

XIX. The Tabernacle

September 18/19/20, 2018

Hebrews 9:1-10

Aim: To understand how Jesus Christ fulfills the symbolism of the tabernacle and provides open, sufficient, and permanent access to God.

A. Review of Hebrews 1-8

[DSB]: Last year, we studied chapters 1-8 of the Book of Hebrews. This is a very brief, high level overview of that study, as a way of review in preparation for studying Hebrews chapters 9-13 during this coming year. As you hopefully recall, unlike the other epistles in the New Testament, where the *author* is known, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews remains anonymous. The author is almost certainly not the Apostle Paul, due to differences in style, content, language, and internal references which make it unlikely to be his work. Although many intriguing possibilities have been suggested over the centuries, it is safest to regard the work as that of an unknown Christian who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this letter.

The original *recipients* were almost certainly a congregation(s) of Jewish believers, who were likely facing imminent persecution. There is some indication that the recipients may have been in Italy, and a Roman setting for the audience makes sense. The likely *date* for the epistle is in the mid-60's AD, close to the outbreak of persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Nero and several years before the final destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. From the content of the letter, it seems as if the original recipients were tempted to revert from Christianity back to Judaism, ostensibly to avoid the coming waves of persecution against the church.

Thus, the overall *purpose* of the epistle is to encourage these beleaguered Jewish believers to hold on to their confession, to continue to persevere in the faith, and to not fall away back into Judaism (and unbelief). The didactic portions of the letter are sprinkled with warnings against falling away and apostasy, as well as encouragements to persevere, press on, and hold fast to the faith. For example:

- 'How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?' (2:3).
- 'But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end' (3:13-14).
- 'Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience... Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (4:11, 14, 16).
- 'And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (6:11-12).
- 'So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before

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us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain' (6:18-19).

To convince his readers to press on in the Christian faith and not revert to Judaism, the *theme* of Hebrews may be expressed as: 'Hold fast to the superiority of Jesus Christ and the new covenant.' The author goes into great detail to compare the new covenant with the old covenant, at every point declaring the superiority of the new in Jesus Christ. The key word in the letter is 'better'. Jesus and the new covenant are 'better' in every way. Jesus is better than the angels, better than Moses, better than Joshua. As a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He has a better priesthood than the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant. He is the mediator of a better covenant with better promises. The old covenant was external and temporary, whereas the new covenant is internal and everlasting. The Aaronic priests never ceased their labors, and their sacrifices were never sufficient. In contrast, Jesus offered Himself up once for all as the perfect sacrifice, and has now sat down at the right hand of God where He rules as our king and intercedes as our high priest. We now have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Given the superiority of Jesus and the new covenant in every way, the author asks, how can the readers ever contemplate a return to the old, shadowy, temporary, and superseded religion of the old covenant?

In this second year, will continue to look at the superiority of the new covenant vs. the old covenant and exhortations to practical Christianity as a result of that superiority. Today's passage in Hebrews 9:1-10 concerns the tabernacle and how Jesus Christ fulfills the tabernacle symbolism and provides open, sufficient, and permanent access to God.

B. The Tabernacle Description (Hebrews 9:1-5)

1. The Tabernacle (9:1)

¹*Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.*

Schreiner: The focus shifts to the sacrifices offered under the old covenant. The word 'now' may designate a resumption of the theme of the old covenant from 8:7. The word 'first' (*ἡ πρώτη, ē prōtē*) refers back to the same word in 8:13, where it clearly refers to the old covenant. The old covenant was to be administered in a particular way. Indeed, many commands or 'regulations for worship' were specified under the old covenant. Israel could not worship God according to its own wisdom and preferences. Worship was regulated and defined so that they followed God's instructions in worshipping Him. The worship required took place at 'an earthly sanctuary. The sanctuary here is clearly the tabernacle. It is 'earthly' (*κοσμικόν, kosmikon*), pertaining to this world rather than the heavenly world where God dwells, pointing forward and upward to something better.

Bruce: The inadequacy of the old order as compared with the new is now set forth with reference first to the arrangements of the sanctuary under the old covenant and then to the sacrificial ritual associated with that sanctuary. The particular sanctuary which our author has in mind is plainly the wilderness tent described in detail in the book of Exodus. The fact that he makes the tent the basis of his argument here and not the Jerusalem temple may suggest that neither he nor his readers belonged to Jerusalem, but it cannot be treated as proof of this. Neither can it be treated as proof that the temple was no longer standing, nor yet that the readers were not Jews at all. What it does prove is that our author's argument is biblical through and through. The sanctuary of the old covenant, in its very furnishings and sacrificial arrangements, proclaimed its own

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temporary character; and while this is shown with more special reference to the tabernacle, the principle holds good equally for the temple, whether Solomon's or Herod's.

Phillips: The Old Testament tabernacle contained items that symbolized great redemptive truths. It showed what must be done for inners to approach God, and typified the blessings of our relationship with God. Hebrews 9 takes up two subjects, namely, the arrangement of the tabernacle and the priestly service that took place within it. Beginning with the tabernacle itself, verse 1 calls it an earthly sanctuary for the old covenant, in contrast with the heavenly sanctuary of the new covenant.

MacArthur: The 'first covenant' was not worthless or pointless. God gave it and He does nothing that is worthless or pointless. Through it He prescribed certain kinds of worship and a special place in which to worship. But it was temporary, signified by the 'earthly' character of the sanctuary. The sanctuary and its worship were divinely instituted, but they, like the earth, were temporary. They were ordained of God and give a beautiful meaningful, detailed picture of the eternal Messiah.

2. The Holy Place (9:2)

a) *The Tent (9:2a,c)*

²*For a tent was prepared, the first section... ...It is called the Holy Place.*

Schreiner: The author zeros in on the holy place and the most holy place, beginning with the holy place. Other features relating to the tabernacle, such as the courtyard or the altar for sacrifices and offerings are not considered here. The 'tabernacle' (*σκηνή*, *skēnē*) or 'tent' was set up according to the directions given by God (Ex. 25-31; 35-40). Probably the author refers to the tabernacle rather than the temple because the former was associated with the enactment of the Sinai covenant, and the instructions about priestly offerings are associated with the tabernacle in the OT.

Bruce: The wilderness tent-shrine consisted of the court, the outer compartment, and the inner compartment. Although the successive temples which superseded it were much more elaborate, they preserved the same ground plan; the courts might be multiplied in number, but the holy house itself, standing toward the west side of the inmost court, consisted of the two essential compartments—the outer ('the holy place') and the inner ('the holy of holies'). Here each of the compartments of the wilderness sanctuary is called a 'tent' or 'tabernacle.' The outer compartment was twenty cubits long, ten cubits wide, and ten cubits high; here it is described simply in terms of its furniture.

Phillips: With regard to the tabernacle's arrangement, verses 1-5 remind us that it consisted of two tents or rooms. In fact, there were three areas of the tabernacle if you also count the outer courtyard. The courtyard contained an altar on which the sacrifices were made and the bronze laver where priests were washed clean. Next, immediately within the tabernacle, was the outer chamber, which the writer of Hebrews identifies as the holy place. It was rectangular in shape, twenty cubits long, ten cubits wide, and ten cubits high (10 cubits is roughly equivalent to 15 feet).

Hughes: Israel's tabernacle was a portable tent-shrine that was always situated at the geographical heart of Israel, with all the tribes camped around it in designated orderly formation. Approaching the tabernacle, one first would see the white linen walls of the court of the tabernacle, which formed an enclosure 150 long and 75 feet wide. The uniform whiteness of the

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enclosure's walls broadcast the holiness of its function. When a worshiper entered the courtyard, he was immediately in front of the altar of burnt offering, a large bronze altar with a horn at each of its four corners to which offerings could be tied. This was as far as the layman could come, and it is the place where he laid his hands on the head of the sin offering (Lev. 1:4). Behind the altar and a little to the right stood the bronze laver, a washbasin for the exclusive use of the priests, which, if neglected, imperiled their lives (Ex. 30:20-21). Directly behind the laver was the tabernacle, a flat-roof, oblong tent fifteen feet in height and width and forty-five feet long. It was covered with three layers and divided into two rooms by an ornate woven veil. The first outer room was called the *Holy Place* and the second inner compartment was the *Most Holy Place* or *Holy of Holies*.

MacArthur: Here is a brief description of the old sanctuary—first the Tabernacle and then the Temple. The emphasis here, however, is on the ‘tabernacle.’ It was the first sanctuary and also the most temporary and the most earthly. Thus it serves to illustrate best the writer’s point. The Tabernacle is important and demands attention in our study, because it is a giant portrait of Jesus Christ. Everywhere you look in the Tabernacle you can see Him. The courtyard of the Tabernacle was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. Its single gate, on the east side, was thirty feet wide and seven and a half feet high, allowing a large number of people to enter at the same time. It is a graphic picture of Jesus Christ, who said, ‘I am the way’ and ‘I am the door.’ Just as there was only one entrance to the Tabernacle, there is only one way to God—the only Way and the only Door, Jesus Christ.

MacArthur: The first article of furniture in the outer court was the bronze altar. It was made of acacia wood sheathed with bronze. It was seven and a half feet square, stood four and a half feet off the ground, and was topped with a bronze grate. The coals were placed underneath the grate and the sacrifice was placed on top. On the four corners of the altar were horns, to which the animal was bound when it was being sacrificed. The bronze altar is again a perfect picture of Jesus Christ, who Himself was a sacrifice for sin. The next piece of furniture in the court was the laver or basin, also made of bronze. In it the priests would wash their hands, and even sometimes their feet, as they went about the bloody service of sacrifice. Here is a picture of Jesus Christ as the cleanser of His people. Once we have received forgiveness for our sins through Christ’s sacrifice of Himself, we still need His daily cleansing that restores fellowship and joy. Still moving west across the courtyard, we come to the Tabernacle proper—forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen feet high. The holy place took up two-thirds of this area, which means that the Holy of Holies was a perfect fifteen-foot cube.

b) *The Furniture (9:2b)*

...in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence...

Schreiner: First, the furniture in the holy place is considered: the lampstand (Ex. 25:31-39; 37:17-24); the table (Ex. 25:23-29; 37:10-16), and the bread presented on the table (Ex. 25:30).

Bruce: the ‘lampstand was placed at the south side of the holy place; it was made of gold, with three branches springing from either side of the main stem; the main stem and all six branches each supported a flower-shaped lampholder (Ex. 25:31-39; 37:17-24. ‘The table, with the showbread’ stood on the north side of the holy place. The table was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold; it was two cubits long, one cubit broad, and one and a half cubits high, and it was equipped with golden plates, spoons, flagons, and bowls (Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16). The ‘showbread’ (lit., ‘the setting forth of the loaves’) consisted of twelve cakes, baked of fine flour, placed fresh upon the table every Sabbath day (Lev. 24:5-8); the old cakes, which were removed

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when the new cakes were placed on the table, because the perquisite of the priests, who ate them in the holy place; no layman might eat them, because they were ‘most holy’ (Lev. 24:9).

Phillips: He reminds the readers of the well-known furnishings of this room, which are described in detail in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. Inside the first room were the lampstand, the table on which the showbread was arranged, and finally the altar of incense. The lampstand, also known as the menorah, had seven branches, three on either side of the main stem (Ex. 25:31-36). The priests in their rotation kept these lamps supplied with oil so that they burned continuously. The next item was the table of showbread, so named for God’s command in Exodus 25:30. Twelve loaves were placed on the table each Sabbath, to be eaten only by the priests serving in the tabernacle. The holy place was where the priests had fellowship with God on behalf of the people, symbolized by the bread—twelve loaves for twelve tribes—which the priests ate at the Lord’s table. The light represented God’s revelation of Himself, His illuminating presence, and the incense altar symbolized the prayers of God’s people.

Phillips: We can also see how these tabernacle symbols each point to Jesus Christ. Jesus is ‘the true light’ (Jn. 1:4, 9). In John 6, Jesus first feeds the multitudes with just a few loaves and then proclaims, ‘I am the bread of life’ (Jn. 6:35). Similarly, it is Jesus’ intercessory prayers that sustain us in God’s presence, a point that has been strongly made by the writer of Hebrews. The whole picture is summed up by John 1:14, where the apostle writes, ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us [literally, ‘*tabernacled* among us’].’ It is in Christ that we have fellowship with God, just as the priests of Israel had fellowship with God in and by means of the tabernacle.

Hughes: The lampstand was made of solid gold, with three branches springing from either side and each of its seven branches supporting a flower-shaped lampholder (Ex. 25:31ff.; 37:17ff.). The table, called ‘the table of the bread of the Presence’ (Num. 4:7), contained twelve loaves of bread, one for each tribe. These furnishings were all profoundly prophetic of Christ. The seven-branched candlestick of pure gold speaks of the Divine Son who left Heaven’s glory to become the light of the world and make His people to shine as such (cp. Mt. 5:14-16; Jn. 1:4, 5; 8:12). The consecrated bread anticipates Christ’s words, ‘I am the bread of life (Jn. 6:35ff.). He is the true spiritual sustenance of His people, and apart from Him there is no life.

MacArthur: On the left of the Holy Place, as the priest entered, was a solid lampstand having seven branches, each filled with the purest olive oil. On the right was the table on which was the sacred bread, or showbread. This table, like the base of the altar, was of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and two and a quarter feet high. Every Sabbath twelve loaves of fresh bread were set on it, one for each of the twelve tribes. At the end of the week, the priests, and only the priests, were allowed to eat the loaves. From His heavenly place now, Jesus lights our path (pictured by the golden lampstand) and feeds us (pictured by the table of showbread).

3. The Most Holy Place (9:3-5)

a) *The Holy of Holies (9:3)*

³*Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place...*

Schreiner: From the holy place the author moves inward, inside the veil to ‘the most holy place’ (*Ἁγία Ἁγίων, Hagia Hagiōn*). The holy of holies was behind the curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place (Ex. 26:33; cp. Ex. 40:21).

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Bruce: At the west end of the holy place hung a curtain of embroidered linen, suspended under the clasps which coupled together the two sets of linen curtains draped over the tabernacle framework (Ex. 26:31; 36:35ff.) This curtain is here called ‘the second curtain’ to distinguish it from the linen screen through which one entered from the court into the holy place (Ex. 26:36ff; 36:37ff.). Beyond the ‘second curtain’ lay the inner compartment, the ‘holy of holies,’ which formed a cube on a side of ten cubits.

Phillips: There was a significant difference between fellowship with God in the tabernacle and our fellowship with God in Christ. This point is suggested in verse 3. The priests served in God’s presence in a limited way through the symbolic items in the holy place, but God Himself dwelt in the next chamber, which was separated by a thick curtain or veil. This inner room of the tabernacle was the Most Holy Place, also known as the holy of holies. It was a cube in shape, ten cubits or fifteen feet on each side.

b) *The Altar of Incense (9:4a)*

...⁴having the golden altar of incense...

Schreiner: The instructions for the altar of incense are detailed in Exodus 30:1-5 (cp. Ex. 37:25-28). Twice a day Aaron was to burn incense on the altar in the morning and at twilight (Ex. 30:7-9). Almost certainly the author, who was so familiar with the Day of Atonement, would realize from this text alone that the incense altar was not in the most holy place. The altar was to be purified once a year (Ex. 30:10), and when there was a sin offering, blood had to be applied to the altar of incense (Lev. 4:7). Exodus is clear that the altar is in the holy place, not the most holy place (Ex. 30:6; cp. Ex. 16:8-19). Hebrews, of course, places the altar of incense in the most holy place. It is difficult to believe the author, who was familiar with the OT and likely knew Jewish tradition, didn’t know where the altar of incense was located. After all, the priest had to tend to it twice a day, and the blood of sin offerings was constantly applied to the horns of the altar. Both Philo and Josephus put the incense altar in the outer sanctum instead of the most holy place. Zechariah’s ministry in the temple confirms this (Lk. 1:5-23), for his ministry at the altar of incense could not have been in the most holy place since it was only accessible once a year. It seems likely, then, that the author links the incense altar closely with the most holy place (cp. also 1 Kgs. 6:20, 22) since the incense altar is associated with God’s presence.

Bruce: The Greek word *thymiatērion*, which our author employs here, is used in the Septuagint with the meaning ‘censer’ but never with the meaning ‘incense-altar.’ The word in itself simply means ‘a place where incense is put,’ or ‘a vessel for burning incense’ and was used not only in the sense of ‘censer,’ but also in the general sense of ‘incense-altar’ and more particularly, by Philo and Josephus, of the incense-altar in the Israelite tabernacle or temple. We should expect some reference to the incense-altar here, along with the references to the other articles of tabernacle furniture. That being so, the question of the location of the incense-altar arises. According to Ex. 30:6, it was to be put ‘before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat that is over the testimony.’ This does not make it altogether clear on which side of the veil dividing the holy place from the holy of holies the incense-altar stood, but the phrase ‘before the veil’ does rather suggest that it stood in the holy place, not in the holy of holies. This seems to be confirmed by Lev. 16:12, 18, where ‘the ‘altar before Yahweh’ is on the outer side of the curtain. There was, however, a special connection between the incense-altar and the holy of holies, no matter on which side of the veil the altar stood. On the one day in the year when the holy of holies was entered, the incense-altar played a significant part; not only was the holy of holies never entered without incense from the incense-altar (Lev. 16:2ff.), but the blood of the

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sin offerings on the Day of Atonement was sprinkled on the horns of the incense-altar as well as on the mercy-seat (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:15). In any case, our author does not stay to answer the questions which his passing reference to the incense-altar may raise in his readers' minds; this is not the feature of the tabernacle to which he wishes to draw their attention more particularly, any more than the contents of the ark of the covenant, which he also passes over quickly.

Phillips: Finally, the golden altar of incense rested immediately in front of the veil separating the outer room from the inner sanctum (see Ex. 30:1-6). Every morning and evening, when the priests came into the holy place to keep the lampstand burning, they also refreshed the incense for this altar. The Old Testament makes it clear that this item was located in the outer room and not in the holy of holies, as the writer of Hebrews must have known. In verse 4, however, he associates it with the inner sanctum because of the vital role the cloud of incense played in covering the high priest's approach as he passed through the curtain on the day of atonement.

Hughes: Scholars have been puzzled because elsewhere the Scriptures place the golden altar of incense not inside the Holy of Holies, but in the outer room 'in front of the veil' before the Holy of Holies (Ex. 30:6). In fact, it had to be outside the Holy of Holies because it was used daily by the other priests (Ex. 30:7-8). So why does the author of Hebrews present the altar of incense as part of the Most Holy Place? Most likely, the author has in mind the intimate connection of the incense altar with the Most Holy Place. It 'belonged to the inner sanctuary' (1 Kgs. 6:22), as is shown by its situation 'in front of the curtain that is before the ark of testimony—before the atonement seat [mercy seat] that is over the Testimony' (Ex. 30:6). While the location of the altar is puzzling to some, its prophetic significance is not, for the incense prophecies of the ultimate prayers offered by Christ, our high priest, in the presence of God.

MacArthur: Further in and to the center of the Holy Place was the altar of incense. It, too, was of gold-overlaid acacia wood, one and one-half feet square and about three feet high. On this altar were placed the burning coals from the bronze altar, where sacrifice was made. This altar of incense is a picture of how Jesus intercedes for us.

c) *The Ark of the Covenant (9:4bc, 5a)*

Phillips: In this inner sanctum rested the ark of the covenant, the gold-paneled container which also served as the footstool of God's throne. On top of the ark were two golden cherubim, between which God's glory especially dwelt. In the ark were the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. These tablets prescribed the terms of the covenant, and from them the ark derived its name. Also, there was the jar containing manna from the wilderness sojourn, and Aaron's staff, which God had caused to bloom when He identified Aaron as the specially chosen priest. The writer's focus is not mainly on these items, but on what happened inside these rooms.

(1) The Ark (9:4b)

...and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold...

Schreiner: The ark of the covenant was constructed according to the Lord's instructions (Ex. 25:10-16; 37:1-5). The ark was in the most holy place (Ex. 26:33; cp. 40:3, 21). The ark is linked with the covenant the Lord made with Israel, with His promise to bless them and to be their God. By the time of the NT, the ark was no longer present (cp. Jer. 3:16), and when Pompey went into the temple, he was shocked to discover that there was nothing there at all.

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Bruce: The ark of the covenant was the principal, if not the only, article of furniture in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple. No more is heard of it after the destruction of the first temple by the Chaldeans in 587 BC; it was not replaced in the post-exilic temple, in which the holy of holies was completely empty, as Pompey found to his surprise when he insisted on forcing his way into it in 63 BC. The ark was a box of acacia wood plated with gold.

MacArthur: In this holiest of earthly places was only one piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant. In it were three very precious articles. Made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, it was about three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide, and two feet high.

(2) The Contents (9:4c)

...in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.

(a) Jar of Manna and Aaron's Rod

Schreiner: The Lord provided manna to sustain Israel for its 40 years in the wilderness (Ex. 16:31-35; cp. Dt. 8:3, 16; Ps. 78:24), and a sample was placed before the tablets as a witness of God's care for Israel (Ex. 16:34). The sprouting and blossoming of Aaron's staff indicated that the Lord had chosen him for the priesthood (Num. 17:1-13). Aaron's staff was placed in the most holy place to deter those rebelling against the Lord. Strictly speaking, Aaron's staff and the manna were not placed in the ark but were in the most holy place, though it is possible that as time progressed such items were put in the ark along with the tables of the covenant.

Bruce: By 'other things' he means more particularly the jar of manna and Aaron's rod, which the Old Testament does not place inside the ark. According to Ex. 16:33ff., Moses commanded Aaron to put an omer of manna (about four pints, one-tenth of an ephah) in a jar. Similarly, when twelve rods or scepters, one for each tribe of Israel, had been laid up 'in the tent of meeting before the testimony,' Aaron's rod, the rod of the tribe of Levi, was found the next day to have put forth buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds—a token that Aaron was the man whom God had chosen for the priesthood (Num. 17:1-10). Moses was then directed to 'put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels' (Num. 17:10). Does the phrase 'before the testimony' imply that these objects were placed inside the ark, or simply that they were laid in front of it? It is not to be doubted that our author represents the jar of manna and the rod as having been inside the ark along with the tables of the law. Since the Old Testament has nothing to say of the jar of manna outside Ex. 16:33ff., and nothing to say of Aaron's rod after it was used to strike the rock in Kadesh (Num. 20:8-11), it is open to anyone to surmise that, even if they were not originally in the ark, they were put there subsequently for safe-keeping, and to surmise further that they were lost when the ark was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:11-6:16).

(b) Tablets of the Law

Schreiner: The tablets of the covenant were placed in the ark at the beginning (Ex. 25:16; Dt. 10:5) and continued to be in the most holy place in the temple and were in fact the only items left in the ark when the temple was built (1 Kgs. 8:9; 2 Chr. 5:10), which confirms that the author thinks historically about what was in the most holy place in the tabernacle and does not reflect on what was in the most holy place of the temple of his day. The tablets, which had the Ten Commandments inscribed on them, represented the main covenant stipulations required for Israel (Ex. 31:18; 34:28; Dt. 4:13; 5:22; 10:4).

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Bruce: It was called ‘the ark of the covenant’ or ‘the ark of the testimony’ (Ex. 25:22, etc.) because the covenant-terms, engraved on two stone tablets, were placed inside it (Ex. 25:16, 21). When, at a later time, it was placed in the holy of holies in Solomon’s temple, ‘there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb’ (1 Kgs. 8:9).

Hughes: Jesus fleshed out the contents of the ark. He perfectly fulfilled the stone tablets of the Law (Dt. 10:5; Mt. 5:17). Aaron’s staff that budded when it confirmed him as high priest (Num. 17:1-11) is fully flowered in Christ’s priesthood. And the manna again speaks of Him who is the ultimate Bread of Life (cp. Ex. 16:33-34; Jn. 6:35ff.).

(3) The Mercy Seat (9:5a)

⁵*Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.*

Schreiner: The glorious cherubim were above the mercy seat (*ἰλαστήριον, hilastērion*), guarding the presence of God (Ex. 25:18-20; cp. 37:7-9; 1 Kgs. 6:23-28; 2 Chr. 3:10-13), a task which belonged to the cherubim in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). The ark is where the Lord had fellowship with His people (Ex. 25:22; cp. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2).

Bruce: The lid of the ark was a golden slab called the ‘mercy seat’ or place of atonement, viewed by our author as the earthly counterpart of the ‘throne of grace’ to which he has already exhorted his readers to draw near for help in the hour of need (4:16). It was given this name because of the part it played in the sacrificial ritual of the Day of Atonement; the blood both of the bullock which was offered to make atonement for the high priest and his family, and of the goat which was killed as a sin offering for the whole nation, was sprinkled on the mercy seat and in front of it, while the God of Israel undertook to ‘appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat’ (Lev. 16:2; cp. vv. 14ff.). The ‘cherubim of glory’ were two gold figures of composite creatures which overshadowed the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18-22; 37:7-9) and served to support the invisible presence of Israel’s God, who accordingly is repeatedly described as the one ‘who is enthroned on the cherubim’ (1 Sam. 4:4; etc.). It was because of this function that they were called the ‘cherubim of glory’; the glory is the *shekinah*, the radiant presence of God dwelling in the midst of His people.

Hughes: The cover of the ark of the covenant is even more redolent with Christ. It was at the mercy seat, the gold plate covering the ark upon which the blood of the atonement was sprinkled, that the sins of Israel were propitiated. Romans 3:25 tells us Christ was ‘displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood.’ Likewise, 1 John 2:2 proclaims, ‘and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.’ The mercy seat symbolized Christ’s work.

MacArthur: On the lid of the ark was the mercy seat, on which were the cherubim of glory, angelic figures made of solid gold. It was between the wings of those angels, on the mercy seat, that God met men (Ex. 25:22). If God and man were to meet it could only have been there. Unfortunately, under the Old Testament economy only one person could ever enter the Holy of Holies, and then only on an extremely limited basis. For all practical purposes, men had no access to God at all. The regular priests could not get nearer than the outer sanctuary, and the ordinary person no closer than the outer court.

MacArthur: The central, in fact the only, thing in the Holy of Holies was the ark, which represents Jesus Christ, the true mercy seat. When we meet Jesus Christ as Savior, we are ushered into the presence of God, into the true Holy of Holies. God no longer communes with men between the wings of cherubim on a gold mercy seat. He communes with men in His Son,

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by whom the veil was torn in two. Jesus Christ is the mercy seat. Only on the basis of the blood of a goat would God have fellowship with Israel, and only on the basis of the blood of Christ will God have fellowship with men. John, in using the term ‘propitiation’ in 1 John 2:2, relates Jesus to the mercy seat, since that very word *hilastērion* is used for the mercy seat in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 25:17.

4. The Tabernacle’s Significance (9:5b)

Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Schreiner: All these articles of furniture could be explored in some detail, but it is not the author’s purpose to do so.

Bruce: When he says that he cannot ‘deal with these things one by one,’ he leaves us with the impression that he could have enlarged at some length on their symbolism had he chosen to do so. What he does proceed to enlarge upon is the use which was made of the ancient sanctuary on the annual Day of Atonement.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews tells us that it was not the details of these items that concerned him. Still, we can make some general observations.

C. The Tabernacle Service (Hebrews 9:6-10)

Hughes: The old system was inadequate for two encompassing reasons—its limited access and its limited efficacy.

1. The Priestly Service (9:6-7)

a) *In the Holy Place (9:6)*

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties...

Schreiner: After explaining the arrangement of the furniture in the holy and most holy place, the ministry of the priests in the tabernacle is related. The priests regularly ministered in ‘the outer room.’ They were to perform their various duties in the holy place, including placing the bread of the presence on the table (Ex. 25:30), which according to 1 Chr. 9:32 was changed every Sabbath (Lev. 24:8; cp. 2 Chr. 4:19; 13:11). Instructions were given for baking, how the bread was to be arranged, and for putting frankincense on the table as well (Lev. 24:5-7). In the same way they had to tend the lampstand to shed light in the holy place (Lev. 24:4; Num. 8:2-3; 2 Chr. 13:11). Incense was to be offered daily (Ex. 30:8), and the lamps were to be attended daily as well (Ex. 27:20; Lev. 24:2). Twice a day sacrifices were to be offered (Ex. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3-8). What is particularly emphasized is that they engaged in this service ‘repeatedly’ (*διά παντός, dia pantos*). Their work was never done and had to be reduplicated each day,

Bruce: In the tabernacle and in the temples which replaced it, the outer compartment, the holy place, was in continual use. Day by day, morning and evening, the appointed priests entered it to trim the lamps on the lampstand (Ex. 27:20ff.) and at the same time to burn incense on the incense-altar (Ex. 30:7ff.). Week by week the appointed priests entered the holy place to put fresh loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:8ff.). These were the principal services which were discharged in ‘the first tent,’ and any member of the priesthood could discharge them.

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Phillips: On a regular basis, the writer says in verse 6, the priests entered the outer room to serve God. Every day the priests came into the outer room to serve God, worship Him, have an indirect sort of fellowship with Him before the candlelights and incense altar. But direct access to God Himself was denied. The key item in this whole description is the second curtain, for it stood between the priests and God's presence. The whole time that they were in the holy place they were made aware of two things: the holy God's actual presence just on the other side of the curtain, and the barrier that kept them from seeing or entering into the holiest place.

Phillips: The veil was the symbol of separation between a holy God and sinful man: they cannot dwell together. The tabernacle thus expressed the union of two apparently conflicting truths. God called man to come and worship and serve Him, and yet he might not come too near: the veil kept him at a distance. Love calls the sinner near; righteousness keeps him back. The Holy One bids Israel build Him a house in which He dwells; but forbids them entering His presence there.

Hughes: Just how restricted the access was is seen in the experience of the official, hereditary priesthood as verse 6 describes it. If they were fortunate, they got into the outer room once in their priestly lives—for a week. The Israelite layperson's access was even less—the front of the courtyard and that's all! If one was fortunate enough to attain to high priest, one could have access for a few blessed (and tense!) minutes at best. On the Day of Atonement, when the high priest took his censer in to first burn incense in God's presence, it was prescribed that he must not stay too long 'lest he put Israel in terror.'

MacArthur: In its sanctuary the Old Covenant had divine services. Every day the priests had to trim the wicks and add oil in the lampstand and put incense on the altar of incense. Every Sabbath they had to change the twelve loaves of bread. They were 'continually' in and out of the Holy Place, ministering in behalf of the people. Theirs was a never-ceasing work. In this they picture Jesus Christ, who does not cease enlightening and feeding and interceding on our behalf. This work of His is perpetual, continual, unceasing.

b) *In the Most Holy Place (9:7)*

...⁷but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

Schreiner: Every day the priests minister in the holy place, but the most holy place is an entirely different matter. Only the high priest can enter the inner sanctuary, and he is not allowed to enter whenever he wishes (Lev. 16:2). The most holy place is restricted to one day a year, the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:34; 23:27; Num. 29:7), which Leviticus 16 describes in detail. Nor does the high priest enter the room boldly. The sprinkling of blood is necessary for forgiveness to be secured (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:14-15, 18-19, 27). He offers a bull for a sin offering for himself (Lev. 16:3) and two male goats for a sin offering for the people (Lev. 16:5). Thereby atonement was secured both for Aaron (Lev. 16:6, 10) and for the people (Lev. 16:9, 15, 21-22). The word used for 'offer' (*προσφέρει*, *prospherei*) here, is never used for what the priests offered, and thus the term anticipates and typifies Christ's offering of Himself on the cross (9:14, 25, 29; 10:12).

Bruce: But none but the high priest was permitted to enter 'the second tent,' the holy of holies; and even he was permitted to enter it only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and the conditions of his entering it were strictly proscribed. These conditions are set out most fully in Lev. 16. Aaron (and that means each successive high priest of Israel) might enter the holy of

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holies only on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) in each year (around the time of the autumnal equinox). Attired not in his violet robe and its accessories, but in vestments of white linen which were reserved for special sacrificial occasions, he entered the holy of holies twice. On the first occasion he carried the blood of the bullock which had been sacrificed as a sin offering for himself and his household, and sprinkled it on the front of the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, which all the time was shrouded in the cloud arising from the incense which burned on the golden altar. Then, when a goat had been slaughtered as a sin offering for the people at large, he brought its blood too into the holy of holies and sprinkled it on and before the mercy-seat. Having thus accomplished this part of the atoning ritual, he came out of the sanctuary and confessed the national sins over the head of the second goat, assigned by lot to ‘Azazel,’ which was then driven from the haunts of men into a ‘solitary land.’ In our author’s typological application of the ritual of the Day of Atonement, however, no mention is made of this second goat; he is concerned only with that part of the ritual which was associated with the sanctuary. And in this connection he emphasizes three points: 1) except on this annual occasion, the way into the throne room of God was barred for all Israelites, even for the high priest himself; 2) when the high priest did receive permission to enter, his entry was safeguarded by sacrificial blood; and 3) this sacrificial blood was not finally efficacious, for fresh blood had to be shed and a fresh entry made into the holy of holies year by year.

Phillips: This frustrating tension was hardly alleviated by the one day of the year, the day of atonement, when the high priest actually did go into God’s presence. Verse 7 tells us that only he entered, only on that one day, and only with blood from the sacrifice to cover his sins and those of the people. Far from minimizing the separation between the holy God and His unholy people, that one day emphasized it all the more. The day of atonement proclaimed that the way was in fact barred on any regular basis.

Hughes: But as inadequate as the access to God under the old system was, it was exceeded by its limited efficacy. The blood sacrifice that the high priest offered only covered sins of *ignorance*. There was no provision in the old covenant’s sacrificial system for forgiveness of premeditated sins! Premeditated, willful sins were called sins of the ‘high hand,’ and for such there was no remedy (cp. Num. 15:30-31). The premeditated sinner was in a huge dilemma! Consider, for example, King David after his premeditated sin with Bathsheba and the cold-blooded murder of Uriah. The system simply did not provide a remedy. This is what Psalm 51 is all about. David knew he was a sinner and confessed it (Ps. 51:3-5). And he knew there was no sacrifice he could bring (Ps. 51:16). What could he do? Only one thing—come to God with a contrite heart and throw himself on God’s mercy: ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise’ (Ps. 51:17). This is how David was forgiven and was saved. Thus we see that the spiritually informed in the Old Testament came to understand that their only hope was a repentant heart and God’s grace. Ultimately salvation rested on the blood of Christ.

MacArthur: Nothing, however, pictures Christ so perfectly as the work of the high priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), very briefly described in verse 7.

2. The Spiritual Significance (9:8-10)

a) *Limited Access (9:8-9a)*

(1) Inspired Teaching (9:8a)

⁸*By this the Holy Spirit indicates that...*

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Schreiner: The writer clues the readers into the significance of the Day of Atonement ritual. The Holy Spirit is revealing the difference between the old covenant and the new. When reading about the Levitical priesthood and the administration of its sacrifices, the rituals should be read with spiritual perception.

Phillips: Verse 8 says, ‘The Holy Spirit indicates’ this. On a first reading we might think that this simply refers to the Spirit’s role in inspiring Scripture. The writer of Hebrews speaks this way on two other occasions (3:7; 10:15). However, that is not what is being said in this case. For one thing, there is no citation from the Old Testament found here. For another, the verb is not past tense but present tense. We see, therefore, a deliberate contrast. On the one hand, the old tabernacle *was showing* that the way was barred, because the curtain kept the priests from the holy of holies. Now the Holy Spirit *is showing* the opposite, that the way to God is finally opened. The linking of the Holy Spirit and the holy of holies in this passage is also deliberate. The character of God’s Spirit is appropriate to His inner sanctum: the Spirit is ‘Holy.’

MacArthur: In the illustration of the old sanctuary and its services, the Holy Spirit is teaching at least three things. First, the worship of God was limited in the Old Covenant. There was no access to God. The people, and even the high priest, could come only so close. Second, the Spirit wants to teach the imperfect cleansing accomplished through the old sacrifices. The Israelites never really knew that they were forgiven. There was no freedom of conscience, no assurance of cleansing. Third, the Spirit is teaching that the Old Covenant was temporary. The sacrifices—the daily and the yearly—all had to be repeated. The Old Covenant was limited, imperfect, and temporary. The provision of the New Covenant had to sweep back over all the believers of the past to provide access, cleansing, and permanent salvation.

(2) Not Yet Opened (9:8b)

...the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing...

Phillips: The day of atonement also pointed forward to a day when the way would be fully opened. The whole point of the tabernacle system of worship was on the one hand to show God’s intent to have fellowship with His people, while on the other hand showing that the way for this was not yet open. The key phrase is ‘not yet.’ Therein is summed up the entire Old Testament religion. No, the way was not open to God; it was barred. But it was not simply not open, but not yet open—not yet, that is, until the time of Christ.

Schreiner: In this instance the limitation of access to the most holy place only once a year on the Day of Atonement indicates that access to God’s presence was not yet freely available. As long as the first tabernacle continued, the people could only meet with God once a year and only through the mediation of the high priest. The continuation of the tabernacle does not refer to its remaining in existence but to its continued validity. Now that Christ has come and sacrificed Himself, its viability has ended.

Bruce: What lesson does the Holy Spirit teach in the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement? This, that throughout the age of the old covenant there was no direct access to God. Whereas hitherto our author has used ‘the first tent’ of the outer compartment of the sanctuary, here he uses it apparently to mean the sanctuary of ‘the first covenant,’ comprising the holy place and the holy of holies together. And by ‘the first tabernacle’ here we are to understand not merely the Mosaic tabernacle, but the other structures which replaced it from time to time, down to and including Herod’s temple. What he means is that unimpeded access to the presence of God was not granted until Christ came to accomplish His sacrificial ministry.

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MacArthur: While the Tabernacle still stood, there was no way into God's presence. There was no access. The people could not even get into the holy place, much less into the Holy of Holies. The whole thing was meant to prove that without a Redeemer, without a Messiah, without a Savior, there is no access to God. The Holy Spirit was teaching the impossibility of access to God without a perfect priest, a perfect sacrifice, and a perfect covenant. By allowing the people to go no further than the outer court, He was illustrating that through Judaism there was no access to Him, only symbol of access.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews conceives of these two rooms as a statement regarding worship and life in the two covenants. Life in the old covenant was life in the holy place. The priests were called to serve God. They had an indirect, mediated relationship with God, but they did not know Him directly. They could not know Him this way because their sin, though covered temporarily, was not yet removed. Year after year, the high priest took the sacrificial blood before God, so the people were not altogether rejected. But they could not and did not dwell in His direct presence.

Phillips: In great contrast to this is life in the new covenant, symbolized by the Most Holy Place. By His own blood, the blood of the new covenant, Jesus Christ did what had not yet been done in the Old Testament. In Him the way into the Most Holy Place is opened, and through faith in Him we actually enter into direct fellowship with God. The New Testament tells us that on the day Jesus died, the curtain that barred the way was actually torn in two, 'from top to bottom' (Mt. 27:51). How astonished must the priests have been! By divine action the inner sanctum was now wide open, showing that through faith in Christ believers might have direct fellowship with God. We are no longer consigned to outward forms without inward reality. In Christ Jesus, we now have direct access to the Father. We may come before Him without fear, for our guilt is removed, our debt paid in full.

Phillips: Immediately upon the death of Christ, the veil of the temple was rent in half, revealing that the way to God was open. But what did the priests do? Did they walk boldly through the way into God's presence that now was opened? Did they look upon Jesus as the true Lamb of God, who is now able to fulfill their fondest desire of drawing near to the Lord? Far from it! In the greatest of tragedies, they sewed up the veil again. With their own hands, they reestablished the barrier God Himself had removed. What greater symbol could there be of the old covenant and its inability to bring sinners to God!

(3) Symbolic for the Present Age (9:9a)

...⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age).

Schreiner: Limited access to God via the sacrificial cultus functions as a 'symbol' (*παραβολή, parabolē*) or 'illustration.' As long as the earthly sanctuary remained valid, there was no regular access to God in either the earthly or the heavenly sanctuary. Such sacrifices were ordained by God for a particular period of salvation history, but a new era has arrived ('the present time') where such sacrifices give way to a greater and perfect sacrifice. Hence, the present time designates the era of the new covenant.

MacArthur: 'Symbol' (*parabolē*) refers to the setting side-by-side for the purpose of comparison. The old is being set beside the new and the two are compared. From this Greek word we get *parable*. The old was only a parable, an object lesson for Israel.

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Bruce: This state of affairs—the prohibition of general entry into the holy of holies—is parenthetically described as a parable or figure ‘for the time present.’ The veil, together with its significance, constituted a parable, emphasizing the contrast between the free access to God now guaranteed through Christ and the strictly limited access permitted by the structure and ceremonial of the earthly sanctuary.

Phillips: What took place after Jesus ascended into heaven? The answer is Pentecost. Jesus went into heaven as our high priest, offered His blood once for all, and sent His Holy Spirit into the world, fulfilling the ancient promise (cp. Gal. 3:13-14). In the old covenant, God wrote His law on tablets of stone; in the new covenant, He is writing it by His Holy Spirit upon our very hearts. The point here is that the Holy Spirit’s work proves we have access to God in the new covenant. Jesus Christ has torn away the veil and won us access to God by His blood. Now He sends His Spirit to enlighten our eyes and renew our hearts so that we might have fellowship with God. This means that we have unrestricted access to God the Father through faith in Christ. Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, our sins do not keep us from the holy God. It is true that sins still affect us. They will, for instance keep us from enjoying our fellowship with God. But our access to God is secured forever through Jesus Christ because of His finished and sufficient work. The Spirit’s work within us reminds us that we are now in fellowship with God and imparts to us the knowledge of His grace.

Phillips: It is at this point that a significant error is made by some Christians, who see in the tabernacle two stages of the Christian life. There are select Christians, according to this teaching, who lead the higher life. These are also known as ‘spiritual Christians,’ and they dwell in the holy of holies. There are also those who lead a lower life, called ‘carnal Christians’; they know only the outer room dimly lit and distant from God. The contrast in our passage is not between two types of Christians, higher and lower, but between the old covenant and the new covenant. While the first tabernacle and the old covenant religious system were still standing—that is, before they were superseded by Christ’s entry into the new and heavenly tabernacle—the way to God was not yet disclosed. Now in Christ that way has been made known. The whole point of Hebrews is that a failure to move from the old covenant to the new covenant does not risk a lower state of salvation, but rather the loss of salvation altogether: ‘How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?’ (2:3).

Phillips: What higher-life teachers describe as the carnal Christian is in fact no Christian at all. To live outside the sphere of the Spirit of God, to bear no evidence of the Spirit’s sanctifying presence and work, to display no reliance on or pleasure in your relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not to be a weak saved person but an unsaved person altogether. If you have not actually rested upon Jesus for your salvation, have not known His Spirit’s presence changing your heart and molding your affections, enlightening you with the gospel and enflaming you with commitment to Christ—then you are not saved.

Phillips: On the other hand, anyone who has come into God’s presence through faith in Christ, and has known the Spirit’s work within, but yet finds himself slow and weak and dull in his struggle with sin, is not a lower-level Christian but a normal Christian. There is no such thing as a Christian who is not struggling with some issue of sin (see 1 Jn. 1:8), and who is not daily dependent of God’s grace.

Phillips: Therefore, we see that the higher-life teachers err on both sides of the equation. There are no ‘carnal’ Christians who have yet to pass through the veil into a personal relationship with God; such persons are not Christians at all. Likewise, there are no ‘spiritual’ Christians for

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whom all struggle is gone in this life, who have entered into a stage of perfect sanctification. Indeed, the expectation of the latter stage is injurious to the Christian's spiritual life, for the struggle with sin and weakness is not a sign that we have not yet arrived as Christians. Rather it is merely the reality of life this side of heaven.

b) *Insufficient Cleansing (9:9b)*

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper...

Schreiner: The gifts and sacrifices offered under the Sinai covenant (Lev. 1-7; 16) could not 'perfect the worshiper's conscience.' The perfection (*τελειῶσαι, teleiōsai*) of the conscience involves the full forgiveness of sins. In 7:19 the law's inability to perfect (*ἐτελείωσεν, eteleiōsen*) means it can't bring people near to God. In 10:1 the author uses the same verb that we find in this verse: the same sacrifices can't 'make perfect (*τελειῶσαι, teleiōsai*) those who draw near.' Hence, those who rely on the law have a continual 'consciousness' (*συνείδησιν, syneidēsin*) of sins (10:2) and are reminded of sins daily (10:3). The parallel with 9:9 is remarkable, for here the author speaks of perfect the conscience (*συνείδησιν, syneidēsin*). We find a similar idea in 9:14 where Christ's blood 'cleanse[s] our consciences.' The flaw with the OT cultus, then is that it did not truly cleans the conscience of sin.

Bruce: In the earthly sanctuary sacrifices were indeed offered, but their efficacy was sadly restricted; they could not bring 'perfection' to the worshiper because they did not affect his conscience. Now we see what our author wishes to teach his readers. The really effective barrier to a man or woman's free access to God is an inward and not material one; it exists in the conscience. It is only when the conscience is purified that one is set free to approach God without reservation and offer Him acceptable service and worship. And the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats is useless in this regard. (This was appreciated by men and women of spiritual insight throughout Israel's history. That is plain enough from Ps. 51:16ff.). Animal sacrifice and other material ordinances which accompanied it could effect at best a ceremonial and symbolical removal of pollution.

Phillips: As sinners we have an inner consciousness of guilt that keeps us from drawing near to God. This was a great problem in the old covenant. The curtain in the tabernacle was a barrier erected by God. But there is another barrier within. Knowing our guilt, we naturally erect our own barrier against God—we dread drawing near to His presence, seeing Him in His holiness, or being seen by Him in our sin. The sacrifices of the Old Testament 'cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.' Without a new heart, without a new conscience that has been cleansed, man cannot come near to God.

Hughes: The spiritual limitations of the old system went even deeper, because since only sins of ignorance were forgiven (even on the Day of Atonement), no one could have a completely clean conscience. "Gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.' A clear conscience in the *absolute* sense of the word was beyond their reach. The old system was deficient. It was external and superficial. So the limitations of the old covenant were profound—*limited access* and *limited efficacy*. Average Joes were several ecclesiastical layers removed from access to God's presence—and their consciences never rested easy.

MacArthur: Even with all the ceremonies and rituals, perfect cleansing from sin could not be accomplished. The specific imperfection mentioned in this passage is that of 'conscience.' The Old Covenant was imperfect in every way, but the writer selected only certain elements to make

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his point. The old sacrifices were never meant to cleanse from sin, but only to symbolize such cleansing. The conscience of the person sacrificing was never freed from the *feeling* of guilt because the guilt itself was never removed. The cleansing was entirely external. Consequently, he could never have a clear conscience, a deep, abiding sense of forgiveness.

c) *Temporary Duration (9:10)*

(1) External Regulations (9:10a)

...¹⁰*but deal only with food and drink and various washings...*

Schreiner: Old Testament regulations were fundamentally external. They dealt with foods (cp. 11:1-44; Dt. 14:3-21), drinks (cp. Num. 6:3), and regulations for cleansing and different kinds of washing and cleansing (e.g., Ex. 29:4; 30:19-21; 40:12; Lev. 11:25; 13:6; 14:8-9; 15:5-8; 16:26; 17:16; Num. 19:7-8; Dt. 23:11). Such ‘regulations’ are ‘physical’ (σαρκός) or ‘external.’ In other words, they point to a greater washing and cleansing, to truly being washed and cleansed from sin. In the OT itself ‘washing’ and ‘cleansing’ become a metaphor for true forgiveness of sins (e.g., Ps. 19:12; 51:2, 7; Ez. 36:25, 33; 37:33; Zech. 13:1).

Bruce: The reference to ‘food and drink’ probably has to do with the food-laws of Lev. 11. Much more is said there about solid food than about drink; as far as drink goes, there is the direction that water may not be drunk from a vessel into which a dead animal has fallen (Lev. 11:34)—a sound hygienic direction, as no doubt were many of the food-laws, but having little enough to do with heart-religion. There were also the libations which accompanied several of the sacrificial offerings (cp. Num. 6:15, 17; 28:7ff.). But for our author, as for Paul, these things were but ‘a shadow of the things to come’ (Col. 2:17). As regards the ‘various ablutions,’ not only had the high priest to ‘bathe his body in water’ after performing the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:24), but similar purifications were prescribed for a great variety of actual or ceremonial defilements. Again, these purifications undoubtedly had great hygienic value, but when they were given religious value there was always the danger that those who practiced them might be tempted to think of religious duty exclusively, or at least excessively, in terms of externalities.

MacArthur: The cleansing, like the covenant as a whole, not only was limited and imperfect but temporary. This system was never intended to last forever.

(2) Time of Reformation (9:10b)

...*regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

Schreiner: Such external regulations had their place for a certain period in salvation history. The author doesn’t denigrate the regulations, as if they were not from God. He argues temporally and eschatologically. They were appropriate during the old covenant, but they were intended to cease when a day of fulfillment arrived. Since the ‘time of restoration’ (καιροῦ διορθώσεως, *kairou diorthōseōs*) or better ‘the time of the new order’ has arrived, the old regulations are dismissed, for that to which they pointed has come.

Bruce: By the rendering ‘reformation’ we might understand ‘reformation’ in the sense of ‘reconstruction’; the coming of Christ involved a complete reshaping of the structure of Israel’s religion. The old covenant was not to give way to the new, the shadow to the substance, the outward and earthly copy to the inward and heavenly reality.

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MacArthur: ‘Reformation’ is from *diorthōsis* (used only here), which means ‘to make straight,’ that is, to correct, to straighten out, to make right, to reform. Only the New Covenant in Christ sets things right, and the symbols, the old forms, were meant to serve only until this time, the ‘time of reformation.’ The Old Covenant was never capable of setting things right between men and God. Its purpose was only to symbolize the setting of things right until the true, effective sacrifice was made—the sacrifice that ‘re-formed’ man from the inside, not merely the outside.

Phillips: The Old Testament sacrifices were like all the other external rites, rules concerning food and drink and other outward ceremonies and regulations. This is the point of verse 10, which speaks of ‘regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.’ Until the time of the new order—the time foreseen by Jeremiah in his declaration of the new covenant (see Heb. 8)—this was all an outward show of an inward reality that had not yet come. The Israelites could sacrifice animals day after day—and they did—without having their consciences truly cleaned, without having peace about drawing near to God in holiness.

Phillips: What is it that is keeping you from God? Is it your sense of guilt, the feeling that you are dirty, that makes you uneasy in the presence of God? Then Jesus Christ is God’s way to you and your way to God. The time of the new order has now come in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Once you were a sinner barred from God’s presence and unwilling to come to Him. But through faith in Jesus Christ, what Paul writes will be true: ‘You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:11). And through faith in Christ you are now free to worship and live as a child of God forever.

D. The Tabernacle Summary

Schreiner: The author considers the tabernacle: its furniture and compartments. What is striking is that the tabernacle does not provide full and free access to God. Only once a year does the high priest actually enter God’s presence. Further, the regulations of the old covenant have to do with external matters like food, drink, and washings. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through these matters. The new covenant rather than the old brings us into God’s presence. Our consciences aren’t cleansed and perfected through the old covenant rituals, for those rituals point to a sacrifice that is better and truly brings us into God’s presence.

For next time: Read Hebrews 9:11-22.