

THE SANCTUARY TERMINOLOGY IN HEBREWS

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As one reads various translations of chaps. 8-10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews, one is struck with the diversity of the translations that are used for the Greek term τὰ ἄγια and its variant forms with reference to the sanctuary. Either there is a lot of uncertainty about what the term means, or it is simply being translated to suit particular theological views. We prefer to assume the former.

A 1967 study by A. P. Salom¹ used a broad statistical study of τὰ ἄγια in the LXX as a basis for determining the meaning of τὰ ἄγια in Hebrews.² Whether or not one agrees with his conclusions, his methodology seems to be problematic. When one evaluates the context of each use and discovers that the majority have nothing to do with the sanctuary per se or its apartments,³ he or she realizes that the statistics themselves prove nothing for the book of Hebrews, and a different approach needs to be taken to produce a more viable result.

A very brief 1981 study by Norman H. Young⁴ also failed to produce a fully satisfactory result, since he did not take into account any evidence outside of the book of Hebrews to see how the term would have been understood by the readers of the book based on the terminology commonly used during that period.

The purpose of this article is to explore anew the literature that may shed light on the use and meaning of τὰ ἄγια and related terms for the sanctuary used in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Specifically, I study the sanctuary terminology used in the LXX and the writings of Philo and Josephus, in the hope that we may with more certainty be able to translate the terms in Heb 8-10 correctly.⁵ In order to do this

¹A. P. Salom, "Τὰ ἄγια in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 5 (1967): 59-70.

²Salom did have one sentence summarizing the use by Philo and Josephus. *Ibid.*, 63.

³Most uses refer to holy or consecrated things, such as vessels, furnishings, sacrifices, etc., not to the structure itself, as in Hebrews.

⁴Norman H. Young, "The Gospel According to Hebrews 9," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 198-99.

⁵It would be well to point out that τὰ ἄγια does not appear outside of the book of Hebrews in the NT, and all but three uses are found in Heb 9. Since the term appears only once outside

better than the previous studies, a more careful and consistent methodology must be used. Rather than considering every use of the term τὰ ἅγια irrespective of its context and uses, as Salom did, we will consider only those passages that refer specifically to the sanctuary itself or its apartments. In the LXX, I have chosen to focus on the sections of Exodus and Leviticus which discuss the establishment of the wilderness tabernacle, reflecting the earliest terminology for the sanctuary and forming a significant theological background for the Epistle to the Hebrews. In addition, I consider also the passages in Kings and Chronicles which deal with Solomon's temple and reflect the terminology of the Second Temple period. Special attention is also given to those passages in Philo and Josephus that discuss the sanctuary/temple, since they were written in the first century A.D., very close to the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, and therefore would be expected to use a similar terminology.¹

Once I have reviewed the pertinent literature and drawn conclusions, then I do a brief exegesis of the relevant passages in Heb 8-10 to determine how this meaning suits the local context and whether or not the conclusions aid in interpreting the text.

The goal of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary by providing a more careful methodology for understanding the meaning of the sanctuary terminology in Hebrews.

The Terminology of the Sanctuary

In Heb 9:1-5 there is given a succinct description of the earthly sanctuary and its furnishings in which the author uses two titles, or proper names, for the two parts or apartments of the sanctuary which he describes. The first apartment (σκηνή . . . ἡ πρώτη) he titles Ἄγια (v. 2), while the second apartment (μετὰ δὲ τὸ δευτερον καταπέτασμα σκηνή) he titles Ἄγια Ἁγίων (v. 3). The fact that these are titles is made clear not only by the use of the introductory phrases ἥτις λέγεται and ἡ λεγομένη, respectively, which are clearly naming formulas,² but also by the fact that they are given in anarthrous form.³

of chaps. 8-10, namely, in 13:11, I confine my study to Heb 8-10, with a footnote reference dealing with 13:11.

¹Much has been written concerning possible relationships between the writings and thought of Philo and the thought of the book of Hebrews. See Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), for a discussion of the issue. While I believe too much has been made of this, one should not be surprised to see a similar terminology used for the sanctuary/ temple.

²For examples of ἡ λεγομένη and its variants as naming formulas, see Matt 27:17,22; Luke 22:1; John 4:5,25; 5:2; 11:16; 19:17; Acts 3:2; 6:9; Eph 2:11; Col 4:11. These are synonymous with the Lucan expression τὸν καλούμενον and its variants (see Luke 23:33; Acts 9:11; 27:8,16). Ἅτις λέγεται likewise finds its parallel in Luke's ἥτις καλεῖται (see Luke 2:4).

³Compare the titles and proper names which follow the naming formulas cited in the previous note.

Thus one would expect to see these titles reappear in his subsequent discussion of the heavenly sanctuary if he intends to draw a correspondence between the two. The surprising thing is that this does not turn out to be the case. Only in 9:24 do we find anarthrous ἅγια, and here it is clearly not a title or proper noun, for it is qualified by two anarthrous words, the adjective χειροποίητα and the appositive substantive ἀντίτυπα. Furthermore, it clearly has a plural sense, as indicated not only by the two above qualifiers, which are also plurals, but especially by the use of τῶν ἀληθινῶν ("the genuine ones") of which they are ἀντίτυπα.

Elsewhere we find either τὰ ἅγια or τῶν ἁγίων, except in 9:1 where the singular τὸ ἅγιον appears. Since τῶν ἁγίων is merely the genitive form of τὰ ἅγια, it should not be treated as a different term.¹ Thus, besides the two titles, Ἄγια and Ἄγια Ἁγίων, τὸ ἅγιον in 9:1, and ἅγια in 9:24, τὰ ἅγια is the term used for the sanctuary in Hebrews (8:2; 9:8,12,25; 10:19; 13:11). Τὰ ἅγια is the plural of τὸ ἅγιον, which means literally "the holy place" or "the sacred place." It is basically a generic term which may in some cases become a technical term, depending on how it is used.

Before we attempt exegesis of the τὰ ἅγια passages in Hebrews, we need to trace the use of the term and its cognates in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus to see if there is a discernable pattern in Jewish use of certain terms for the sanctuary and its two apartments.

Sanctuary Terminology in the LXX

The LXX is the proper starting place to seek an understanding of the meaning of Greek terms for the sanctuary and its two apartments. Since the author of Hebrews used the OT heavily in buttressing his theological arguments,² and since he relied on the LXX to some extent as a source for his OT quotations,³ we must consider it to be a primary source in understanding his use of sanctuary terminology. What is the nature of that terminology in the LXX?

¹The oblique case forms are not treated separately in this study. The lexical forms are used.

²Richard Reid, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1964; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978), 33, 35-38.

³Note the use of Ps 40:6-8 in Heb 10:5-7, for example, which uses the reading of the LXX as opposed to the reading of the MT. Harold W. Attridge, "The Uses of Antithesis in Hebrews 8-10," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 9; Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 422; J. C. McCullough, "The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980): 363-64; cf. George Wesley Buchanan, "The Present State of Scholarship on Hebrews," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pt. 1, 316-17.

The First Definitive Passage

Let us consider those texts which are definitive. One of these is Exod 26:33-35. There we find God's instructions to Moses in the building of the wilderness sanctuary. God is very clear, in describing the two apartments of the sanctuary, that a veil shall divide between τοῦ ἁγίου and τοῦ ἁγίου τῶν ἁγίων. Which apartment is which is also very clear because vv. 33-34 describe the ark of the testimony being placed ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ τῶν ἁγίων, "within the veil," and v. 35 describes the candlestick and the table "without the veil." Since τοῦ ἁγίου and τῷ ἁγίῳ are simply other case forms of τὸ ἅγιον, it can be said that the outer apartment is here called τὸ ἅγιον ("the Holy Place") and the inner apartment is called τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων (literally, "the Holy of Holies," but more colloquially, "the Most Holy Place"¹). This pattern is fairly consistent, though τὸ ἅγιον is used also for the sanctuary as a whole, as will be shown below, creating some ambiguity and confusion in certain texts.

The Most Holy Place

Another LXX passage which is very significant for terminology is 3 Kgs (1 Kgs)² 6:16-21. There are several terms used here. Οἶκος (house) seems to refer to the whole structure. Ναός, usually translated "temple," seems to be used here for the Holy Place as opposed to the Most Holy Place.³ The Most Holy Place is referred to by two different terms here. The more common one is δαβίρ, actually a transliteration of the Hebrew דַבְרִי (oracle), the place from which God speaks. Though this term is never used in relation to the wilderness sanctuary, occurring only in 3 Kings and 2 Chronicles, it normally refers to the inner shrine, the Most

¹This is the clear sense of the phrase, as may be observed by the use of the same phrase in Exod 30:36; Lev 2:3; Num 4:4; and a similar phrase in the plural (τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων) in Exod 30:29; Lev 2:10; 24:9; 2 Chr 31:14; plus the anarthrous forms ἅγιον ἁγίων (Lev 27:28) and ἅγια ἁγίων (Lev 6:17,25,29,31 [7:1],36 [7:6]; 1 Chr 23:13). In each case the reference is to things that are considered "most holy." All Greek forms are an attempt at translating the Hebrew דַבְרִי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, which follows the Semitic method of emphasizing a certain quality, in this case that of holiness. Of those things that are holy, it is the most holy. One might say "holiest of holy things/places." Thus some translators render it "Holiest of all."

²Where the LXX reference differs from the English, the English reference is given in parentheses (or brackets) following the LXX reference the first time such a reference is cited.

³Note vv. 17-19, where the ναός is said to be forty cubits long in front of the δαβίρ in the midst of the οἶκος within. There is some confusion of the text here, however, and the MT reads somewhat differently, though preserving the forty cubit length of the ναός, still identifying it with the Holy Place. That the δαβίρ itself was only twenty cubits long is clear from v. 20 and 2 Chr 3:8, and that the whole οἶκος was sixty cubits long is clear from 2 Chr 3:3 (3 Kgs 6:2 erroneously gives it as forty cubits, but the margin points out that the MT and Codex Alexandrinus give it as sixty cubits, in agreement with 2 Chr 3:3).

Holy Place of the sanctuary.¹ The other term is τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων (v. 16), the same as in Exod 26:33-34. Though its syntactical relationship to δαβίρ in this verse appears a bit vague, it is made clear by a comparison with the parallel passage in 2 Chr 3:8,10, where τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων is described in the same way that δαβίρ is described in 3 Kgs 6:20,23.² Further, in 3 Kgs 7:50, the innermost part of the house is called τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων, again using the very same terminology for the Most Holy Place.

Interestingly, however, τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων is not the only form of this phrase for the Most Holy Place in the LXX. Though 3 Kgs 6:16 and 7:50 call it by this singular appellation, there is a shift of terms a few verses later, for 8:6 calls it first δαβίρ, then τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, the same plural form used anarthrously as a title in Heb 9:3.³

Again we find the same phenomenon in 2 Chronicles where, after observing the singular τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων in 3:8,10, the plural τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων appears in 4:22 and again in 5:17. The reason for this use of the plural will be discussed below.

Aside from 1 Chr 6:49, which is somewhat ambiguous,⁴ these are the only places where τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων or τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων are used of the Most Holy Place in the LXX passages covered in this study.⁵ And except for Lev 16, the only other term clearly used specifically of the Most Holy Place is δαβίρ, which is used only with reference to the temple, never of the wilderness tabernacle.

¹This is evidenced in part by the description of its dimensions and furnishings. See 3 Kgs 6:5,16,19,20,22,23,31; 7:49; 8:6,8; 2 Chr 3:16; 4:20; 5:7,9.

²The MT is more clear in 1 Kgs 6:16, where the "oracle" and the "most holy place" are in apposition (לְכַבֵּיר לְקֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדֶשִׁים).

³The only appearance of the anarthrous form found in the LXX in this study was in 1 Chr 23:13, where it is used as a subject accusative with the infinitive of purpose τοῦ ἁγιασθῆναι, with the probable sense, as indicated by the usual translation, of "most holy things." It is certainly not used here as a title, as in Heb 9:3.

⁴Here τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων could be translated either "Most Holy Place" or "most holy things," though the former is generally preferred.

⁵There are three other passages in which these two phrases have occasionally been translated as Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place, but the context suggests that this is an incorrect translation. In Num 4:19, the reference is to the sons of Kohath approaching τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, but at this time the veil to the Most Holy Place has been taken down in preparation for moving the tabernacle (v. 5), the articles of furniture from both apartments have been covered (vv. 6-15), and the sons of Kohath are led by the sons of Aaron to their posts for carrying the various articles of furniture (v. 19). A comparison with vv. 15,20 suggests that τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων should be translated either "the most holy things" or "the holy things of the sanctuary." In similar fashion, Num 18:10 speaks of Aaron and his sons eating their portion of the sacrificial offerings ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ τῶν ἁγίων. That this could not be the Most Holy Place should be obvious, for only the high priest could enter there, and that only on the Day of Atonement. Even if the sons of Aaron were here understood in the same way as in 1 Chr 6:49-53, where it signifies the genealogy of the high priesthood, the context is the eating of the daily offerings brought to the sanctuary, and this cannot be envisioned as taking place in the Most Holy Place. A comparison with Lev 10:17-18 suggests that the proper translation should be, "in the Holy Place of the sanctuary."

Before considering the use in Lev 16 of special terminology in connection with the Day of Atonement services, we must first consider the terms used for the Holy Place.

The Holy Place

Except for the general term for the sanctuary, ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου (the tent/tabernacle of witness),¹ which often appears to refer to the Holy Place because that is where the daily ministration takes place, the only explicit term for the Holy Place in the LXX is the one noted above in Exod 26:33: τὸ ἅγιον.² This study found no example where the plural form τὰ ἅγια was used to indicate the Holy Place.³ These forms were always used of the sanctuary in general or of the two apartments conceived of together ("holy places"). Therefore it is unclear from the LXX where the author of Hebrews derives the title Ἁγία for the Holy Place in Heb 9:2.

The Terminology of Lev 16

In Lev 16 the most common term used in connection with the service of the Day of Atonement is τὸ ἅγιον.⁴ On the basis of its use there, some have argued

¹The term appears over 160 times in the LXX, half of these in Exodus and Leviticus. It refers to the tent or enclosure which housed the two sacred apartments, as a reference to the tabernacle in general.

²There is another phrase which has often been interpreted to speak of the Holy Place, but this is questionable. The phrase is ἐν τοπῷ ἁγίῳ. Literally it means "in a holy place," and that is no doubt how it should generally be translated, signifying any place within the tabernacle enclosure as opposed to outside the sacred enclosure. This seems required by such passages as Lev 6:16 and 8:31, which speak of boiling and eating the flesh of certain sacrifices ἐν τοπῷ ἁγίῳ, i.e., in the court (αὐλή) of the tabernacle, and Lev 14:13, which commands that the lamb be killed in the place where they kill the whole burnt offerings and the sin offerings. By comparison with 1:11 and 4:4,5,7,14-16, the latter may be determined to be in the court on the north side of the altar of burnt offering. Lev 10:17-18 at first appears to be a contradiction of 6:16 and 8:31, but comparison with 10:12 reveals that there is no contradiction. The mention of blood being brought into τὸ ἅγιον tends to cloud the issue. It is less confusing in the Hebrew, which places "within" (פְּנִימָה) with the bringing of blood into the sanctuary rather than with the eating. It is also true, however, at least in Lev 16:24, that ἐν τοπῷ ἁγίῳ may indeed refer to the Holy Place.

³Salom, 62, indicates six such occurrences in his statistical summary chart, but there is no indication which texts he is referring to, so there is no way of challenging his statistics. Admittedly, his sampling includes the whole of the OT, so that could explain the difference, but the note under his chart also allows for interpretation: "The accuracy of these figures is, of course, subject to such factors as variant readings, doubtful uses, and the human factor" (ibid.).

⁴It appears in vv. 2,3,16,17,20,23,27. The use of τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου in v. 33 will be discussed below.

that it becomes the term to describe the Most Holy Place.¹ This seems to many to be a valid judgment, especially when considering the way in which it appears to be used as a separate entity from ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου in vv. 16,20,23,33.² Still, the distinctive use of τὸ ἅγιον for the inner apartment here in contrast to the terminology used everywhere else for the Most Holy Place raises questions. Could there be a reasonable explanation?

In fact, in all of the above cited references to either the Most Holy Place or most holy things outside of Lev 16, with the exception of the use of δαβίρ, the Hebrew uses $\text{יִשְׁכַּנְתָּ שְׁנָךְ}$ or $\text{יִשְׁכַּנְתָּ שְׁנָךְ}$. The fact that this term never appears in the MT of Lev 16 may suggest that the author consciously avoided the term for a particular reason, and may also explain why the LXX likewise does not use any of the familiar terms for the Most Holy Place in this chapter.

One fact which some commentators either overlook or ignore in connection with the Day of Atonement is that, while it was only on that day that the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, most of the services of the day were held outside of the Most Holy Place. A careful review of the chapter reveals that only in vv. 12-17 is the high priest actually in the Most Holy Place.³ The rest of the chapter is taken up with a discussion of what took place in the court and in the Holy Place, even outside the camp. There was an atonement made for τὸ ἅγιον (vv. 16,20), or τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου, as it is called in v. 33.⁴ In harmony with its use elsewhere, τὸ ἅγιον seems to indicate the sanctuary in general as sacred space,⁵ but may represent a particular aspect of the sanctuary when further modified. In v. 2 it is modified by the phrase ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος (within the veil) to denote the Most Holy Place. In v. 33 it is modified by τοῦ ἁγίου, where it may be translated “the Holy Place of the sanctuary” or perhaps “the sacred space of the sanctuary.”

There was also an atonement made for ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, which, as shown above, is the regular designation for the physical tent or tabernacle in general (vv. 16,20,33), and for the altar of incense (vv. 18-20,33), as well as for the

¹Young, 198; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 194. Bruce admits here, however, that τὸ ἅγιον should be translated “the holy place” and that it is only the qualifying expression “within the veil before the mercy seat” in v. 2 which excludes ambiguity and shows that the Most Holy Place is in view (ibid.).

²See, for example, the argument by M. L. Andreason, *The Sanctuary Service*, 2d ed., rev. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1947), 174-75.

³However, vv. 2,17,20,23,27,33, and possibly also v. 3, make passing reference to what takes place within the Most Holy Place, assuming that τὸ ἅγιον indicates the Most Holy Place in all of these verses.

⁴This is the only example found in this study where the genitive singular τοῦ ἁγίου is used in a compound construction instead of the plural τῶν ἁγίων. It translates the unusual Hebrew form $\text{שְׁנָךְ הַשְּׁכָנָה}$, and should probably be translated “the Holy Place of the sanctuary,” though the Hebrew itself is better translated “the holy sanctuary.” It is significant that it avoids the regular titular form for the Most Holy Place, τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων.

⁵The New International Version translates τὸ ἅγιον as “the sanctuary area” in v. 3.

priests (vv. 6,11,17,24,33) and for all the congregation (vv. 17,24,30,33,34). Of a long series of events comprising the atonement for the priests and the congregation, only the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offerings had specifically to do with cleansing or making atonement for τὸ ἅγιον, ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, and the altar of incense (vv. 14-20).

What is noteworthy here is that the whole sanctuary was involved in this service, not just the Most Holy Place. It is not accurate to conceive of the Day of Atonement services as being primarily restricted to a Most Holy Place ministry, though that was certainly the high point of the festival.

Rather than use standard terminology for the two apartments with reference to the Day of Atonement services, the author of Leviticus repeatedly uses the phrase ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασμετος (“within the veil”) every time he describes the high priest entering the Most Holy Place (vv. 2,12,15). This suggests that it is this act that has significance in the service, not the relative sacredness of the two apartments. The sanctuary is conceived of as a whole unit with a dividing veil which must be penetrated to open a way of access to God.¹

Whether or not it is proper to translate τὸ ἅγιον as “the Holy Place,” “the Most Holy Place,” or “the sanctuary” in Lev 16 will be determined by some of the pre-understandings brought to the passage. It should be borne in mind, however, that the Most Holy Place itself was not polluted by sin, since no blood was transferred to the Most Holy Place during the year, so that it would not be correct to understand atonement as being made for the Most Holy Place. Atonement was made *in* the Most Holy Place, but not *for* it. This understanding could affect one's translation. Τὸ ἅγιον no doubt refers to the sacred space inside the sanctuary, while the structure as a whole is represented by ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου. These were in need of atonement.

In any case, as Salom points out, each use of τὸ ἅγιον in Lev 16 is singular, while in Hebrews, with the exception of 9:1,² the terms are plural (τὰ ἅγια).³ So it is unlikely that the use in Hebrews reflects borrowing from the terminology of Lev 16, as some would like to conclude.

The Sanctuary As a Whole

By far the most common expression for the sanctuary as a whole in the LXX is τὸ ἅγιον.⁴ This seems to be the sense of texts like Exod 28:3; 29:29; 30:24;

¹This seems to be the message also of Heb 10:19-20.

²Here there is no problem, since there is unanimity in reading τὸ ἅγιον as “the sanctuary” in a general sense. Even Young, 198, who holds that τὸ ἅγιον is the usual term for the Most Holy Place in Lev 16 (LXX), admits that in Heb 9:1 it “clearly refers to the whole sanctuary.” Cf. Salom, 59.

³Salom, 62.

⁴Contra Salom, 60, who indicates that the plural form appears more than twice as frequently as the singular. This would be true if its uses to refer to “holy things” and not just to the sanctuary were included, but this would not be an accurate reflection of the terminology used for the sanctuary.

35:21; 36:6; 39:19 (41); Lev 4:17; 22:12; 27:3, which speak of the sanctuary in general terms, not specifically of the Holy Place. Even where it has been translated to signify the Holy Place, it does not always mean to specifically indicate the outer apartment.¹

Besides τὸ ἅγιον, the plural τὰ ἅγια is also used in speaking of the sanctuary as a whole, probably with the sense of both apartments in mind (“the holy places”). This appears to be the meaning in Exod 29:30; 36:8 (39:1); Lev 5:15 (cf. Exod 30:24); 21:12; and Num 4:12. It also provides a background for τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews. While Salom claims one possible occurrence of τὰ ἅγια in the LXX which refers to the inner compartment,² no such text was found in the passages referring to the sanctuary per se in this study. The only occurrences of τὰ ἅγια in the LXX found in this study signified either “holy things” or the sanctuary as a whole, though the latter might be translated “holy places.”

Having looked at evidence for the terminology of the sanctuary in the LXX, let us now turn to Philo of Alexandria, a source very close in time to the writing of Hebrews.

Sanctuary Terminology in Philo

Our study of the terminology in Philo will be far less extensive than that in the LXX. It will not be so much determinative as comparative with what we have already seen in the LXX, since Philo was a commentator on Scripture and specifically a student of the LXX version.³

This study found five occurrences in Philo of the term τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων. Four of those refer clearly to the Most Holy Place,⁴ while one is used differently, referring to the separation of “sanctities from sanctities.”⁵ Interestingly, the references in *Leg. All.* 2.15 and *Quis Her.* 16 are part of commentaries on Lev 16:1,17, respectively, and the one in *Som.* 2.28 is found in a purported quotation from Lev 16:17. This means that Philo apparently understood τὸ ἅγιον in Lev 16:17 to refer to the Most Holy Place, but it also is significant that Philo felt it necessary to change the term so that his readers would know what he was talking

¹For example, 3 Kgs 8:10 speaks of a cloud filling the house (οἶκος) when the priests came out of τὸ ἅγιον. This might seem at first to be speaking of the Holy Place, but v. 6 reveals that the priests brought the ark into the Most Holy Place and left it there, so that they are not so much viewed as coming out of the Holy Place per se as from the sanctuary as a whole.

²Ibid., 62. Since he does not provide any supporting texts for this statistic, this claim is difficult to verify.

³Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 50-51, 168-69. Sandmel indicates, however, that perhaps the expression “Septuagintal type” would better describe what Philo used, since some evidence suggests that Philo may have used other versions of the Greek OT than just the LXX (ibid., 168-69).

⁴*Leg. All.* 2.15; *Quis Her.* 16; *Som.* 2.28, 33.

⁵*Mut.* 35. It does, however, offer an insight into the meaning of the phrase, since Philo goes on to add, “like the veil in the midst of the tabernacle.” The translation is by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (5:241).

about, suggesting that τὸ ἅγιον would not normally have been understood as a reference to the Most Holy Place, but that the usual term for it in Philo's day was τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων.

Philo's use of terminology for the Holy Place is really unclear, because in every instance where either τὸ ἅγιον or τὰ ἅγια appears, it can be translated "the sanctuary" just as well as or better than "the Holy Place." There are five places where the translator has translated "the Holy Place," but all of these are questionable.¹ What is clear in Philo is that the use of the plural τὰ ἅγια is far more common than the use of the singular τὸ ἅγιον. Philo seems to have viewed the sanctuary primarily as a unit composed of two sacred subdivisions rather than as an undivided unit or as two separate apartments with distinctive elements.

Having briefly surveyed Philo's use of sanctuary terminology, let us turn now to that of Josephus.

Sanctuary Terminology in Josephus

As with that of Philo, we will survey Josephus's use of sanctuary terminology only briefly, comparing his terminology with that already identified in the LXX.

In two places Josephus speaks definitively of the sanctuary in terms of its various parts. The first, not in terms of composition but of OT sanctuary history, is in *Ant.* 3.6.4. There he describes the construction of the wilderness tabernacle, how the length of the tabernacle (σκηνή) was divided into three portions, and at ten cubits from the innermost part (μυχός) four pillars were set up. The area within the pillars he calls ἄδυτον, literally, "not to be entered," a term used for the innermost shrine of a sanctuary.² He goes on in *Ant.* 3.6.4 to describe the curtains which covered the four pillars that divided the two apartments (νεών) and screened off the ἄδυτον. The whole temple (ναός), he says, was called ἅγιον, and its inaccessible shrine (ἄβατον) within the four pillars was called τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ ἅγιον. The latter is equivalent to τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου, since the order in Greek is insignificant.³ This makes it comparable to Lev 16:33, which suggests that the

¹In *Leg. All.* 3.43, "sanctuary" may be read. In *Post.* 49, "sanctuary" should be read. In *Plant.* 12, "a holy thing" should be read. In *Mig.* 18, "sanctuary" should probably be read. And in *Som.* 1.37, "sanctuary" should definitely be read. In this last passage, we have another instance of a commentary on Lev 16 (v. 4), in which he speaks of the high priest going εἰς τὰ ἐσώτατα τῶν ἁγίων (into the innermost parts of the sanctuary).

²This is Josephus' usual term for the Most Holy Place, translated "adytum" by H. St. J. Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, Allen Wikgren, and L. H. Feldman in the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) series. See especially *Ant.* 3.6.4-5; 7.13.10; 8.3.3, 8.3.7, 8.4.1; *Bell.* 5.5.7. He avoids to a large degree the LXX terms τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων and τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων.

³The possible argument that τοῦ ἁγίου goes with the preceding word, κισίωνων (pillars), must be rejected since the resulting appellation for the "inaccessible shrine" would be identical with that of the "whole temple" (ἅγιον). Clearly, this is not the intent of the passage. Neither is τοῦ ἁγίου needed as a qualifier for κισίωνων, since the context makes its abundantly clear which pillars are being spoken of. The only noteworthy factor is that the title for the Holy Place is given anarthrosly with the naming formula ἐκαλεῖτο, similar to Heb 9:2,3, while the title

latter may have been understood by Josephus to signify the Most Holy Place rather than “the Holy Place of the sanctuary.” This terminology, however, is different from the normal τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων or τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων of the LXX, which always have the plural in the second element.

In *Ant.* 8.3.3, we find another definitive statement by Josephus, this time dealing with the construction of Solomon's temple. Here Josephus describes Solomon as dividing the temple into two parts. The inner house (τὸν ἔνδοθεν οἶκον), of twenty cubits, Solomon made into an ἄδυτον, while “the rest, forty cubits long, he designated [ἄπέδειξεν] as the Holy Temple [ἅγιον ναόν].”¹ Here again we see the anarthrous use of a title used with a naming formula, in this case, ἀπέδειξεν. These formulaic statements provide the safest clues to the use of specific names for the sanctuary and its various parts by way of comparison with those in Heb 9:2-3.

One other passage in Josephus deserves special note. In *Bell.* 5.5 there is an extended description of Herod's temple, which was destroyed in A.D. 70. Again we find that specific names are given to the various parts of the temple. After describing the foundations and the cloisters, Josephus describes passing from the outermost court, the court of the Gentiles, through some cloisters into a second court which had notices posted forbidding foreigners to enter. This court had a partition delineating a special place of worship for Jewish women. In this description, Josephus includes the court of women as a part of the court of Israel, with only a partition separating the women from the men. Josephus says of it, τὸ γὰρ δεύτερον ἱερὸν ἅγιον ἐκαλεῖτο (for the second temple enclosure was called a holy place).² He goes on to describe ten gates on this court, nine of silver and gold and one of Corinthian brass. Then he describes “the sacred edifice [ναός] itself, the holy temple [τὸ ἅγιον ἱερόν]” which was in the midst of the inmost court.³ Finally, after describing the curtains and the furniture in the Holy Place, he comes to the inmost part of the temple, which was twenty cubits long and was separated from the Holy Place by another curtain. This place was “unapproachable, inviolable, invisible to all.”⁴ Josephus writes, Ἁγίου δε ἅγιον ἐκαλεῖτο (“Now it was called Holy of Holy”).⁵ Worthy of note is the use of the naming formula again with the anarthrous title as in Heb 9:2-3. As also in *Ant.* 3.6.4, both elements are singular and the genitive form precedes the nominative; unlike that usage, the title is anarthrous here.

for the Most Holy Place has the article without the naming formula, though the latter is implicit in the structure of the text.

¹The translation is by Thackeray and Marcus, LCL, 5:609.

²*Bell.* 5.5.2.

³*Ibid.*, 5.5.4 (Thackeray, LCL, 3:263). Here ἅγιον is in attributive relation to τὸ ἱερόν, whereas in 5.5.2 it was predicative, so the translation cannot be the same.

⁴*Ibid.*, 5.5.5 (Thackeray, LCL, 3:267).

⁵*Ibid.*

Elsewhere in Josephus both τὸ ἅγιον and τὰ ἅγια are used of the sanctuary in general, and the frequency of singular versus plural is about equal. Nowhere, however, did this study ever find either τὸ ἅγιον or τὰ ἅγια alone used for the Most Holy Place in Josephus.¹ Evidence for use of terminology for the Holy Place, aside from that in the above definitive passages, is difficult to substantiate due to the fact that the name for the Holy Place was the same (ἅγιον) as the name used for the whole temple building and, since most of the activities in the sanctuary involved only the Holy Place, there was no need to make a separate identification. There is no place, however, where the plural τὰ ἅγια seems to refer specifically to the Holy Place in particular. This fact has significance for our study of τὰ ἅγια in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Summary

In reviewing the data concerning the use of sanctuary terminology in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, several facts emerge:

1. Due to the vagueness of the context in so many passages that use τὸ ἅγιον and τὰ ἅγια and their various forms, resulting in an imprecision that has produced a great variety of translations, a statistical summary becomes too simplistic a basis for determining terminology accurately.
2. A selection of definitive passages produces a much safer and more conclusive result. These definitive passages generally are found in the context of a description of the building of the sanctuary or temple, with explicit descriptions of the separate apartments of the sanctuary. Another key element of the definitive passages is the use of the naming formula in connection with the appellations given to the sanctuary and its compartments, like that found in Heb 9:2-3.
3. Except for the passage in Lev 16, which is not one of the definitive passages, strictly speaking, the Most Holy Place is almost invariably referred to by either a special term not directly related to ἅγιον, such as δαβίρ or ἄδυτον, or one of the forms of τὸ ἅγιον having a double element with superlative force. Of the latter, several forms are found. The most common form in the LXX is τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων. The most common form in Philo is τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων. In Josephus, the form is either τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ ἅγιον or the anarthrous ἁγίου ἅγιον.
4. In Lev 16, which is significant primarily because it is the main OT passage which deals with the Day of Atonement and its Most Holy Place ritual, the singular term τὸ ἅγιον is used to speak of the sanctuary in general, though it is clarified in v. 2 by the phrase "within the veil" to distinguish it clearly from the Holy Place or the sanctuary as a whole, which are the usual places referred to by that term elsewhere. Once, in v. 33, the term τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου appears, but as shown above, this does not refer to the Most Holy Place and should be translated either as "the Holy Place of the sanctuary" or "the sacred space of the sanctuary. What

¹In *Bell.* 1.1.10, where τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον has been translated "the Holy of Holies," this appears to be a poor translation. In fact, the marginal note reads, "The holy [place] of the sanctuary."

is no doubt more significant for our study is that neither plural form, τὰ ἅγια or τῶν ἁγίων, is present in Lev 16.

5. The normal term for the Holy Place is τὸ ἅγιον. It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish definitively that the plural τὰ ἅγια is ever used for the Holy Place as a separate apartment. However, the evidence suggests that the Holy Place was not viewed independently from the whole temple,¹ though the Most Holy Place was looked upon as a sacrosanct enclosure within the larger structure. Thus the Holy Place is representative of the whole and might conceivably be referred to at times by either appellation for the whole, though evidence for such use is far from clear, if not lacking.

6. Both τὸ ἅγιον and τὰ ἅγια generally refer to the sanctuary or temple structure which houses the two apartments. The former seems to be used when the sanctuary is being conceived of as a whole, while the latter seems to envisage more often the sanctuary as comprised of two holy apartments. This subtle distinction is not always clear, however.² What is fairly clear is that generally τὰ ἅγια should be taken as a reference to the whole sanctuary rather than to either apartment separately, and certainly there is no precedent whatever for applying it to the Most Holy Place *per se*.

7. The terminology for the sanctuary is everywhere neuter. Never is it masculine or feminine.

Sanctuary Terminology in Heb 8-10

Having looked at the backgrounds to the use of the sanctuary terminology in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, we must now approach the texts in Heb 8-10 in their context and see how those backgrounds may shed light on an understanding of the use of these terms in Hebrews. We will take each of the nine occurrences of τὸ ἅγιον or τὰ ἅγια separately and evaluate it in its context.

Heb 8:2

In Heb 8:2 the term τὰ ἅγια appears in the genitive. It is used with reference to the place of Christ's ministry "on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (v. 1). There should be no question as to its reference to the heavenly sanctuary as a whole, since it is connected by an expegetic καὶ³ to τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς ("the true tabernacle"), "which the Lord pitched, and not man." Thus, in the very first appearance in Hebrews of the term τὰ ἅγια, we find a

¹See Exod 26:1-37; 36:8-38; 3 Kgs 6:1-21; 7:50; 2 Chr 3:3-10; 4:22; Philo *Som.* 1.37; Josephus *Ant.* 3.6.4; 8.3.3; *idem*, *Bell.* 5.5.4.

²E.g., Exod 30:24; Lev 5:15.

³Salom, 65, concurs in this.

conclusively certain use of the term with reference to the whole sanctuary rather than to one of its apartments.¹ This is noteworthy for subsequent interpretation.

Heb 9:1

Heb 9:1 uses τὸ ἅγιον to speak again of the sanctuary as a whole. Since this use is not really debated, it is not necessary to present a long defense. It is speaking both of the sacred structure and the ordinances of service associated with it which were a part of the first covenant. B. F. Westcott says that τὸ ἅγιον here “appears to give naturally the general notion of the sanctuary without regard to its different parts.”² It is speaking of the earthly sanctuary, specifically of the tabernacle in the wilderness, as clearly indicated by v. 2. The separate aspects of the tabernacle will be enumerated subsequently.

Heb 9:2

Heb 9:2 speaks of a tent (σκηνή) being pitched which was called “Ἅγια. It is described as “the first” (ἡ πρώτη), and its contents are described as the lampstand, the table, and the presence of the loaves. Clearly this is the Holy Place. If, however, this description is compared with that of Exod 26:1-37; 36:8-38; 3 Kgs 6:1-21; and 2 Chr 3:3-17, one can get the impression that the first tabernacle is the whole tabernacle, or house, of which the Holy Place and its furnishings constitute the substance, while the second, inner apartment of the Most Holy Place is a subsection which takes its identity from the “second veil” (Heb 9:3), which constitutes it a separate tent or σκηνή. Thus the “first tabernacle” is the larger and encompasses the smaller, inner apartment. This may help to explain how the author of Hebrews can use the plural “Ἅγια as a title for what we tend to limit to the “first apartment” in v. 2, even though it is somewhat unusual.

It should not be concluded that ἅγια here is feminine singular rather than neuter plural, since this would be inconsistent with all other uses of the term. The pronoun ἡτις refers to σκηνή, not to ἅγια.

Heb 9:3

Heb 9:3 is the only example in the NT of the use of the double element “Ἅγια Ἅγίων, which represents the superlative form, “the Most Holy Place.” Clearly, from the context, this is what is being spoken of, for it is “after the second veil”

¹Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 214, states that “no local distinction can be pressed in regard to the heavenly antitype (archetype),” meaning that “the general thought is that of the immediate Presence of God (τὰ ἅγια), and the scene of His manifestation to His worshippers (ἡ σκηνή).” This is probably carrying the generality too far, though 9:24 can be read in such a way as to support this thesis.

²Ibid., 244.

and contains the ark of the covenant and those things that pertain to it. That the author of Hebrews uses this title for the Most Holy Place rather than τὸ ἅγιον, as found in Lev 16, should leave the reader without doubt as to his choice of terminology. Again, he is speaking of the earthly sanctuary as it was constructed in the wilderness under the first covenant.

Heb 9:8

Heb 9:8 is a very difficult passage, which must be seen in the context of vv. 6-7. Verse 6 describes the priests, after the two tents or apartments mentioned in vv. 2-5 were thus erected and furnished (κατεσκευασμένων), going "always" into the "first tabernacle" (τὴν πρώτην σκηνὴν),¹ accomplishing the service of God. "But," v. 7 adds, "into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." Clearly vv. 6-7 refer to the services administered in connection with the two apartments of the wilderness tabernacle described in vv. 2-5.

Verse 8 begins with a demonstrative pronoun (τοῦτο) that refers to the main clause which follows as a conclusion. Τοῦτο is connected with a genitive absolute construction in which there is a time relationship with the infinitive πεφανερώσθαι, which functions as the main verb, with τὴν ὁδὸν functioning as the subject. The time relationship is defined by the tense of the participle (δηλοῦντος) in the genitive absolute. Since δηλοῦντος is in the present tense, the time relationship is contemporaneous. The same is true for a second genitive absolute construction found in the second half of the verse. Further, it should be noted that the whole passage from v. 4 onward is rendered in the historical present tense so that the verbs in the present tense may be translated as past tense and those in the perfect may be translated as past perfect. Thus the verse may be translated, "The Holy Spirit all the while disclosing the fact that the way into [the holy places of] the sanctuary [τὰ ἅγια] had not yet been revealed while the first tabernacle [τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς] still had a status."

There has been considerable debate as to whether or not "the first tabernacle" here is the same as in vv. 2,6. In the context of those two verses, it would seem that it should carry the same meaning here. Young argues that vv. 6-10 form one periodic sentence, so it would be "intolerable" for the meaning to fluctuate unannounced within such close context. Besides, he adds, a shift from the spatial reference in vv. 2,6 to a temporal reference here would be "unnecessarily harsh."² F. F. Bruce, on the other hand, argues for a change of meaning whereby the author now uses the phrase to mean the sanctuary of "the first covenant," comprising the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies together.³ Bruce does not attempt to defend his assertion, and it comes across as weak.

¹Cf. σκηνή . . . ἡ πρώτη in v. 2.

²Young, 200.

³Bruce, 194-95.

A definitive conclusion may be impossible, but one may wonder if it is really necessary. If both the first and second apartments of the earthly sanctuary lost their status at the Cross when "Christ our Passover" was "sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7) and the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt 27:51; Luke 23:45), then it really makes little theological difference whether it means "the first apartment" or "the first sanctuary." The point is, as v. 9 says, that the former means of approach to God was futile, serving only as a figure or parable (παραβολή) for the time then present (εις τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα), since those gifts and sacrifices were unable to make the supplicant perfect as pertaining to the conscience (cf. 10:1-4). Those rites were imposed only until the "time of reformation" (v. 10), when Christ came and entered in once by His own blood into the sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια) not built with human hands, having obtained eternal redemption for us (vv. 11-12). Verse 24 tells very plainly where Christ entered: "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

The parallel with 10:19-20 cannot be overlooked. There we are told that we may now have boldness for an entrance (εἰσοδοῦν) into the sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια) by the blood of Jesus, which (entrance) He innovated (ἐνεκαίτισεν) for us, a new and living way through the veil, that is, through His flesh.¹ This passage suggests that the significant aspect of the sanctuary is behind the veil, where the presence of God is. Jesus has entered within the veil as our "forerunner" (6:19-20), preparing the way for us.² This He has done as high priest, suggesting a possible allusion to the Most Holy Place. However, it must be noted that, just as in Lev 16, any identification of the Most Holy Place comes, not from the fact that the location is explicitly named, but from other identifying factors such as the mention of the entrance within the veil along with other corroborative details in the narrative. It is worthy of note that the only specific reference to the Most Holy Place by name in Hebrews is in connection with the earthly sanctuary. Every reference to the heavenly sanctuary uses τὰ ἅγια. Could it be that the author of Hebrews makes no distinction in his mind between apartments in the heavenly sanctuary corresponding to those he has described in the earthly sanctuary? He is concerned only with access to God, not with heavenly topography. This is not to deny that there may be two apartments in the heavenly sanctuary, on which the earthly was

¹While some would prefer τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ ("his flesh") to function as a genitive in apposition to ὁδόν ("way"), this is not natural. Given the explanatory nature of the construction (τοῦτ' ἔστιν), it is best treated as another object of the preposition διὰ ("through") in apposition with τοῦ καταπετάσματος ("the veil"). To try to take διὰ as an ablative of means here is not precise. Ὀδόν is in apposition to εἰσοδοῦν. The entrance to the sanctuary, to heaven and the presence of God (9:24), is the way through the veil, not by means of the veil. The means is the blood of Jesus. The veil represents His flesh, which was rent so that a way of direct access to God might be provided.

²George E. Rice, "Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning *Katapetasma*," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 65-71, argues against the veil being the inner veil leading to the Most Holy Place, but sees it rather metaphorically representing the sanctuary from which Jesus dispenses the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. This view has not received wide acceptance, though it does have some points to commend it.

patterned, but to suggest that they may not be significant in the theology of the author of Hebrews, who is more interested in showing the superiority of Christ over the cultic rituals of the old covenant.

Coming back to 9:8, we are now in a position to see that, when our author stated that the way into the (heavenly) sanctuary was not yet disclosed while the first tabernacle, the earthly *παράβολή*, still had its status, he was pointing out the efficacy of the veil as a means of preventing the sinner's direct access to God. Only the priests could enter the sanctuary, and even they were not allowed to penetrate the veil. Only once (*ἅπαξ*) a year was even the high priest permitted to pass through the veil into the place of God's presence, and that not without blood to offer for his errors and the errors of the people (v. 7). Such was the inaccessibility which the earthly sanctuary offered into God's presence even at its best.¹ But all this changed with the sacrifice of Christ. A new and living way was provided. This is the message of this part of Hebrews.

Heb 9:12

Reference has already been made to Heb 9:12 in the context of v. 8 above. We need only to clarify what was there stated. Verse 11 speaks of Christ being come as a high priest of coming good things by means of a greater and more perfect tabernacle which is not of human construction. It would seem that the tabernacle (*σκηνή*) here is conceived of as a whole structure, not one of two apartments. Thus when v. 12 speaks of His entering once (*ἐφ' ἅπαξ*) into *τὰ ἅγια*, having obtained eternal redemption for us, the author probably has a similar concept in mind. Some have argued that because the blood of goats and calves is mentioned in v. 12, the author must have a Day of Atonement scene in mind,² but this seems to compartmentalize the text beyond what is natural.

Beginning in v. 11, the sacrifice and ministry of Christ is compared with that of the priests in the earthly sanctuary in their daily ministry (cf. 10:11-12). Verses 9-10 speak of both gifts and sacrifices brought by the worshipers, as well as washings and carnal ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. Verse 13 adds to the blood of bulls and of goats the ashes of the red heifer for ritualistic tests of purity. This is compared with the blood of Christ in v. 14, but is certainly not part of the Day of Atonement ritual. Verses 19-21 speak of the sprinkling of blood at the ratification of the old covenant, and this service is compared with the purification of heavenly things with the blood of Christ when He entered into the heavenly sanctuary (vv. 23-24). So it is not imperative because of the mention of

¹Westcott has a similar view of *τὰ ἅγια* in 9:8. He states: "It is evident that this phrase 'the Holy place' must include 'the Holy of holies,' the symbolic Presence of God (v. 12; 24f.; x. 19), even if it does not mean this exclusively. Perhaps however a general phrase is chosen by the Apostle to include both the scene of worship and the scene of the Divine revelation. The people had no way into the Holy place which was open to the priests only: the priests had no way into the Holy of holies which was open to the High-priest alone" (Westcott, 252).

²Bruce, 200; Westcott, 258.

goats and calves (or bulls) that the Day of Atonement service only be seen as in view here. A careful review of Lev 4 quickly reveals that these were also daily offerings, not only yearly offerings. A better reason for seeing the Most Holy Place here would be the parallel with verses like 6:19-20; 9:24; and 10:19-20, which connect entrance into τὰ ἅγια with passing within the veil into the presence of God. But this view is still based on the inadequacy of the earthly type, where God's presence was limited to a place behind a curtain in the Most Holy Place, a situation that may very poorly reflect heavenly realities.¹ It seems preferable to do as the author of Hebrews has done and use generalizing terminology to refer to the sanctuary as a whole.²

Heb 9:24-25

Heb 9:24 is located between two different contexts. It was noted above that vv. 18-21 refer to the sprinkling of blood in the ratification of the old covenant. It is noteworthy that the blood of calves and of goats was used in this ceremony too, according to v. 19.³ Verse 23 states that it was necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens be purified with these animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. At this point, Christ's entry into "heaven itself" is placed in stark contrast with what he has not entered, namely a sanctuary (ἅγια) "made with hands." Here the reference is to the earthly sanctuary as a whole, not to a part of it. Christ's entry into "heaven itself" is clearly set in parallel with "the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building" (v. 11). "Now to appear in the presence of God for us" (v. 24) could be seen in the light of v. 25, which goes on to speak of the yearly entrance into τὰ ἅγια by the high priest with the blood of others, clearly a reference to the Day of Atonement service. It should be remembered, however, that the Day of Atonement service was not limited to the Most Holy Place. Blood was carried into and used in both apartments of the sanctuary on that day. So, even though the reference is clearly Day of Atonement imagery, it is not necessary to translate τὰ ἅγια by "the Most Holy Place." It is preferable to retain the more

¹Bruce, 201, n. 82, warns against the dangers of basing doctrine too strongly on types, instead of using types to illustrate securely based doctrines.

²Both Bruce, 200, n. 79, and Westcott, 258, note that the plurals used for the animal sacrifices are generalizing, detracting from the specificity that they themselves would like to give to them. Continued reference to τὰ ἅγια is similarly generalizing when it is recognized that the author could have used τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, ἅγια ἁγίων, or another specific term for the Most Holy Place instead.

³Bruce, 214, and Westcott, 267, note that the sacrifice of goats is not mentioned in the Mosaic narrative in Exod 24, though that does not exclude the possibility. Westcott sees them as partaking of the patriarchal type, much like Abraham's original covenant sacrifice (Gen 15:9). Young, 205, sees in Heb 9:19-21 an amalgamation of various other OT rituals, including the Day of Atonement.

generalizing translation, “the sanctuary,” in harmony with the usual use of the term τὰ ἅγια and parallel to the use of τὸ ἅγιον in Lev 16.¹

Heb 10:19

Heb 10:19 has also been referred to above. We need only to review what was noted above and draw a final conclusion.

This verse is part of our author's conclusion to this section of his homily. From 9:25 to 10:14 he speaks of the contrast between the “day after day” and “year after year” rounds of sacrifices that took place “often” under the old covenant, which were unable to take away sins or make the worshippers perfect, and the once-for-all-time (ἐφάπαξ) sacrifice of Christ which “perfected forever them that are sanctified” (10:14). In vv. 15-17, our author reminds the reader of the new covenant promises already quoted from Jer 31 in 8:10,12, which closes by saying, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” He concludes with the statement that “where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (v. 18).

What we find beginning in 10:19 is exhortation based on this good news. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest [read ‘the sanctuary’ (τὰ ἅγια)] by the blood of Jesus, . . . and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” the author writes in vv. 19-22.² The purpose of this passage is to provide hope and assurance to the reader of ready access into God's presence, symbolized here by τὰ ἅγια, the sanctuary. This access is provided through the blood of Christ (v. 20), which opens a new and living way through the veil by the rending of the veil of His flesh.³ To pass through the veil is to gain access to God's presence. This could be seen as entering the Most Holy Place, as noted above, but this may not be necessary, since the heavenly sanctuary does not have to parallel the limitations of the earthly type. Heb 10:24 suggests that “heaven itself” is equivalent to “the presence

¹Interestingly, the parallel with v. 25 is not found so much in Christ's entrance into the presence of God in v. 24 as in the death of Christ on the Cross in vv. 26-28. This is made abundantly clear in 10:1-14.

²“The house of God” in 10:21 is undoubtedly to be seen as equivalent to τὰ ἅγια here in 10:19, affirming the suggested generalizing translation, “the sanctuary.”

³Some have objected to the idea that the veil which kept humankind from beholding the glory of God represents Christ's flesh, but this must be seen from a biblical perspective. In Christ the glory of God was veiled in human flesh so that humans could look upon Him and live (John 1:14), yet He could perfectly reveal God to mankind (14:7,9). It is sin that separates people from God (Isa 59:2), and this sin has infected human nature (Rom 7:14-24). Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, to deal with the problem of sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). Though He knew no personal sin, on the Cross He became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), like the serpent on the stake (John 3:14). Thus God condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3), so that sin was put away by Christ's sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26). The piercing of His flesh to condemn sin in the flesh opened the way for man to be reconciled to God and to come once again into the divine presence through the merits of Christ's substitutionary death.

of God,” so that no apartment concept may be valid in terms of being able to enter the presence of God.

Summary

It would appear that, with the exception of Heb 9:2-3, which clearly speaks of the two apartments of the wilderness tabernacle, the passages in Heb 8-10 which use the terms for the sanctuary use them in a general sense in which the sanctuary is viewed as a whole. Local context may in some cases point to a Day of Atonement setting, but this is probably not as prevalent as often suggested. Even where a Day of Atonement setting can be fairly clearly substantiated, as in 9:25, it must be remembered that even the Day of Atonement did not involve solely a Most Holy Place ministry.¹ Also, Lev 16 does not use τὰ ἅγια, so it is difficult to establish any precedent for limiting τὰ ἅγια to the Most Holy Place.

When τὰ ἅγια refers to the heavenly sanctuary (8:2; 9:12; 10:19) it is roughly equivalent to “heaven itself” or “the presence of God.” This does not preclude apartments in the heavenly sanctuary, but it tends to overlook them for a more generalizing view.²

Conclusion

As one reviews the use of the Greek terminology for the sanctuary in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, it becomes evident that there are no fixed forms which are used throughout. Certain patterns of use do emerge, however. These patterns will not be repeated here, since they have been outlined in the summary at the end of that section above, but a couple of key points may be highlighted.

The use of the superlative form, the doubled use of τὸ ἅγιον or τὰ ἅγια, is standard for the Most Holy Place. The major exception to this pattern is Lev 16, for unknown reasons. Lev 16 regularly uses the usual term for the whole sanctuary, τὸ ἅγιον, qualifying it in v. 2 by the expression ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος to refer to the Most Holy Place, and using the expression ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου to refer to the sanctuary structure as a whole. Only once (v. 33) does the doubled form appear, and that in the singular in both elements, unlike Heb 9:3. It cannot refer to the undefiled Most Holy Place, for atonement

¹Heb 13:11 may also fall in this category. The reference is to the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin. The bodies are burned outside the camp. While there are other sin offerings whose bodies are burned outside the camp (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:11-12,21; 8:17; 9:11), their blood is not taken into the sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια) by the high priest for sin as here. That was done only on the Day of Atonement. Once, again, however, it is well to note that the blood was taken in and sprinkled in both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Again, there is no reason not to take τὰ ἅγια as representing the sanctuary as a whole.

²The recurring idea of the veil beyond which one must enter to reach the presence of God (6:19; 10:20) carries with it a sense of the architecture of the typical sanctuary, though it does not have to match the type in every respect.

is never made for the Most Holy Place, but is best rendered, "the Holy Place of the sanctuary" or "the sacred space of the sanctuary."

The use of τὸ ἅγιον and τὰ ἅγια refers primarily to the sanctuary as a whole, though the former is also used specifically of the Holy Place. Τὰ ἅγια, the usual form in most of the Hebrews passages, is not used of either apartment by itself, judging from the context of each use. Rather, it seems to represent primarily the sanctuary as a whole entity.

When understood in this light, the references to τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews must be viewed first with an eye to a more generalized conception of the sanctuary, then the context must be allowed to guide in arriving at conclusions that are not based on false notions of what the terms signify. When each passage is thus studied, it becomes clear that it is not necessary to see τὰ ἅγια as referring strictly to the Most Holy Place in these passages. Even where a Day of Atonement context is suggested by the language of the text, it helps to remember that the Day of Atonement was not itself strictly a second apartment service. The whole sanctuary, including both apartments, was integrally involved in the service. Thus it is more natural to see τὰ ἅγια as representing the sanctuary as a whole in each case rather than trying to alter its meaning with each new context. The fact that the author of Hebrews clearly sets forth his terms for the two apartments of the earthly sanctuary in 9:1-3, then abandons them when he begins discussing the heavenly sanctuary, should suggest that he is moving away conceptually from a sanctuary that is compartmentally divided as was the old covenant sanctuary.

To attempt to determine the meaning of τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews without a study of the use of sanctuary terminology in the LXX and contemporary writings like Philo and Josephus would seem to be an exercise without adequate controls. This kind of study helps to provide the controls which should yield a result that is more sure and satisfactory in the long run.