

Hebrews Study Session 13 - Chapter 9:1-10

The point of this passage is to assess the deficiency of the Mosaic covenant by demonstrating its provisions for worship. The old system set up at Sinai consisted of a series of barriers to God. By describing the layout of the tabernacle and the furniture within it, the author is showing his original audience just how limited the access of the average Jew was to God under the old system. People could only approach God through a representative. As we'll see, free access to God had not yet been revealed under that covenant but it was essential in that it set the stage for what was to come in the new covenant under the ministry of Christ.

Before we dive in, it's important to note that the author is using the OT tabernacle, the tent which the Israelites moved around with them until the Temple was constructed under Solomon. The reason for this is that it was the Law designated the tabernacle as the place where God's people were to worship Him and meet with Him. It was the pattern shown to Moses on Sinai. Thus, the author is going back before the Temple to the original place of worship mentioned directly in the Law to point out the shortcomings of the old covenant. On the note of grammar in this section. The author uses the present tense a lot in this passage. The main use of the present tense is to denote something happening now and on-going. It's the state of things now and will be until something changes it. However, because the author is speaking of things in the ancient past, the present is being used in what's called the "timeless" sense. The present in this passage is in essence saying, "This is the way it was." What was being described is timeless in that it describes how things always were in the day.

[Read Hebrews 9:1-5]

Q: According to our passage, where did worship of the Lord take place under the Law? (*the tabernacle*)

Q: What were the two rooms of the tabernacle? (*the outer - the holy place and the inner - the holy of holies or Most Holy Place*)

Q: What does this passage tell us was in the outer chamber? (*the table and show bread and the lampstand*)

Q: What does this passage tell us was in the inner chamber? (*the altar of incense and the ark of the covenant*)

Q: According to this passage, what was in the ark of the covenant? (*the Ten Commandment tablets, the rod of Aaron that budded and a golden jar of manna*)

Q: Why do you think that author so abruptly ends his discussion of the contents of the tabernacle at the end of v.5? (*he only mentions those things which are important to the points he is going to make about the deficiencies of the Levitical Law and the superiority of the new covenant in*

Christ.)

Here's the deal, as Jews, the original audience understood the tabernacle and the importance and meaning of all the furnishings in the tabernacle. They understood that each element and location was important and that it was arranged according to a divine pattern given to Moses. Back in v.1 we are told that this section is going to deal with the worship of the Lord under the first covenant. Notice that the sanctuary is called "earthly". This is not used in a bad sense. It's just that this tabernacle belonged to this world. All of the regulations and ceremonies of worship took place here. When we get to next week, the author is going to make the dramatic shift to the heavenly tabernacle set up by God - the one which is the original and that the earthly one is but a mere shadow. In order to fully grasp this section, we need to have a basic understanding of worship in the tabernacle under the old covenant so we are on the same level of understanding as the original audience.

[Read Leviticus 16:11-19]

Q: What are the two things the high priest is to take with him into the Most Holy Place? *(some of the coals from the altar of incense and the incense and some of the blood of the sacrificed bull and goat)*

Q: In our Hebrews passage, where does the author state that the altar of incense is located? *(in the Most Holy place - v.4)*

Q: In the passage in Leviticus (16:12) where does it imply that the altar of incense is located? *(in the Holy place or outer room)*

Q: How do you reconcile these two accounts? *(give time for answers - look at Lev. 16:17, on the day of atonement, the high priest is in the tabernacle alone. No one else was to be with him so the altar of incense was in the outer chamber but right next to the veil leading to the Most Holy place. The high priest could pull the veil open so that he could travel in and out of the Most Holy place several times to complete his duties as his hands were full. Remember, one of the things he was taking into the Most Holy place was burning coals. If he tried to get through the bulky veil with hot coals, he might set the place on fire. On that one say, since he was the only person in the tabernacle, the veil could stay open so he could complete his work before the Lord. Thus, there is no discrepancy in the Biblical account, just a different focus - one on the actual location and the other on the functional location on the day of atonement -which is the day the author of Hebrews is referring to by bringing up the Most Holy place.)*

Q: What do you see as what God requires for atonement? What is the agent of purging sin? *(blood - notice the amount of blood required is large)*

There is a time factor involved in the ministries that took place in the tabernacles as well. In the outer room, the Holy place, any priest could enter there at any time. In reality, lots were drawn to determine who would go in where and it was an honor to be chosen to minister in the Holy place. The Holy place had two items that were mentioned by the writer of Hebrews. One

was the table with the show bread on it. The other was the golden lampstand. Daily, the priests would minister in this area. They made sure that there was oil in the lamps so that they burned perpetually. (Remember, there were no windows in the tabernacle so it was imperative to have a lampstand in the place. This also points to the veil being held open on the Day of Atonement so that the high priest could see what he was doing as that lampstand was the only light in the tabernacle.) There were 12 loaves of unleavened bread on the table arranged in two rows of six each - with each loaf representing one tribe of Israel. The bread was changed out weekly and on the day when it was changed out, the priests on duty would eat the week old show bread. Now these tasks were done daily by any of the priests. Once per year, the high priest would clear the tabernacle out of all the other priests and perform the sacrifices and rituals prescribed by the Law within the second chamber - the Holy of Holies where the ark with the mercy seat was located. The mercy seat represented the physical presence of God's sovereignty and presence in the world. However, keep in mind that everything in the tabernacle was placed that way by God's design because it represented a heavenly sanctuary in which Christ was the high priest. So before moving forward (and this will help greatly with next week's study) we need to understand the placement of the furniture and it's basic meaning.

1) The mercy seat was located upon the top of the ark of the covenant. At both sides of the mercy seat were cherubim, golden representations of flaming beings worshiping God. Cherubim are always in God's direct presence. The mercy seat was in the center of the Holy of Holies and it faced outward towards the other chamber, the Holy place. Our passage in Hebrews is the only place in Scripture where we are told the full contents of the ark of the covenant. In the Old Testament, we are only told of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God.

2) When a priest walked into the Holy Place the first piece of furniture he encountered was the golden candlestick. The light of these seven candles was the only source of light for the tent. Light is one of the practical necessities of getting anything done in this world. Without it, we are lost and blind.

[Read John 8:12 & John 9:1-5]

Jesus is the light of the world. The lampstand is a symbol of Christ, who was to come and bring light to all mankind. He also illuminated the way to God as well as the true nature of God.

3) The next piece of furniture in the Holy place was the table with the show bread. This bread was an offering to God as this table was right before His face. Remember, the mercy seat faced outward to this chamber so that God Himself saw this offering daily.

[Read John 6:32-35 & John 6: 47-51]

Jesus is the bread of life. One of the most pressing needs man has is to eat. As long as a person is fed, he can go about his normal life but when he is hungry, his thoughts turn towards getting fed. It is a very strong drive in all humans. In the same way that the Lord created our

bodies to need food, He created our hearts to need/crave Him. The things of this world do not satisfy our longings but only Jesus satisfies our deepest needs through our belief in Him. Jesus is the nourishment our souls need to survive and thrive.

4) The last piece of furniture in the Holy place was the altar of incense. Daily the priest needed to attend to it by making sure there were new coals added to the fire to keep it going. Incense was placed on the coals from time to time to represent the sweet aroma of prayers going up to God and remember this was directly in front of the mercy seat - thus what was closest to God.

[Read Romans 8:33-34]

Jesus is our intercessor to the Heavenly Father in prayer. He is at the right hand of God interceding on our behalf through our prayers. Earlier in Romans 8 we are told that the Holy Spirit also intercedes on our behalf before the throne of God. The incense is the picture of the Holy Spirit of Christ before the mercy seat.

So in the Holy place we see Christ, our heavenly high priest, being portrayed symbolically in the arrangement of the furnishings. One of the main things to keep in mind is the under the old covenant, everything inside and outside the tabernacle was designed to keep people out. It was all to limit access to God.

Q: Do you have any questions about the tabernacle as presented thus far?

Back to our passage in Hebrews.

The main thought for the writer of Hebrews is that there are two sections to the sanctuary where the Law prescribed worship to happen. The outer one any priest could enter and the functions were done daily. The inner one only the high priest could enter and that function was done once per year. In other words, the activities of worship in both were done repeatedly as long as that covenant was in force.

[Read Hebrews 9:6-10]

The weakness and inferiority of the entire Levitical system is shown clearly by the limitations of the ministry of the priests and high priest in that they were forced to repeat their actions constantly - either daily or yearly - but repeat them nonetheless.

Q: What is mentioned in this passage of what the high priest takes with him into the Holy of Holies, the second chamber, on the one day a year he goes into it? (*blood*)

In v.8 we see that the Holy Spirit not only inspires Scripture but also has revealed special insight into the tabernacle not previously available to those living in the Old Testament times, under the Law.

Q: What was that special revelation which the Holy Spirit did not reveal in the Old Testament

times? *(that the tabernacle had special significance in relation to Christ. It was more than just a tent used for worship but a picture of Christ and His provision for all our needs.)*

Remember what I was saying about the tabernacle being a series of barriers to get into God's presence. Only the high priest once a year was in God's direct presence and he had to have some of the blood of the sacrifices with him. The front room of the tabernacle was the last barrier to the back room, which was the Most Holy place. This is a picture of redemptive history; God's plan of salvation for man unfolding through history is seen in the tabernacle's structure. While the front room, the Holy place was in operation, the Law and the old covenant that system of worship was valid. And as long as this room stood, the Spirit did not disclose the meaning of the contents of that room to the people. It kept people from God because the sacrifices were imperfect. Once Christ's sacrifice of Himself was completed, the first or outer room (the Holy place) was made obsolete. Then the Spirit revealed the full and true meaning of the outer room and how it leads to the inner one to mankind. This front room was a metaphor for the old system or covenant. Once it was removed, the last barrier to God's presence was removed and man now has direct access to God. The second room (the Most Holy place) becomes the symbol for the new covenant. Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice so it was never needed to be repeated again and by His sacrifice, the old, the outer room was abolished so that the veil was torn in two and man has direct access to God through Christ. He is the reality of the symbols in the outer room - thus the symbols are no longer needed where the reality exists.

In v.9 the "present time" is the present time for the author writing Hebrews to his original listeners. They now could understand the meaning of the tabernacle in light of Christ.

Q: According to our passage, what cannot be made perfect under the old system of sacrifices? *(our consciences)*

Q: Why is it important for the consciences of believers to be clean? *(many answers - to approach God with boldness, we need to have clean consciences is one of them)*

The failure of the old covenant to cleanse a person's conscience was part of the inferiority of the old system. It was built into it as the old covenant was all externals. Nothing dealt with the internal conscience of the person worshiping God. The writer is not implying that the Old Testament saint never had clean consciences only that they didn't get those clean consciences from the sacrifices they offered.

"Perfect" in v.9 is referring to perfecting believers in terms of their relationship to God. No one can be perfected in their relationship to God until they understand the fulness of Christ's sacrifice for them and the impact that has on us. The perfect blood of Christ perfects our relationship to God by fully and decisively cleansing us from sin and all defilement. As a defiled conscience is a barrier to true worship, the perfection came in the new age under the new covenant.

In v.10 the word "imposed" means to "lay upon" or "pressed upon".

Q: What are some of the religious requirement that you've had laid upon you in the past? *(give*

time for answers)

Q: Did any of them cause you to have a clean conscience?

At the end of v.10 and the phrase “time of reformation” it’s talking about re-forming something (worship). Hippocrates used this word to mean to straighten out a misshapen or crooked limb. Thus God was re-shaping worship of Him, relating to Him; He was straightening it out permanently. This shows that the old system of the Law was intended to be temporary. Through Christ, God opened a better system of worship, one where man had clean consciences. Paul made the same argument about the Law in Galatians 3.

[Read Galatians 3:15-22]

Q: With these truths in mind, what dangers do you see in legalism? *(it focuses on externals, the box-checking cannot cleanse the conscience, it misses the relationship with God personally, it focuses on the activities of the person rather than the truth of their identity in Christ and what He’s done for them, and more...)*

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?