

HEBREWS

STUDY 5

9:1-10:18



God Provides the Better Covenant and the Better Promises

Repetition and Expansion

The Hebrews author in this section repeats some of the concepts of chapters 7 & 8 and moves on to expand his understanding of the Old Testament covenant.

For example: a contrast is drawn between worship under Judaism and what is foreseen in the new order with Jesus Christ. There is a description of Old Testament sacrifice and arrangement of the tent of meeting based loosely on Exodus 25-31, and parts of Leviticus and Numbers.

Tent of Meeting & Holy of Holies - definitions

Holy of Holies – inner sanctum of the tent of meeting (and later the Temple in Jerusalem) where the ark of the covenant was kept. Only the high priest could enter there once per year for the offering of atonement.

Lampstand – 7 branched candelabra made of pure gold (Menorah) in areas outside Holy of Holies.

Bread of Presence – 12 loaves placed on table outside Holy of Holies for daily offering to the Lord. Priests were able to eat them as part of their holy portion.

Golden Altar of Incense – The place where high priest burned perfumes made of aromatic ingredients to produce a pleasant odour to the Lord and avoid God's wrath (Leviticus 16:12-13; Numbers 16:46-48).

Aaron's Rod – According to Numbers 17, Moses put the staff of Aaron and other tribal leaders in the tent of meeting to demonstrate their authority. When Aaron's sprouted leaves, it was God's way of showing that ultimate priestly power would come from his line.

Tablets – Two stones on which the Ten Commandments were written.

Mercy Seat – The gold cover on top of the ark where the ten Commandments were kept in the Holy of Holies. It was believed that it was there that God's presence could be found.

Cherubim of Glory – messengers or angels from God (Exodus 25:18-22; 26:1; 37:7-9). On the ark of the covenant, images of two of them were made of hammered gold and placed at each end of the mercy seat, presumably functioning as sacred warnings.

Priestly Duties and Jesus' Continuing Ministry as High Priest

Hebrews 9:6-14 contrasts the functions of the priest of the Tent of Meeting with the activities of Jesus as the high priest in the new age to come.

The four final sections of chapter 9 can be summarised thus:

9:9-10: Activities of the priests are symbols of the present time and indicate the imperfection of the old worship.

9:14: Christ offered himself to purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God.

9:22: Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin.

9:28: Christ, having been offered once, will appear a second time.

Verses 6-10 describe the ritual activities of the priests in the outer area of the Tent of Meeting, including lighting the lamps, offering of the bread, and the preparation of the incense.

The High priest, in contrast, is the one who only goes into the inner area (second tent) on the Day of Atonement for *the blood that he offers for himself*. 9:7 may refer to those 'unintentional sins' of the people.

The meaning of the phrase '*as long as the first tent is still standing*' is uncertain. It may mean that no-one goes into the Holy of Holies while rituals are performed in the outer court; but when the high priest enters the second tent, the way is opened. Whatever the meaning, the truth is that Jesus is to be seen as the true high priest who *really* brings us into the presence of God. What went on in the old tent is now old and obsolete anyway.

Priestly regulations are outlined in Lev. 1-15. Many of these rules existed in Jesus' day. The author of Hebrews objects to these rules, not because Jesus rejected them, but because they are ineffectual in and of themselves and are perfected only through the unblemished sacrifice of Jesus.

New Covenant, New Metaphor (9:15-22)

The writer uses the example of a will (testament) not being effective until after the one who made it dies. An Old Testament will is also certified by death – the sacrifice of animals. As this is the only way a will can be fulfilled, then the blood (sacrifice) of Jesus is so much more valid.

When Hebrews was written, it would be impossible to live in any major city without being exposed to temples everywhere. It would be virtually impossible to avoid the smell of burning animal flesh wafting through the streets, along with the sounds of dying animals and prayers and hymns being raised to the gods.

The Temple as Symbol (9:23-28)

The writer returns to the image of the Tent of Meeting, or the Jerusalem Temple, as an ideal of the difference between the two covenants. The contrast between earthly and heavenly sanctuary fits here – particularly in contemporary Jewish thought. There is a spirit of longing within Judaism for the presence of God to be more powerful than that mediated by the cult of animal sacrifice. The author of Hebrews would say that this has now happened in the death and exaltation of Jesus.

The expression "*again and again*" is a key one.

If forgiveness of sin, and redemption from God's punishment, are really brought about by the shedding of blood, then it had to be practiced daily by the priests, and by the high priest on the Day of Atonement to offer the sacrifices, year after year (10:1,3). In the case of Jesus' death, the sacrifice doesn't have to be offered over and over – it is once and for all, bearing the sins of many.

Reprise (10:1-18)

The author returns to the idea that Jesus himself and the Holy Spirit are both speaking through Old Testament texts – in this case Ps.40:6-8; Jer.36, as well as the texts used earlier in Hebrews. (Ps. 110; Jer. 31:31-34) These emphasise that there is no longer a need for the offering of sin, any time, any place, ever again.

INSIDE THE TEMPLE

(Cutaway view)

- 1. Holy of Holies
- 2. Ark
- 3. Veil
- 4. Altar of Incense
- 5. Lampstand (Menorah)
- 6. Holy Place
- 7. Table of Shewbread
- 8. Outer Veil

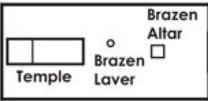
Pillar of Smoke

The Temple

Pillar



Size comparison (approximate):



TEMPLE COVERINGS AND CURTAINS

- 9. Outer covering of badger skins
- 10. Covering of Ram's skin dyed red
- 11. Curtain of goat's hair
- 12. Curtain of fine linen

Curtain enclosure

Entrance Curtain

The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The Tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

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