

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

HEBREWS 8:1-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

- Warren Wiersbe, *Jesus Christ is God's superior Priest; but is there anything that can minimize this superiority? Nothing! For He ministers on the basis of a better covenant (Heb. 8), in a better sanctuary (Heb. 9), and because of a better sacrifice (Heb. 10).*
- Ray Stedman, *Moses used the blood of an animal; Jesus used wine as a symbol of his own blood. Moses spoke of the covenant of the law; Jesus alluded to the new covenant of grace. Moses spoke of God's words which provided for the partial covering of sins so God could remain with his people; Jesus promised the actual remission of sins so God could live within his people forever. It is that excellent new covenant which chapters 8–10 of Hebrews now expounds.*

INTRODUCTION

- A. An outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
 1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the work of Christ (4:14-10:18)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
 - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
 - d. The superior priestly order of Christ (7:1-28)
 - e. The superiority of the New Covenant (8:1-10:18)
 - 1) A superior High Priest (8:1-13)
 - 2) The earthly sanctuary (9:1-10)
 - 3) A superior sanctuary and sacrifice (9:11-10:18)
- B. Review of Hebrews 8
 1. Donald Hagner, *The new, the better, has come, but it was nothing other than this to which the old pointed and for which the old prepared the way.*
 2. Warren Wiersbe, *Yes, our Lord is ministering on the basis of a better covenant, a New Covenant that makes us partakers of the new nature and the wonderful new life that only Christ can give.*
- C. Introductory comments on Hebrews 9
 1. Ray Stedman, *In chapter 9, we will return to the tabernacle and its ritual that we may more clearly grasp the realities of the new covenant and the freedom it gives us to live in a pressure-filled, baffling and bewildered world by the power that flows from our high priest today.*
 2. Thomas Constable, *The writer introduced two subjects in the first verse: regulations of divine worship, and the earthly sanctuary. He then proceeded to expound them in reverse order, as he often did in this homily (vv. 2–5 and 6–10).*
 3. Donald Hagner, *In this section the author draws out parallels and contrasts between the old levitical ritual and the priestly work of Christ in considerable detail.*
 4. Warren Wiersbe, *Hebrews 9 presents a detailed contrast between the Old Covenant sanctuary (the tabernacle) and the New Covenant heavenly sanctuary where Jesus Christ now ministers. This contrast makes it clear that the New Covenant sanctuary is superior.*

HEBREWS 9:1-10, THE EARTHLY SANCTUARY

- A. A description of the earthly sanctuary (1-5), note illustration on page 5.
1. The writer notes that Levitical priests had regulations for worship and place of worship (1), *Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.*
 - a. *regulations for worship*
 - 1) The rituals involved in the services will be addressed in verses 6-10.
 - 2) The writer's intent is to show the superiority of the New Covenant based on a superior High Priest and heavenly tabernacle.
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *Hebrews reminds readers that the regulations and practices in the tabernacle were ordained of God. If there was any inferiority in the tabernacle service, it was not because God had not established the ritual. While the Old Covenant was in force, the ministry of the priests was ordained of God and perfectly proper.*
 - b. *an earthly place of holiness*
 - 1) This is the writer's way of describing the *sanctuary* or *tabernacle*.
 - 2) It is the place where God's presence dwelt, Exodus 25:8-9, *And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *In his comments on the place of worship and its divisions, the writer draws upon the tabernacle of the Israelites in the wilderness rather than upon the temple in any of its forms. . . The matter of the sanctuary is to be considered in relation to the old and new covenants, and the contrast between the two. It is only natural, therefore, that the tabernacle be used rather than the temple because of the association of the desert sanctuary with the establishment of the old covenant at Sinai.*
 - c. *Comments*
 - 1) Raymond Brown, *Although the old covenant is a vanishing shadow, our writer does not dismiss it hastily, casually or unappreciatively. He recognizes something of its former glory, even when he is explaining its partial worth.*
 - 2) B. F. Westcott, *He seems indeed to linger over the sacred treasures of the past ... there was, he says, something majestic and attractive in the Mosaic ordinances of worship.*
 - 3) William Barclay, *If all the loveliness of the tabernacle was only a shadow of reality, how surpassingly lovely the reality must be. He does not describe the tabernacle in detail; he only alludes to some of its treasures. This was all he needed to do because his readers knew its glories and had them fixed in their memories.*
 2. The *tent* or *sanctuary* (2-5)
 - a. *Construction*
 - 1) It was flat-roofed, fifteen feet high and forty-five feet long.
 - 2) It consisted of an outer room, *the Holy Place* and an inner room, *the Most Holy Place*.
 - 3) R. Kent Hughes, *It was covered with three layers. The first consisted of gorgeous woven tapestries of blue, purple and scarlet yarns and linen, which was then overlaid with two layers of animal skins. Inside, the Tabernacle was divided into two rooms by an ornate veil woven of the same colors along with gold and embroidered with cherubim. The veil was supported by four golden columns set on silver bases.*
 - b. *The layout of the sanctuary*
 - 1) The Holy Place (2), *For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.*
 - a) *Location*
 - 1] It was in the front (first) section of the tent which also housed the Holy of Holies.
 - 2] Exodus 26:36, *You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework.*

- b) Contents of the Holy Place
- 1] *the lampstand*
 - a] Exodus 25:31-34, “*You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers,*
 - b] It stood on the south side which was to the left as one approached the veil.
 - c] It was seven-branched menorah with an oil-lamp on each branch and made of solid gold.
 - d] It pictures the Son of God who came to earth to become the light of the world (John 8:12).
 - 2] *the table and the bread of the Presence*
 - a] Numbers 4:7, *And over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall spread a cloth of blue and put on it the plates, the dishes for incense, the bowls, and the flagons for the drink offering; the regular showbread also shall be on it.*
 - b] It stood on the north side which was to the right as one approached the veil.
 - c] The table held twelve loaves in two rows, one loaf for each tribe, and changed every Sabbath.
 - d] R. Kent Hughes, *The consecrated bread anticipates Christ’s words, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35ff.). He is the true spiritual sustenance of his people, and apart from him there is no life.*
- 2) The Most Holy Place (3-5)
- a] Location (3), ***Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place,***
 - 1] It was behind the second curtain, the veil, Exodus 26:33, *And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.*
 - 2] William Barclay, *In front of the Holy of Holies, there was the veil, which was made of fine, twined linen, embroidered in scarlet and purple and blue, and with the cherubim upon it.*
 - 3] Access the Most Holy Place was restricted to the High Priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement.
 - b] Contents of the Most Holy Place (4-5)
 - 1] Altar of incense (4a), ***having the golden altar of incense***
 - a] Leviticus 16:12-13, *And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.*
 - b] The writer of Hebrews places this in the Holy of Holies.
 - c] William L. Lane, The ceremonial prescriptions for the Day of Atonement, however, plainly indicate that this altar was located in the Holy Place. . .
 - d] R. Kent 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 curtain” before the Holy of Holies (Exodus 30:6). In fact, it had to be outside the Holy of Holies because it was used daily by other priests (Exodus 30:7, 8).*
 - e] H. D. M. Spence, *The smoke of the incense daily offered on it was supposed to penetrate the veil to the holy of holies, representing the sweet savour of intercession before the mercy-seat itself; and on the Day of Atonement, not only was its incense taken by the high priest within the veil, but also it, as well as the mercy-seat, was sprinkled with the atoning blood.*

- 2] Ark of the covenant (4b-5a), *and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.*
- a] A description of the Ark
- 1} Exodus 25:10-15, *They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.*
 - 2} William L. Lane, *The ark of the covenant was the most important object located within the Most Holy Place. It was a chest made of acacia wood and was covered on all sides with gold, with rings of gold in each corner through which the staves for lifting and transporting the ark from one place to another were to be permanently inserted (Exod 25:10–15; 37:1–5).*
 - 3} The lid of the chest was the focal point for atonement, Exodus 25:22, *There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.*
- b] The contents of the Ark
- 1} *a golden urn holding the manna*
 - a} Exodus 16:15, *When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.*
 - b} Exodus 16:3, *And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations."*
 - 2} *Aaron's staff that budded*
 - a} Numbers 17:8, *On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.*
 - b} Numbers 18:10, *And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die."*
 - 3} *the tablets of the covenant*
 - a} Deuteronomy 9:9, *When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water.*
 - b} Deuteronomy 10:5, *Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the LORD commanded me."*
 - 4} *the mercy seat*
 - a} Exodus 25:21-22, *And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you.*
 - b} Exodus 25:27-28, *You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat.*
 - c} David Brown, *mercy seat . . . the footstool of Jehovah, the meeting place of Him and His people.*
 - d} R. Kent Hughes, *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.*

5} *cherubim of glory*

- a) William L. Lane, *The description of the ark is extended with the mention of the cherubim, the two-winged figures made of gold that stood facing each other on top of the ark, their wings outstretched over the lid of the chest (Exod 25:18–20, 22; 37:7–9). Together with the cover they were seen as the throne bearing the divine glory . . .*
- b) Donald Hagner, *The Glory almost certainly refers to the shekinah (i.e., “dwelling”) glory that hovered over the ark of the covenant (cf. Lev. 16:2; Exod. 40:34f.) symbolizing the presence of God.*

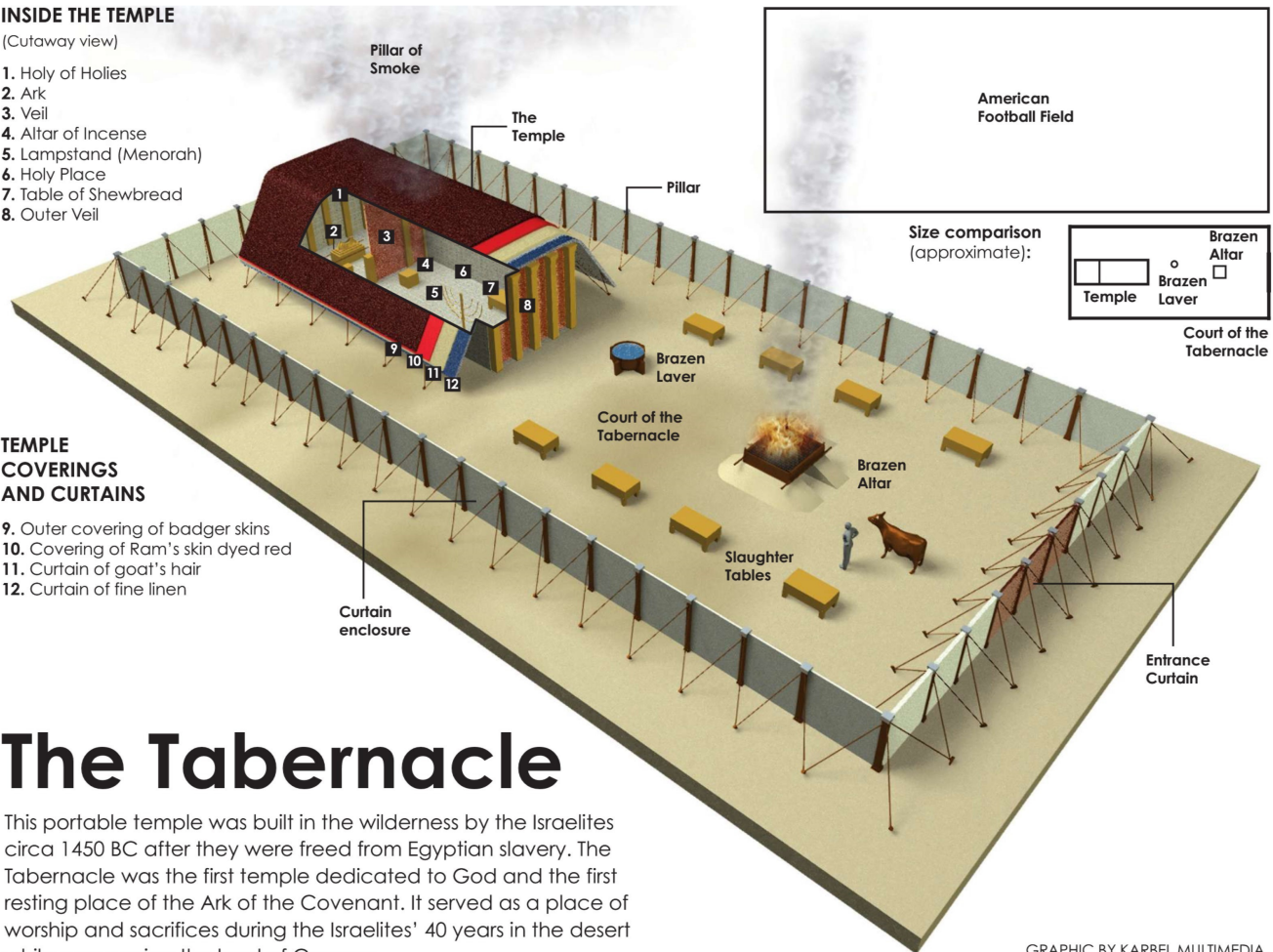
c. A setting of priorities (5b), *Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

- 1) It is most profitable to major on majors.
- 2) William Barclay, *It was of all this beauty that the writer to the Hebrews was thinking—and yet it was only a shadow of reality.*
- 3) Thomas Constable, *The writer declined to speak of the tabernacle furnishings in more detail (v. 5) because his main purpose was to contrast the two rituals and the two covenants.*
- 4) John Calvin, *Since nothing is enough for inquisitive men the apostle cuts out any opportunity for subtleties ... in case too much discussion of these things might break the thread of his argument ... philosophizing beyond reasonable bounds (as some do) is not only futile but also dangerous ... we must show discretion and moderation in case we desire to know more than it has pleased God to reveal.*

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



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

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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B. Regulations for worship in the earthly sanctuary

1. Introductory notes

- a. Douglas Mangum, *The previous paragraph dealt with the materials of the tabernacle, and this paragraph considers the activities within the sections of the tabernacle. The aim here is to show the limitations inherent to the old cultic (religious) system in order to set the groundwork for highlighting the superiority of Jesus and his high-priestly sacrifice.*
- b. R. Kent Hughes, *The old system was inadequate for two encompassing reasons—its limited access and its limited efficacy.*

2. There was limited access (6-9a)

- a. The priests ministered daily in the Holy Place (6), ***These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties,***

1) *these preparations*

- a) The writer refers to the description of the tent, rooms and furnishings of the tabernacle of verses 1-6.
- b) The items necessary for ministry were in place.

2) *the first section*

- a) Levitical priests had access only to the *Holy Place*.
- b) The present tenses imply that ministrations were still taking place (they ended in 70 AD).

3) *their ritual duties*

- a) They lit the lamps every evening and trimmed them every morning, Leviticus 24:3, *Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.*
- b) They set out the showbread every sabbath, Leviticus 24:8, *Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever.*
- c) They burned incense on the golden altar twice a day, Exodus 30:7, *Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever.*

- b. The high priest ministered once a year in the Most Holy Place (7), ***but 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.***

1) *the second*

- a) The high priest alone could enter the Most Holy Place.
- b) He had access only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).
- c) Leviticus 16:2, *and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.*

2) *not without taking blood*

- a) He made an offering for himself.
 - 1] William L. Lane, . . . *blood is the medium of approach to God, and this fact underscores the importance of the reference to Christ's blood in the ensuing argument.*
 - 2] Zane Hodges, *The Levitical arrangements were designed to convey the idea that the true way to God did not lie in them. What this indicates for the present time is that the Old-Covenant sacrificial system did not meet human need at its deepest level. It could not clear the conscience of the worshiper.*
 - 3] A comparison must be made to the superior High Priest, Jesus, who is the all sufficient one-time sacrifice.
- b) He made an offering for the unintentional sins of the people.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *In Israel the punishment for deliberate rebellion against the Mosaic Covenant was death. It is about this apostasy that the writer warned his audience.*
 - 2] Donald Hagner, *The technical phrase "sins of ignorance" alludes to the fact that only unintentional sinning could be atoned for (see Lev. 4:1, 13, 22, 27; 5:15, 17-19), not that done "with a high hand" (see Num. 15:30; Deut. 17:12).*

- c) What about intentional sins?
- 1] R. Kent 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 clear conscience.*
 - 2] Consider King David who had premeditated sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. There was no remedy in the Old Covenant. Consider the words of R. Kent Hughes, *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” (v. 17). . . 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.*
- c. The earthly sanctuary was exclusive (8-9a), ***By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).***
- 1) The regulations restricted direct access to God.
 - a) Raymond Brown, *The very presence of that outer tent symbolized the restricted way and limited ministry of the old covenant. A heavy curtain kept ordinary priests out of the inner sanctuary. This arrangement would certainly have to be changed to something better if the access was to be made available to all.*
 - b) R. Kent Hughes, *His point is crystal-clear: throughout the ages of the Old Covenant, there was no direct access to God, period!*
 - c) Donald Hagner, *The continued existence, therefore, of the first tabernacle, which together with the curtain before the Holy of Holies barred the way to the very presence of God, showed the futility of the old covenant . . . and at the same time pointed inescapably to the future.*
 - 2) Direct access to God is now available.
 - a) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *when Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50–51) and the way was opened into the holy of holies. There was no longer any more need for either the holy place or the holy of holies, for now believing sinners could come into the presence of God.*
 - b) Hebrews 10:19-20, *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,*
 - c) Donald Hagner, *That future has now come for the author and his readers.*
3. There was limited effectiveness (9b-10)
- a. The ministrations of the priests could not make a permanent difference (9b), ***According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,***
 - 1) *According to this arrangement*
 - a) The structure of the Old Covenant had limitations.
 - b) Its focus was on externals with no direct access to God.
 - c) F. F. Bruce, *The really effective barrier to a man’s free access to God is an inward and not a material one; it exists in his conscience . . .*
 - 2) *cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper*
 - a) H. D. M. Spence, *The gifts and sacrifices of the Law availed in themselves only for external ceremonial purification . . . they could not bring about that sense of spiritual accord with God which is spoken of in Jer. 31. as marking the new covenant . . .*
 - b) Raymond Brown, . . . *the real barrier between man and God is not merely a physical one. The heavy curtain is symbolic. The problem is not purely external; it is internal, within our hearts and minds. The real trouble is what Bunyan described as ‘a wounded conscience.’*
 - c) Thomas Constable, *The Old Covenant system of worship did not meet the deepest need of God’s people, namely, intimate personal relationship with God.*

- b. Their ministrations were temporary until the institution of a new order (10), *but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*
- 1) The Old Covenant focused on the external.
 - a) Zane Hodges, *The words of Hebrews 9:10 probably refer to sectarians for whom food laws and ceremonial washings retained great importance. The readers must remember the transitory nature of these things under the "aging" covenant and should not return to them.*
 - b) William Barclay, *Every year, this ceremony had to be gone through again. Everyone but the high priest was barred from the presence, and even he entered in terror. The cleansing was a purely external one by baths of water. The sacrifice was that of bulls and goats and animal blood. It was a noble ritual, a thing of dignity and beauty; but it was only a shadow which could not succeed in its purpose.*
 - 2) The New Covenant focuses on the internal.
 - a) Raymond Brown, *All the sacrifices and gifts in the world could not ease the most seriously disturbed part of man's inner life. The better covenant offered full and complete inward cleansing.*
 - b) Donald Hagner, *Christ fulfills the anticipations of the old covenant and brings his people to the realization of the salvation God has intended from the beginning.*
 - c) William Barclay, *The only priest and the only sacrifice which can open the way to God for all men and women is Jesus Christ.*
 - d) *The time of reformation has come.*

CONCLUSION

- Warren Wiersbe lists five reasons why the Old Covenant sanctuary was inferior to the New.
 - 1) *It was an earthly sanctuary (v. 1).*
 - 2) *It was a type of something greater (vv. 2-5).*
 - 3) *It was inaccessible to the people (vv. 6-7).*
 - 4) *It was temporary (v. 8).*
 - 5) *It's ministry was external, not internal (vv. 9-10).*
- Ray Stedman, *Those who today try to earn a sense of being pleasing to God by good behavior need to hear this lesson. Never knowing when they have done enough, they feel troubled and restive without any heart-peace and thus are often driven to extreme measures of self-punishment and despair. They need to cease from their efforts and trust in Christ's completed work.*
- Raymond Brown, *Hebrews reminds us repeatedly of the assurance of pardon. God's people enjoy the privilege of undeserved remission and eternal security. Their sins are remembered no more and their names are enrolled in heaven. This is the staggering message of a better hope, of a new covenant and an eternal redemption.*