

## Christ as Priest in the New Testament

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As the 2001 document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible” states (II.A.5), “The Exodus, the primordial experience of Israel’s faith (cf. Dt 6:20-25; 26:5-9), becomes the symbol of final salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

The whole Bible Jewish and Christian is about the blessings of God’s presence, for which God created us. Or about the loss of that presence and its hoped-for restoration. The first exile was from Eden. The prototypical exile was in Egypt and the prototypical liberation (or “salvation”) is from Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Israel will conquer the Land, but its sins will bring it back to “Egypt,” Deut 17:16; 28:68; 2 Kgs 25:26.

But the goal of the Exodus already in Exod 15:17-18 is the holy mountain of God and the place where Yahweh dwells, his sanctuary made by His hands; here God will reign forever.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish Bible ends with 2 Chr 36:22-23: the end of Exile is conceived as returning from “Babylon” to the Holy Land to rebuild God’s House, thus “going up” to Mt. Zion, the place of God’s presence.

Now how does “Exile” exactly end? It ends as a Jubilee, when all exiles return home, Lev 25:10. It is to take place on Yom Kippur, the Great Day of Atonement, v. 9. This was the one day per year that the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled blood on the cover of the Ark<sup>4</sup> and obtained complete forgiveness of the list of sins found in the Hebrew Bible, Lev 16:15-16 (see also the role of the scapegoat in the following verses).

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<sup>1</sup> This official English translation is not exact; the French original says that the Exodus *devient le modèle d’ultérieures expériences de salut* (“becomes the model for further experiences of salvation”). But I agree that the concept of “exodus” as I understand, develop and explain it is the model and symbol of “salvation.”

<sup>2</sup> Already two great “salvation” verbs are found in regards to Moses’ actions in Exod 2:17, 19. In v. 17, what the NAB has as “defend” and the RSV as “helped” is the Hebrew “yeshua-salvation” verb; in v. 19, what those versions have as “saved” and “delivered” is the Hebrew “pluck out” (as from fire, see Zech 3:2).

<sup>3</sup> What I have as “place” here is *makon*; the more usual synonym for “temple” is *maqom*, the “Place” in Exod 23:20 (where the “Guardian Angel” leads), more explicitly reread in Mal 3:1 (see Mark 1:2-3); Isa 66:1 derides the temple proposed to be rebuilt as not really capable of being Yahweh’s *maqom m<sup>e</sup>nuhati*, “Place of my resting-place” (see Acts 7:47-50). “Place” is God’s heavenly abode (and not Solomon’s temple) in 1 Kgs 8:27, 39, 43, 49, and thus can we interpret John 14:2. The temple is the “Place” in John 11:48 and Acts 6:13-14.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek called *hilasterion*, word used in Rom 3:25; see Heb 9:5.

The key word for the “liberty” of the Jubilee is the Hebrew word *d̥ror*, translated into Greek as *aphesis*, “release.”<sup>5</sup> This Hebrew *d̥ror* / Greek *aphesis* (usually translated “liberty”) is what Jesus proclaimed as “fulfilled today” in Luke 4:18, reading Isa 61:1-2 in his first sermon in his hometown. We should then understand that Jesus is proclaiming the final Jubilee to take place in the final Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

Jesus as high priest, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, went into the real presence of God (or Holy of Holies) with his own blood, going through the veil which kept it separate, his own flesh, Heb 9:24; 10:20. Having accomplished this “eternal redemption” once for all (Heb 5:9; 9:12), he *sat down at God’s right hand*, Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2. This fulfills Ps 110:1 (see Mark 12:35-37; 14:61-62). In that psalm, the king addressed is proclaimed a priest forever according to the “prototype” of Melchizedek (see Heb 7 on Jesus and Melchizedek). But where exactly is the ‘kingly throne’ at God’s right hand? In his commentary on Psalm 110,<sup>6</sup> the great Hans-Joachim Kraus states that the location of the presence of Yahweh in Jerusalem is the ark.

It is the unoccupied throne of God on which . . . ‘King Yahweh’ is enthroned. . . . The place at the right hand of the king is a peculiar place of honor (cf. Ps 45:10). The Jerusalem king may take his place at the right hand of the God-King. But how, specifically, shall we conceive of the act of enthronement? Did the earthly king . . . mount a royal chair that had been placed next to the ark (in the holy of holies)? The installation of the ruler as priest-king [Ps 110:4] would support the idea of entering the holy of holies.

So we can understand Jesus’ sacrifice as one which enabled him to both enter the “Holy of Holies” and sit on the divine throne at God’s right hand (see the ‘throne for David’ [according to rabbinic tradition] in Dan 7:9). This Jesus did on the eschatological Yom Kippur wherein full forgiveness of all sins was obtained and which ushered in the final Jubilee = end of Exile. See the reference to Jesus’ “exodus” in Luke 9:31. This is the new and living way to God which Jesus inaugurated, Heb 10:19-20 and which gives us confident assurance to approach the Father (Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:35). See also Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12 (*prosaḡōgē* evokes the drawing-near of sacrificial offerings to God).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> But this is the usual “forgiveness of sins” word in the New Testament.

<sup>6</sup> *Psalms 60-150* (German 1978<sup>5</sup>, English 1989), 348.

<sup>7</sup> We know the Hebrew form of this type of devoted offering from Mark 7:11, *qorban*.