

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 9:1-14**

To better understand the reformation from the first covenant.

Read the Text:

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. 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. 3 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense 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. 5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 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. 8 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 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb. 9:1-14, ESV)

Study the Text:**Regulations**

Hebrews 9 covers many Old Testament regulations in a very short space. And while some may want to spend multiple lessons getting lost in the details of verses 2-5, the Author says, "of these things we cannot now speak in detail." Not because they are unknown or now completely irrelevant, but because they are only part of a larger picture. Luckily, for those interested, there are 23 years' months' worth of Life Bible Study lessons

that covered Exodus and these exact items. Below is a breakdown of the purposes of the regulations listed in Chapter 9.

A Tent

To connect with what the author is wanting to communicate in Chapter 9, it is important to understand a bit about the tent he references. The tent is more often referred to as the sanctuary or the tabernacle. In Exodus, Moses is shown a pattern for the sanctuary, and the Lord tells him “let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Ex. 25:8) and Moses notes that “everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp” (Ex. 33:7). But, it is important to note that while the people would “go out to the tent of meeting” and Moses would even “enter the tent” (Ex. 33:9), only the high priest (Aaron at this time) was allowed to enter behind the second curtain to the “Most Holy Place”.

Behind the Second Curtain

Now, in the author of Hebrews’ description of the tent, Grindheim notes that it is outlined as a chiasm:

- A The contents of the first tent (v. 2a)
- B The designation of the first tent (v. 2b)
- C The curtain (v. 3a)
- B The designation of the second tent (v. 3b)
- A The contents of the second tent (vv. 4–5)

A chiastic structure serves to emphasize the central element, in this case, the reference to the curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.”¹

But why would the author emphasize the curtain? The purpose of the curtain was to separate the first and second sections of the tent. The first section (Holy Place) is for regular priestly service. “Aaron and his sons shall tend [the lamp] from evening to morning before the LORD” (Ex. 25:30) and “you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly” (Ex. 27:21). The second section (Most Holy Place) is only for the High Priest “and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.” Between the daily duties of the priests in the first section and the once-a-year inaccessibility of the second section was the curtain. And the curtain is emphasized by the author to ensure it is understood that there is a separation between God and man because of man’s sin.

The Time of Reformation

The Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places has not yet been opened as long as the first section remains standing (which is symbolic of the present age). Remember last week (session 19), in speaking of the Old Covenant it was noted that “what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away,” but it must be understood “that Jesus fulfills the law by bringing it to its intended goal.” If it is understood that “the Old Covenant has reached its terminus in Christ,” then the tent of meeting has likewise reached its completion and the Holy Spirit then indicates that the first section must no longer stand for “through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) [Christ] entered once for all into the holy places.” There is a reformation from the old tent which held a curtain (that separated man from God) to a more perfect tent that has a curtain, that is, Christ’s flesh (but more on that in chapter 10). At the time of his writing,

¹ Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 409.

the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. Those who look to the “present age” with the old covenant sacrificial system will find that the way into the holy places has not yet been opened. The temple was destroyed in AD 70, bringing an end to the “present age”—the era in which a temple stood with a curtain separating God from man. That age is no longer present, for the entire sacrificial system it depended on has come to an end—and remains so.

Worship and an Earthly Place of Holiness

This brings us back to verse 1: “Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.” The author uses verses 2 through 7 to describe the earthly place of holiness, and verse 9 to show that the first covenant could provide only regulations that “cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.” He wants his audience to connect verse 1’s limitations—both in worship and in holiness—to the freedom found in Christ by showing how the new covenant addresses each. The earthly place of holiness, he says, has been replaced by “the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation).” And the conscience of the worshiper that the old system could never perfect is now purified—for Christ’s blood will “purify our conscience.” Jesus responded to the woman at the well after her question about worship, saying, “but the hour is coming, and is now here, when the *true worshipers* will worship the Father in *spirit and truth*, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.” Christ’s blood has made a way for true worshipers to enter the Holy Places (in spirit) and worship with a pure conscience (in truth).

What About Now?

In texts that deal with Old Testament regulations, it can be easy to gloss over the details and not connect the depth of the author’s intent. But here we find one of the most important aspects of our Christian life - the freedom that is found in Christ. We know from 1 John that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This freedom is not only that God has broken the chains that had bound his people through the blood of Jesus, but that we are worshiping and serving before the Living God with a “pure conscience.” As we saw in Hebrews 4, “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.”

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 9:1-5. What two sections made up the tent?

2. Read Hebrews 9:1-5. What furnishings were placed in each section?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 9:6-7. How often did the priests enter the first section compared to the high priest entering the second?

2. Read Hebrews 9:6-7. Why is it significant that even the high priest had to offer for his own sins?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 9:11. How is the tent through which Christ entered described?

2. Read Hebrews 9:12. How do Christ's offering and the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant differ?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 9:13-14. What comparison does the author make between the Old Covenant sacrifices and the blood of Christ?

2. Read Hebrews 8:13. What does it mean to have our "conscience" purified "from dead works to serve the living God"?

Discuss the Text!

Session 20 Discussion: Confidence to Serve

The blood of Jesus has secured an "eternal redemption" as well as a here-and-now confidence to serve the Living God. But often we feel the weight of our sin and want to distance ourselves from the Lord. Or worse, we feel as if the Lord wants to distance Himself from us because of our sin. Talk as a group about how this shapes the way you live your daily life.

1. Icebreaker: What are some "dead works" or old patterns you find yourself falling back into?
2. Is there a recent moment when you felt your sin distanced you from God?
3. What does that distance-taking look like practically (avoiding prayer, skipping church, busyness, etc.)?
4. Read 1 John 1:9. If Hebrews 9 says Christ's blood has already secured an eternal redemption, what are we really doing when we confess sin — earning forgiveness all over again, or agreeing with a cleansing that's already complete?
5. What does it look like this week to serve God out of a clean conscience rather than a guilty one?

Takeaways:

1. By the blood of Christ, Jesus entered once for all into the holy places.
2. The blood of Christ secured an eternal redemption and purifies our consciences.