitiation (*hilastērion*) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, lest he die. Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. (Lev 16:11–14)

Note well that the High Priest dare not enter the Most Holy place on Yom Kippur without having the blood and a fire pan of coals, along with two handfuls of finely ground incense. The phrase “lest he die” (vv. 2, 13) makes it abundantly clear that these were the essential elements necessary for the high priest to accomplish his prescribed duties. Entering without both blood and incense, he would be struck down.

So, the High Priest comes in with blood and incense. What does this imply? Incense is symbolic of “prayer” (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3,4), while the blood is symbolic of “sacrifice.” Clearly, on Yom Kippur the sacrifice and incense are combined in the Most Holy place. This is to teach that the sacrifice of Yeshua and His subsequent intercession or prayers on behalf of His children are combined in His work of salvation. To put it simply: Yeshua applies the blood of His sacrifice to the mercy seat in heaven by interceding for us. In His intercession He pleads the merits of His own blood before the Father and thereby continually cleanses us with the perfect atoning work of His death. Clearly, the death of Yeshua and the application of it to the mercy seat in heaven cannot be separated. He pleads the merits of His blood on behalf of all who draw near to God through Him. It is for this reason that our author states that He is able to save “forever” or “completely,” for He sees to it that the value of His death, stamped with the approval of the Father by the resurrection, is applied to the account of each of His children. Thus, in Him we “draw near” to God—we commune with Him as those entirely cleansed by the blood, and thus in His sight righteous in every way.

Further insight is given to us regarding the intercession of Messiah in John’s gospel, chapter 17. In this scene, Yeshua has faced the reality of the cross, and has come to the garden in order to pray to the Father. Yet though He and His disciples are there in the garden, the text itself seems to indicate that in Yeshua’s mind He has transported Himself beyond the cross, beyond the grave, and even beyond the ascension, entering heaven itself, as the risen, glorified Son. Note the following verses from John 17 which contain words of our Messiah’s prayer:

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your

name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. (John 17:11–13)

The phrases “I am no longer in the world...,” “While I was with them...,” and “But now I come to You...” all combine to give the very real sense that Yeshua is here praying as He would after returning to the Father. If this is so, then we may take this chapter from John’s Gospel as providing us a glimpse into heaven itself and Yeshua’s intercession for us there.

We may note first of all the particular nature of Yeshua’s prayer. In v. 9 we read: “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.” Here we see that, like the earthly high priest who entered the Holy of Holies specifically and only on behalf of the people of Israel, so Yeshua intercedes for those who are His, not on behalf of the world. In this regard we may note how often Yeshua refers to His followers as those whom the Father has “given” to Him:

... even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. (17:2)

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (17:6)

I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; (17:9)

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (17:24)

The prayer (intercession) of Yeshua is not general but specific, not wide but narrow. He pleads the merits of His own sacrifice and in this pleading secures the eternal salvation of all for whom He prays. None for whom Yeshua intercedes will be eternally lost, for He prays that the

merit of His own death will be applied to all those who have been given to Him—to the elect.

Looking at John 17 and the garden prayer of our Lord as indicating the pattern of His heavenly intercession, we may note the kinds of requests which embody His prayer as representative of His heavenly intercession on behalf of His people.

1. *The restoration of the glory He had with the Father:*

Yeshua spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...." (17:1)

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (17:5)

2. *The salvation and unity of those who have been given to the Son:*

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. (17:11)

3. *That those who have been given to the Son would be kept or protected from the evil one.*

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (17:15)

4. *That those who have been given to the Son would be sanctified in the truth of God's word.*

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (17:17)

5. *That those who have been given to the Son would be unified as one people to the glory of the Son.*

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that



they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (17:20–23)

6. *That those who have been given to the Son would come to be with Him in glory.*

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (17:24)

7. *That those who have been given to the Son would be characterized by the love with which they have themselves been loved by Father.*

O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (17:25–26)

Surely Yeshua's intercession is always in complete harmony with the will of the Father, for the Messiah and the Father are One (Jn 10:30; 17:22). Therefore every request He brings is certainly granted and fulfilled. And we see that the requests of Yeshua's intercessory prayer culminate in full and unhindered communion with the Father, for this is the ultimate goal and the final achievement of His atoning work.

That Yeshua's intercession is entirely effective, securing the goal for which it is offered, rests upon His divine nature and thus His being eternally without sin. This is the very emphasis of our author in the continuing context of our text, i.e., Hebrews 7:26-27.

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; Who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (Heb 7:26–27)