

The Book of Hebrews

Verses 9:1-12

July 22, 2018

Up until this point, the writer of Hebrews has been trying to convey to the Jewish Christians just how dramatically their relationship with God has changed from the past until now. Hebrews 9 gives us an insight into their spiritual history so that we can understand their motivations and frame of mind. Knowing from where a group or person has come can really help us better understand them. Let's walk a mile, or at least a few feet, in their shoes.

Hebrews 9:1 – *That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth.*

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus harshly chastized the Jewish leaders for their overabundance of rules and demands that the people stick to them. But as we read here about the Temple and the regulations put into place for worshipping God, we can gain a better understanding of why the leaders reacted like they did. Of course, it wasn't their strict adherence to following God's rules to which Jesus objected, it was their incessant additions to these rules and their insistence that the people follow them that raised the ire of Christ.

Hebrews 9:2-3 – *There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place.³ Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place.*

The illustration on the upper right depicts the layout of the Jewish Tabernacle with the outer courtyard, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

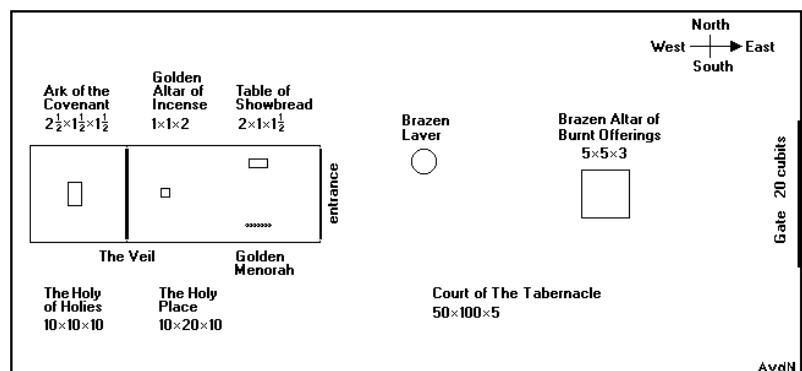


Figure 1: Tabernacle of Moses

It was built according to very specific directions provided by God as a place where He would dwell among his chosen people as mentioned in Exodus. Unlike us, the Israelites didn't have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to help guide them. So, to communicate with God they had to go to the Tabernacle. But even then, they could not communicate directly with God themselves. That was the job of the high priest.

Exodus 25:8-9 – *“Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them. ⁹ You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.*

As you can see the Lord gave *very* specific instructions on how the Tabernacle was to be built even down to the exact dimensions for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. For example, the table holding the showbread was to be made of acacia wood, 36" long, 18" inches wide and 27" inches high overlaid with pure gold.

Why acacia wood? There are three acacia tree species that grow in the Land of Israel in the desert and one rare species in the Mediterranean region. In large areas of the desert lands of the Negev and Sinai, acacia trees are the only trees which would explain why God would specify that acacia wood be used for their building material.



Figure 2: Acacia tree

Hebrews 9:4-5 – ⁴*In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant.* ⁵*Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.*

The writer of Hebrews is pointing out that even though the Tabernacle was merely a multi-room tent, it was exquisitely appointed. All the items were either pure gold or overlaid with pure gold. The two cherubim above the place of atonement were themselves molded into one piece of pure gold.

Imagine what it would cost to make furnishings overlaid with gold and silver like this today. In examining the cost of building such a structure as the Tabernacle, we find in Exodus 38 that 2,193 pounds of gold and 7,544 pounds of silver were used to build the sanctuary. At today's prices, the value of the gold used would be roughly \$33.3 million and the value of the silver used would be \$1.45 million. Those are some expensive furnishings for a tent!

But, where would the Israelites get such large quantities of gold and silver, you might ask? We find one likely source for these precious metals listed in Exodus 12.

Exodus 12:35-36 – ³⁵*And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed; they asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold.* ³⁶*The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth!*

One might think, wow, how fortunate was it that the Israelites were able to plunder the Egyptians when they left! But, it was no coincidence. God knows the future like we recall the past so of course He knew they would be building the Tabernacle and would need all this silver and gold. Consequently, He provided for it before they ever left Egypt. It may seem natural to us to question why things happen when and how they do but we need to learn to trust that God is always in control and will do what is best for the situation. Instead of questioning His actions, we should instead trust them and be praying for guidance, patience and understanding of them.

Point to ponder: Have you ever really considered the combined weight of these precious metals by themselves was nearly 5 tons? And, that after adding in the weight of the other building materials, the acacia wood, the bronze, the fabrics, and leather, it would be quite the monumental task to move the Temple every time the Israelites moved camp! Yet they did it!

Now, even with all of this beauty inside the Tabernacle, there were *no* sightseeing tours of it! No, it was definitely *not* a place where you would go and gawk at the pure beauty of it as we are warned in Numbers 4.

Numbers 4:17-20 – ¹⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸ “Do not let the Kohathite clans be destroyed from among the Levites! ¹⁹ This is what you must do so they will live and not die when they approach the most sacred objects. Aaron and his sons must always go in with them and assign a specific duty or load to each person. ²⁰ The Kohathites must never enter the sanctuary to look at the sacred objects for even a moment, or they will die.”

The Kohathites were one of the clans of the Levites, Kohath being one of the three sons of Levi. Moses and Aaron were Kohathites. The Kohathites had charge of moving the most holy things: the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread and the lampstand along with the other items of the Holy Place. But, again, they could never *look* at them!

The other two Levite clans, the Gershonites and Merarites were responsible for moving the rest of the temple. The Gershonites took care of the decorations in the sanctuary – curtains, ropes and the coverings. And, the Merarites had the task of maintaining and carrying from place to place the pillars, bases, frames, pegs and cords that created the structure of the tent of meeting.

It’s interesting to note that the Gershonites and Merarites were given oxen and carts to carry their items but the Kohathites were to hand carry their items suspended from poles placed upon their shoulders.

Another very interesting point is how not even the very ones who were tasked with carrying the sacred objects were allowed to enter the sanctuary and gaze at the sacred objects “*for even a moment*” or they would die! You’ll also recall how later in the Bible during David’s reign that Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, died when he reached out to steady the Ark with his hand while it was being transported on an oxen cart and the oxen stumbled. Of course, the ark was never supposed to be transported by oxen, only hand carried.

Today, we’ve become complacent and we often don’t treat our God with the honor and respect He is due as the Creator of the entire universe. Many approach God like He is supposed to serve us and not the other way around. We mistake his patience with us as indifference or uncaring or an inability to intercede in our lives. Like over-indulged children, we tend to be self-involved and focused on our own wants and desires rather than on what God desires for us in our lives.

As children of the King, we are joint heirs with Christ. We are royalty. With this comes the perks but also with this position comes responsibility. Like Christ, we can sometimes be called upon to make sacrifices that try and test our very souls. May we always be found faithful!

Hebrews 9:6-8 – ⁶ When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. ⁷ But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸ By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

The people could enter the courtyard where the sacrifices were performed. However, only the priests could enter the Holy Place and *only* if they first washed in the Brazen Laver or they would *die*! From there, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place but he could only do it once a year. This is quite a difference from

our casual approach to God today. We need to remember what a precious gift it is for us to be able to boldly approach God's throne and enter His presence!

Hebrews 9:9-10 – ⁹ *This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them.* ¹⁰ *For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.*

As pointed out here, the old system of sacrifices and regulations was far from perfect. It was merely a foreshadowing of the perfect system that was to come with the appearance of Christ. While it might have atoned for the sins committed by the people, it didn't effect change in the hearts of the people being forgiven. With Christ's sacrifice, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to effect change in our hearts to break the bondage of sin and make us one with God again.

Hebrews 9:11-12 – ¹¹ *So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world.* ¹² *With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.*

There is so much said here it's difficult to take it all in with one reading:

- The earthly Tabernacle has been replaced with a more perfect one in heaven.
- Jesus has become the High Priest for this new Tabernacle. He is the *only* one who could possibly fulfil that role. Since he has lived as a man, he fully understands our challenges and weaknesses but because he is also God, he lacks the flaws, self-concerns and sinful-nature that disqualifies even the best human on earth as High Priest.
- Christ is not only the High Priest but he is also simultaneously the sacrifice that he offers for our sins.
- Every other sacrifice could only be offered once. Once sacrificed, it is dead and used up. But by offering his own blood Christ offered a sacrifice unlike any other. Unlike other sacrifices, his only needed to be made *one* time for *all* mankind. For once Christ died he rose again and his atoning blood now lives forever bringing life to all it touches.
- The earthly High Priest could only enter the Most Holy Place *once* a year. Like the earthly High Priests, Christ made his atoning sacrifice, himself, and then entered the Most Holy Place. However, unlike earthly High Priests he then remained there. He has remained and is continually before the Father interceding for us!

So, let's step back a bit and look at the situation from the Jewish Christians point of view. They suddenly went from a very rigid, extremely structured, ritualistic mode of worship that had been in place for almost 1500 years where the penalty for disobeying was death to one that basically had one rule, accept Christ.

I would imagine this would be very distressing to those who had grown up with the security of the boundary of rules to govern their actions to then suddenly be freed from all these restrictions. It's easy to see why some would want to reinstate some of the restrictions to which they were accustomed. The familiarity would seem "right." But, external actions aren't what make us right with God, it's the internal state of our heart that pleases

God. But be forewarned, it is also the internal state of our heart that can displease God! Jesus expresses this thought in Matthew.

Matthew 23:25-26 – ²⁵ *“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!”*²⁶ *You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.*

So, we can rejoice that the burden of the old Law has been lifted from our shoulders but a more solemn responsibility has been placed upon us to serve God inwardly with our whole hearts and minds and not just outward appearances. We must continually examine our deepest thoughts and motivations because they’re all there for God to see.

Questions For Discussion

1. Discuss the reasons why the priests would die if they didn’t wash in the Brazen Laver before entering the Holy Place and why the Kohathites would die if they were to look at the sacred items in the Holy Place *for even a moment?*
2. Compare our position with God to the ancient Israelites. Why do we not die when entering His presence even though we aren’t completely holy?
3. Discuss why the Kohathites had to carry the items from the Holy Place and Most Holy Place by poles suspended from their shoulders versus on an oxen cart like the rest of the items?
4. How come such precise directions were given (down to the exact dimensions) for building the Tabernacle?
5. Examine the reason why God’s “rules for worship” changed so dramatically after Christ’s appearance?
6. Why do people and some Christian sects to this day insist on adding “rules” to what a Christian should do and how they should act?
7. How can we go about we “cleaning” the inside of our “cups and dishes” and not just the outside?