

THE GREATER TABERNACLE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter
Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines
Ministries

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Let's Begin

Our modern life continues to produce complications for our everyday living. Even with the latest technological gadget which promises the easier, more effective results, still we remain complicated. Perhaps no place more illustrates our cultural confusion than a traffic sign at an intersection of busy expressways near Chicago: "To Make a Left Turn Make Two Right Turns."

To study Hebrews can seem very complicated to us. The author speaks of sacrifices on altars, tabernacles, shewbread, candlesticks, and the presence of God dwelling in a tent. Nonetheless, while these elements may reveal a measure of complication, the author makes it remarkably clear how all these elements of Old Testament worship painted a beautiful picture of the coming Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we make our way through chapter nine, let's focus on the outline below:

- I. The Examination of the Sanctuary (vv. 1-5)**
- II. The Explanation of the Service (vv. 6-10)**
- III. The Exaltation of the Savior (vv. 11-28)**

I. The Examination of the Sanctuary (vv. 1-5)

The author begins this section with a brief but detailed description of the wilderness tabernacle in the Old Testament. He writes, "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly" (Heb. 9:1-5). The description pertains to the first tabernacle Israel was instructed by God to build. Consisting overall of three parts—court, holy place, and holy of holies—the author focuses on two rooms and the articles in each.

First, the outer room is examined (vv. 1-2). The outer room is what we call the holy place. Interestingly, it is also called the "worldly sanctuary." Many times when we think of the term "worldly" we think of ungodly ways or lifestyles. The author had no such meaning in mind. Rather he was referring to the sanctuary as being made on earth; that is, of this world. It was a material structure not a spiritual one. And, in the outer room two particular articles are noted. The first article is the candlestick. A more familiar term is lampstand. The lampstand stood in the southern portion of the outer room. Its primary focus was to provide light. Even so, as all articles and furniture pointed beyond themselves to Jesus, the lampstand is the perfect picture of Christ who is the Light of the world. In fact, John records that Christ lights "every man" (John 1:9). In addition, since we are in Christ as believers, we walk in the light because we are children of the light (John 8:12; Phil. 2:14-15; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5).

Reflection Connection

The worship of the Old Testament is obviously much different than worship in the New Testament. What advantages do you perceive between Old Testament worship and New Testament worship? Explain.



In addition to the candlestick, there was also the table which held the showbread. Against the northern most wall stood a table made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. Every Sabbath the priests placed fresh bread on the table (cp. Lev. 24:5-8). No one should miss the truth we have here: Jesus is the bread of God which comes down and gives life to the world (John 6:33). He feeds us daily. In fact, unless we feed upon the bread of life, Christ says we have no life available to us (John 6:51).

Second, the *inner room* is examined (vv. 3-5). We know this room as the holy of holies. A veil separated the two rooms, the holy of holies being a perfect cube. One article in the holy of holies was the golden censor, a shovel-like tool used to bring fire into the place of worship. In addition, the ark of the covenant was in the holy of holies. The sacred chest held the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of covenants. Christ fulfilled the old covenant in every way required, meeting every single need a person possesses in establishing a right relationship with God. Finally, in the holy of holies was the mercy seat. Serving as the lid of the ark, the mercy seat was made of pure gold. God's presence manifested itself on the mercy seat. Here a holy God met sinful men and provided pardon for their wicked ways (cp. Ex. 25:22; Rom. 3:25).

II. The Explanation of the Service (vv. 6-10)

The Lord had given specific instructions pertaining to the ordination of the priests. The actions of the priests were occasions for the Holy Spirit to teach God's people spiritual realities.

First, note what the priests wrought. The author writes, "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But 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" (Heb. 9:6-7). The outer room was in constant use. Priests were in and out, trimming lamps, burning incense, and other matters related to overall maintenance of the tabernacle. Year after year, generation after generation the priests continued this service.

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Moreover, on special occasions the high priest had specific duties to accomplish. For example, on the day of atonement which happened only once a year, the high priest entered the holy of holies and made sacrifice for himself and the people (cp. Lev. 16). He was the only one who could accomplish the service for the people. And, he had to do so every year indicating the temporality of the sacrifice. Only the blood of Jesus could take away sins, a sacrifice He offered once for all.

Second, note what the Holy Spirit taught. The author of Hebrews continues, "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made



manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:8-10). According to the author, the service the priests offered in the Old Testament functioned as an object lesson to demonstrate a spiritual reality. The sacrifice pointed toward the future—toward Calvary—and was never intended to remove sin. The Old Testament was entirely incomplete.

Reflection Connection

Are there any ceremonies which characterize New Testament worship? How are they different from Old Testament ceremonies?

The high priest was the only one who could enter into the holy of holies for the people. Hence, the people had no direct access to God. Or, in the author’s words, “the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest.” People were kept at a distance. But the Holy Spirit was teaching a way would be opened up which provided full access to God (cp. Rom. 5:1-2). Even more significantly, the sacrifice the priests offered “could not make him that did the service perfect.” The offerings were never complete because all was external and consequently could not affect the “conscience.” External ritual affected the physical but never transcended to the spiritual. Only when the “time of reformation” came would all be set right.

III. The Exaltation of the Savior (vv. 11-28)

The author writes, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building” (v. 11). What a difference only one word makes—Christ! With Him, “good things to come” takes on an entirely new meaning. Jesus arrived on the scene of sin and sorrow and through His sacrifice, we have the “greater and more perfect tabernacle”! And, just what is superior about Jesus?

First, Jesus offered a superior payment. Note the author’s words, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (v. 12). Animal sacrifice could never be sufficient to atone for human depravity. A different kind of blood would be required. And, according to Scripture, the blood Jesus offered was unique, a one of a kind sacrifice (cp. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). More significantly, the blood Christ offered for our sins was a one-time act—never to be repeated. Having “entered in once” He “obtained eternal redemption” for us. Since God is holy, righteous, and pure, He cannot so much as look upon sin (cp. Deut. 31:18; Ezek. 39:29; Mic. 3:4). Indeed sin remains the wall which separates us from God (Isa. 59:2). In Christ, however, we have “eternal redemption” given to us by way of faith (Rom. 5:8; 6:23).

Second, Jesus completed a superior purging. The author of Hebrews continues, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb.



9:13-14). Christ not only offered a *superior payment* for our sins, He completed a *superior purging* from our sin.

It is true animal sacrifice accomplished certain ceremonial aspects of redemption through the “ashes of a heifer” (cp. Num. 19). However, again the outward aspect of the sacrifice dominated and could not touch the spiritual aspect of the problem. Jesus made it clear our being cut off from God is systematically an inward obstacle; that is, a *heart problem* (Mark 7:15). Hence, since the sacrifice of animals remained spiritually vacuous, the author clearly points to the “how much more”—the superiority—of the purging from sin the Lord Jesus completed. By “offering Himself” as one “without spot” He was able to “purge” our consciences from “dead works” to serve our living God. The author nailed the coffin shut on the validity of temple sacrifices offered by the Jewish worshippers, sacrifices toward which the Hebrew recipients were tempted to return. Christ was the end of the law and the final sacrifice God would eternally require. Jesus completed full purging from sin for all those who believe in Him.

Third, Jesus secured a superior provision (vv. 15-28). Christ offered a *superior payment* for our sins through His own blood sacrifice. Indeed His blood as the One “without spot” definitively completed a *superior purging* from all our sin. Consequently, we obtain an eternal provision through Jesus Christ. His last will and testament became ours through His unchangeable promise.

Note the author’s words, “And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (v. 15). The Greek word translated “testament” is *diatheke*, and carried the idea of the disposition which a person makes for his property upon his death. We call it a legal will. When a person dies, instructions are given to an executor who disposes of the deceased’s property the way he or she desires. So, what the author of Hebrews is unfolding is what Jesus has left His people through His last will and testament!

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Three procedures are required for the will to be fulfilled. First, the will is *mediated* (vv. 15-17). Accordingly, Christ is the “mediator” (v. 15). A mediator is simply a go-between; someone who connects the will with the heir. In this case, Jesus is the mediator between a holy God and sinful humanity. Indeed, according to Scripture, there is only one mediator possible between God and men (1Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6).

In addition, the mediation process involves two elements. On the one hand, the *benefits* are recognized, both positively and negatively. The author speaks of both the “redemption of transgressions” and the reception of “eternal inheritance.” Christ’s payment for our sins gave us eternal immunity from condemnation



because of our sins. We are heirs to the throne and “joint-heirs” with Jesus Christ (cp. Rom. 8:17). On the other hand, the *benefactor* of the will is recognized (vv. 16-17). The author refers to the “testator” as the benefactor. He is the one who makes the will. Indeed the benefactor must die before the will can be enforced (v. 17). Hence, there is no salvation apart from Christ’s death on the cross (Luke 22:20).

Second, the will is *validated*. To prove validation of the will, the author offers a picture from the Old Testament law. He writes, “For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry” (Heb. 9:19-21). After Moses made a declaration, he performed a visible demonstration to the people by slaughtering an animal and sprinkling both book and people. Justification from sin and sanctification to an entirely new life are symbolized by Moses’ actions.

In addition, validation was also proven by the provision the New Testament would bring. While “almost all things” under the Old Testament system required sacrifice, it was not until the shedding of Jesus’ blood that genuine cleansing from sin took place. The author concludes, “and without shedding of blood is no remission” (v. 22).

Third, the will is *activated* (vv. 24-28). A will must possess an executor; that is, one who carries out the wishes of the benefactor. Jesus was His own executor. He rose from the dead and carried out the work of the executor Himself! (See 10:9.) The author speaks of three appearances of Jesus in these verses.

First, His present appearing deals with sin’s power in our lives (v. 24). He appears “in heaven itself” amidst the very presence of God. And, He does so on our behalf.

Second, His past appearing deals with sin’s penalty (vv. 25-26). While Old Testament priests were often required to enter the tabernacle for the sins of the people, not the Lord. Rather “once” He entered and put away sin by sacrificing Himself. The term “put away” means “to abolish.” He settled the sin question once and for all time (cp. 1John 3:5; John 1:29).

Finally, His promised appearing will deal with sin’s presence (vv. 27-28). Every person because of sin’s consequences faces physical death. No one escapes its reach. However, Christ will appear “a second time without sin unto salvation” (v. 28). One day sin’s presence will be banished from sight. No unrighteousness will be allowed in the borders of the city of God (2 Pet. 3:13). What a joy every believer anticipates!

Golden Greek Nugget

The author recalls Israel’s worship in the Old Testament as taking place in the “tabernacle” (v. 2). The Greek word translated “tabernacle” is *skene*, and means a “booth” or “hut” or any shaded place for that matter. It was a temporary dwelling place. Hence, Old Testament worship was never intended to have lasting value. Instead the ceremonies always pointed to eternal realities—to Jesus Christ and His work on the cross—which possessed everlasting quality.

Wrap Up

In this study, the author of Hebrews explains in detail the Old Testament practices in the sanctuary, showing the priests as they ministered to the people and for the people. Revealed were pictures of the genuine sacrifice which was future. The animal offerings could never take sin away as did the Lord’s death on Calvary. Therefore, we exalt Him, lifting Him up as the one and only mediator of a New Covenant which offers eternal life.

