

“The Earthly Compared With the Eternal”

Heb. 9:1-14

- INTRO. - It is a spiritual maxim that God never asks anyone to give up something without His offering something better in return. Sometimes people have the idea that Christianity is all about what you have to give up – but they do *not* consider the far greater reward.
- One of the greatest challenges to the early Hebrews (this book was written to) was a failure to understand that their entire system of religion was preparatory and transient.
- Everything connected with the ceremonial law (the old covenant, the old priesthood, and the old order of religion) was given by God to prepare the way for the new covenant (and everything that goes with it).
- This was a difficult barrier for them to get over – and that is why the author of Hebrews is laying out a very careful and detailed explanation of why the new is much better than the old.
- And (by the way) these are the kinds of passages that modern Christians often struggle with as being irrelevant to us. We know that our task (in the study of Scripture) is to first understand the original author’s intended meaning, and then to bring it up to today and how it applies to our lives as Christians.
- But how do you do that with a passage like this? How is this relevant to Gentile Christians more than 2000 years separated from this?
- And to make matters worse, what we will be looking at today (in 9:1-10) is something the author of Hebrews declares is totally abrogated. How can this be something we can learn from today?
- Well, I think there are a few things we need to keep in mind. First, we have to have a commitment that “**all** Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16)
- We just have to believe that we can learn something from every part of God’s Word, and even when we don’t see the apparent relevance, that God has a reason for it to be in His Word and He wants us to learn from every part of it.
- In every part of God’s Word we can learn important truths concerning His nature and His purposes. This passage is no exception.
- Secondly, we always have to keep in mind the broader context of any book of the Bible. The

biblical authors (inspired by the HS) always have purpose that is larger than the individual units of the text.

- In the Book of Hebrews we have to keep the whole sermon in mind and *not* get bogged down in the parts. The section we will be looking at today (9:1-10) doesn't seem to apply to us, but what we need to understand, is that in order to appreciate the significance of the new covenant system we first must understand the old covenant system it is compared with.
- The work of Christ in the new covenant era becomes more beautiful to us when we have a firm grasp on the limitations and inabilities of the old covenant.
- Third, we need to make sure we are understanding the difference between primary and secondary themes (especially in a book like this). It is very easy (in a passage like we will be looking at today) to get caught up in the details (like the furniture in the old Tabernacle) and miss the main point the author is trying to make.
- In fact, in v. 5 he says, "...but of these things we cannot now speak in detail." That's his way of saying, "I could give a lot more details here, but I don't want you to miss the point."
- One of the problems with a passage like our text today, is that there are so many ways we can see Christ in the elements of the Tabernacle (and the sacrificial system of the old covenant) that we can spend our time pointing to those things – but the author of Hebrews doesn't do that.
- George Guthrie writes, "A creative preacher might be tempted to delve into allegorical significance of each of these items in the process of elaborating these verses...Although colorful, such elaboration strays from the author's own purposes for this text."
- We need to stick with his main themes, and there are three of them. From 9:1 all the way to 10:18 he camps on three main points: (1.) The place of Christ's offering was in heaven rather than on earth. (2.) The blood of this offering was Christ's own blood rather than the blood of animals. (3.) The effect of Christ's offering was eternal (being made once and for all) rather than temporary (having to be offered over and over again).
- Whatever else we do with this text, we need to make sure we emphasize those points. It is going to take us two weeks to get through this first section (of 9:1-14), but we need to note that the concept of "access to God" is a key concept here.
- In comparing the old covenant system with the new, we are comparing the *earthly* with the *eternal*.

And the bottom line is that the old covenant offered *no* access to God but the new offers immediate, complete, eternal access. (It's going to take us two weeks to see this.)

- Now, as far as our outline, you've probably heard the old phrase, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Well, that's my philosophy with the outline for this passage. Since I can't "beat" John MacArthur's outline for this section, I'm just going to use it (and give him credit for it).
- In Heb. 9:1-14 the Old and New Covenants are further contrasted, and in vv. 1-10 (which we'll look at this morning) we see the characteristics of the Old Covenant, while in vv. 11-14 (which we'll look at next week) the characteristics of the New Covenant are provided. So we begin with:

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLD COVENANT (vv. 1-10)

- Back in 8:6 our author made reference to Jesus as "the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises." He has already argued (in 8:7-13) for the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old.
- Now we see him coming back to a full description of the Old Covenant system, in order to compare it to the New. Look with me at v. 1, "Now even the

first *covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary."

- The "first covenant" (again) was the Mosaic covenant, but notice the phrase, "regulations of divine worship." We have to begin with the truth that this first covenant was a covenant given by God, and was one in which there were certain regulations in regard to how the people were to worship Him.
- The "regulations" were the commands of the Mosaic Law in regard to how the people of Israel were to worship God in the Old Covenant era.
- The rites and ceremonies of the Old Covenant system were instituted by God. And the design for the "earthly sanctuary" (the Tabernacle and later the Temple) were also given very specifically by God.
- The Old Covenant was *not* worthless or pointless. *Nothing* God does is *ever* worthless or pointless. God had a purpose for it, but it was always God's plan for it to be replaced by the New Covenant.
- Now, the author of Hebrews is going to go into some details about the Tabernacle, but the contrast that is being made (here) is that it was *temporary* (signified by the word "earthly") while the New Covenant is based in that which is heavenly and eternal.

- Now, vv. 2-10 give us three aspects of the old worship order. The first thing we see is:

A. The Old Sanctuary (vv. 2-5)

- Look at v. 2, “For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which *were* the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.”
- Although the layout of the Temple was the same, it was the Tabernacle in the wilderness that best fits the writer’s purpose. It was a large tent, and even from a human perspective it gave the impression of impermanence.
- Now, this connects with the idea of it being an “earthly sanctuary” because the Tabernacle, like the earth, is temporary and is passing away. The Greek word “kosmikon” means “belonging to the earth.”
- In v. 24 the author will call it “a holy place made with hands.” That is in contrast to “the greater and more perfect tabernacle, *not* made with hands” (in v. 11).
- Interestingly, the author of Hebrews describes the earthly tabernacle by the furniture that was in it. He does *not* mention what was in the outer court, but we know from Scripture there was the bronze altar

(on which the sacrifices were made) and there was the bronze laver (where the priests would wash themselves).

- Instead he goes on to talk about the Holy Place (inside the *first* veil). In the Holy Place there were (at least) two pieces of furniture.
- As the priest would enter the Holy Place, on the left side would be the solid gold “lampstand.” It had seven branches, was filled with the purest olive oil, and was kept burning perpetually. It was a daily task of the priest to keep the lampstand filled with oil.
- On the right side was the table of showbread. Every Sabbath twelve loaves of fresh bread were placed on the table (representing the twelve tribes of Israel). At the end of the week the priests (and only the priests) were allowed to eat the bread that had been taken off the table. The consecrated bread was also referred to as “the bread of the Presence” (Ex. 25:23-30).
- Verse 3, “And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which *was* a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant.”

- The Holy of Holies was where the Ark of the Covenant resided, and it was here where the Shekinah glory of God would appear. It was a perfect 15-foot cube – and that is significant because we’re told in the Book of Revelation that the New Jerusalem will be a perfect cube.
- Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once each year (on the Day of Atonement) and only according to a very prescribed manner.
- But before I get to that, there is another issue I need to deal with briefly. The author of Hebrews has the “golden altar of incense” inside the Holy of Holies, but most Bible scholars believe it was in the center of the Holy Place.
- If this *is* a reference to the “altar of incense” then it would make more sense for it to be in the Holy Place where the regular priests could keep the coals on it every day.
- Ex. 30:7 says, “Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps.” Since Aaron only went into the Holy of Holies once a year, it would make more sense that this altar would be in the Holy Place where he could tend to it every day.
- There are also some passages in the OT (such as Ex. 30:6-7) that seem to place it there (although they are *not* totally clear on that). The location of the altar of incense is somewhat ambiguous. But there are some other explanations.
- Some English translations have this as a “golden censor,” (n v. 4) and if that is the case, it would refer to the censor the High Priest would use when he went into the Holy of Holies. I would say *that* is unlikely, but what are we to say about this?
- I’m a little bit like the author of Hebrews himself, who said in v. 5 that he didn’t want to go into a lot of detail here. Scholars have spent pages on this, and I’m *not* sure we can say for sure how to resolve this, but one thing I know – the Word of God does *not* contradict itself and this is *not* (at all) the point of the argument here.
- The main item in the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. Over it was the mercy seat (where the blood of atonement was sprinkled), and in it were three things: a golden jar of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.
- On that lid of the Ark of the Covenant were the two “cherubim of glory” (as v. 5 says). These were figures of solid gold, angelic figures whose wings spread toward the center, facing one another.
- It was here God had declared He would meet with men. In Ex. 25:22 the Lord declared, “And there I

will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony...”

- The Ark of the Covenant was also called the ark of the testimony. If God and men were to meet, it would have to be here. And it was only on the basis of shed blood, and it was only according to the prescribed ritual of the High Priest.
- Ah, but here’s the point the author of Hebrews is making. John MacArthur explains, “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.”
- That was one of the main problems with the Old Covenant system. There was no access to God. The veil was a barrier that kept everyone out.
- And we could dwell on the details of what was in the Ark of the Covenant, etc. but that is *not* the main message. The main message is that under the Old Covenant there was no access to God while under the New Covenant there was full and permanent access to God.

- In v. 5 the author implies that he could go into a lot more detail (here) if he chose, but he doesn’t want them to get lost in the weeds. He doesn’t want them to get so caught up in the details of the Tabernacle that they miss the contrast between the two covenants.

- So the author of Hebrews moves on. After describing the old sanctuary, he goes on (in vv. 6-7) to talk about:

B. The Old Services (vv. 6-7)

- Look with me at v. 6, “Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship...” (Stop right there.)
- This is describing the daily ministry of the regular priests. The “divine worship” in the old sanctuary involved continual services. Every day the priests would enter through that first veil into the Holy Place and trim the wicks on the Lampstand. They would add fresh oil. They would put incense on the altar of incense.
- Every Sabbath they would replace the showbread with fresh consecrated bread. But the whole idea (here) is that they were constantly going in and out of this “outer tabernacle.”

- That is symbolic of the fact that the work of the priests were never done. And (of course) you had to add to this the hundreds of sacrifices that were taking place in the outer court.
- But in contrast to the continual ministry of the regular priests, v. 7 tells us of the unique ministry of the *high* priest. Look at v. 7, “but into the second only the high priest *enters*, once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.”
- This is describing the special sacrifices of the high priest, once each year, on the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur). This was the only time when anyone would ever enter the Holy of Holies – and the high priest would actually enter it twice – once to offer a sacrifice for his own sin, and again to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people.
- But notice that phrase, “not without...blood.” This was the single condition for his entry into the Holy of Holies. He could *not* go in without blood.
- Now, this is the first reference to “blood” in the Book of Hebrews, but it will become a major theme. It was the “blood” of the sacrifice that was sprinkled over the mercy seat to cover (or atone for) the sins of the people.
- Some people today criticize Christianity as being a “bloody religion” (and some say we should take all the songs about the blood out of our worship) but “blood” is a key element in our salvation.
- Ron Phillips writes, “All the blessings of the new covenant are ours because of [Christ’s] blood. Verse 12 declares, ‘By His own blood He entered...’ Verse 14 declares that our cleansing come by ‘the blood of Christ.’ Verse 22 proclaims, without shedding of blood [there] is no remission.”
- Oh my friend, please understand, His blood is “precious blood” because His blood is what cleanses us from all sin and fully atones for us before the Father.
- Jesus said of the cup, “This is the new covenant in My blood.” The blood was important for the Old Covenant, but it is absolutely critical for the New. People can say whatever they want to say, but we must never take the key element of the blood out of our religion.
- But going back to the Old Covenant and the Day of Atonement, the daily sacrifices were offered to deal with various kinds of sins, but the special sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was intended to take care of any sin that had been neglected or overlooked.
- The word for “atonement” means “covering” and this offering was for any sin that had *not* yet been covered. This meant that it was a day for the

liberation of the conscience, but (as we will see) it was unlike the new covenant, in that it could *not* permanently and completely liberate the conscience.

- Without going into too much detail, very early on the Day of Atonement the high priest would cleanse himself ritually and then would put on his high priestly robes (including the breastplate and the linen ephod) and would begin making a sacrifice for his own sin.
- Scholars have said that he would sacrifice as many as 22 different animals by the time he reached the moment known as the atonement.
- Then he would take off his robes of glory and would bathe himself completely. He would then put on white linen garments (with no fancy decorations of them) and he would perform the sacrifice of atonement.
- He would take coals off the bronze altar (where the sacrifices were made) and would carry them with a gold censor into the Holy of Holies. He would take the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it over the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant.
- The people outside could hear the bells on his robes because if he did anything incorrectly he would be struck dead. He would exit the Holy of

Holies quickly – but this first time was to atone for his own sin.

- When he would come out, there would be two goats waiting for him. He would cast lots for the goats, and one would become the sacrifice for the sins of the people. The other would become Azazel, the scapegoat.
- The high priest would take the blood of the sacrificed goat back into the Holy of Holies and would sprinkle that blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people. Again, he would hurry back out.
- Then he would place his hands on the head of the scapegoat, and it would be sent out into the wilderness to represent the sins of the people being taken away.
- John MacArthur says, “The first goat represented satisfaction of God’s justice, in that sin had been paid for. The second represented satisfaction of man’s conscience, because he knew he was freed of the penalty of sin.”
- But (of course) under the Old Covenant this was never permanent because it all had to be repeated again and again. We’re going to see all this applied to Christ (and His perfect, once-for-all sacrifice) but the main point (here) is that blood is necessary

for drawing near to God. (Pause) This leads us to our last point for this morning, and that is:

C. The Old Significance (vv. 8-10)

- Look with me at v. 8, “The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing...”
- Notice that the author of Hebrews is attributing this revelation to the HS, and he is saying that this is the lesson the Spirit of God is revealing to us: Under the Old Covenant system there was no way for the average person to enter the Holy of Holies (into the presence of God). The way into the inner sanctuary was barred by the inner veil.
- Now, earlier, he had used the phrase “outer tabernacle” to point to the Holy Place, but here he is using it to refer to the entire Tabernacle (and its rituals).
- As long as the Temple was still standing (and people were relying on its system of atonement) they would never experience access to God because the old system could *not* provide that.
- Verse 9 continues, “...which *is* a symbol for the present time.” The word for “symbol” (there) is the Greek word “parabole,” from which we get our word “parable.”
- In other words, this is saying that the old tabernacle was a pre-figuring of that which was to come. It was a picture and shadow of the New Covenant. It served as an “object lesson” of the true atonement. It pointed the way, but it could *not* open the way.
- What was the problem of the old covenant? Verse 9, “Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.”
- The old covenant had no way of permanently cleansing the conscience because it only dealt with external matters, and did *not* deal with the internal realities of the heart. Only the “time of reformation” (the establishment of the new covenant) could do that.
- The word for “reformation” is a word from which we get our English word “orthopedics.” It basically means “to set straight.” It was used for devices designed to straighten misshapen limbs – and (of course) it refers to the time when Christ would come to set straight the revelation of God concerning His eternal redemption. It clearly points to the new covenant here.
- There were three main problems with the old covenant (that were ultimately answered by the

new covenant): 1. There was no real access to God under the old covenant, 2. There was only imperfect cleansing under the old covenant, and 3. The atonement of the old covenant was only temporary.

- So what do we do with all this? What is the application for us today? Well, next time we are going to see the characteristics of the new covenant. We see all this fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- In fact, we would be remiss if we did *not* say (at this point) that nearly *everything* we see in the old covenant system points to Christ. All the symbols point to Him.
- Just think about it – only two chapters in the Bible describe the creation of the world, but more than 50 chapters are devoted to the Tabernacle. Why? Because it is a giant portrait of Jesus Christ! Everywhere you look in the Tabernacle you see Him.
- He is seen in the fact that there was only one door into the Tabernacle, and Jesus said, “I am the door” and “I am the way.” There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ.
- He is seen in the bronze altar because He Himself is the perfect sacrifice for sin. Not only that, but we see Him in the fact that the sacrifice was made in the plain view of the people, outside the gates of

the Holy Place – and (of course) we know He was crucified in public, outside the gates of the city.

- He is seen in the bronze laver because He can perfectly cleanse our hearts (and our consciences) by the washing of His regeneration.
- He is seen in the gold lampstand because He is the Light of the world. He alone can light our way in this dark world.
- He is seen in the table of showbread because He is the bread of life. He is the sustainer of all who put their faith and trust in Him.
- He is seen in the altar of incense for He ever lives to make intercession for us. *Not only* is He the perfect sacrifice but also the perfect intercessor.
- He is seen in the mercy seat because there He ushers us into the presence of God through His blood. He is seen in the veil that was torn in two from top to bottom at His crucifixion, indicating full and final access to God.
- In fact, Jesus *is* our mercy seat, as we read in 1 John 2:2, “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins...” The word for “propitiation” is a word that means “satisfaction” but it is used in reference to the mercy seat in Ex. 25:17 (in the Septuagint). You could read it, “He is our mercy seat.”

- We see Jesus in the role of the high priest, in the stripping off of his robes of glory and putting on garments of humility (and then putting back on the robes of glory). That is a picture of His leaving the glories of heaven to dwell with us as a man and then being exalted in His ascension.

- We see Him in the two goats, not only in the goat of sacrifice, but also in the scapegoat (as He carried our sins as far as the east is from the west).

- In all these ways (and many more) we see Christ. He is the perfect fulfillment of the old covenant. He alone was able to bring complete atonement for sin and full access to God forever.

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER