

**The Sanctuary Under the Old Covenant  
Hebrews 9:1-10**

If we are going to give ourselves up to Christ wholeheartedly and completely it would serve us well to better understand the significance of the high priestly ministry of Christ and most importantly what He accomplished when he offered Himself up to His Father, on our behalf, on the cross of Calvary.

And one of the ways for us to better understand the significance of His high priestly ministry, as well as His death on our behalf, is for us to consider the Old Covenant sanctuary, which was intended by God to point people to Christ.

So how could that Old Covenant Sanctuary do that? It could do that because hidden within the shadows of that sanctuary, as dark as those shadows were, based on **Hebrews 8:1-6**, God was pointing His people toward the reality of Christ's future high priestly ministry and His superior offering.

So would considering the Old Covenant Sanctuary be helpful to us in better understanding the high priestly ministry of Christ and His superior offering? Yes, I believe it can. And certainly the author of Hebrews believed that it could as well. And hopefully this will all come alive for us this morning as we return back to our study of the Book of Hebrews.

But before we return back to our study let us remind ourselves of why this book was written and what we have already covered within this study.

As you know the Book of Hebrews was written to a group of struggling Hebrew believers, who under a great persecution, were being tempted, to turn away from Christ and return back to Judaism.

So how did the author of this book counter this danger that was facing this vulnerable congregation? Having set forth the superiority of Christ to prophets, to angels, and to Moses the author then set out to show the superiority of Christ's priesthood over all other **priesthoods** (Hebrews 5:1-10:18).

This lengthy section of scripture can be divided into two main segments.

The first main segment we entitled: The Son's appointment as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-7:28).

The second main segment, that we have just recently begun, we have entitled: Christ's superior high priestly offering (Hebrews 8:1-10:18).

In seeking to advance this particular theme the author, up to this point in our text, has emphasized: The superiority of Christ's high priestly ministry (Hebrews 8:1-6). And he has also emphasized: The superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13).

This morning we will begin a new emphasis: The superiority of the New Covenant **offering** (Hebrews 9:1-10:18). So how did the author begin this new lengthy section?

## MESSAGE

The author began by focusing on: The sanctuary under the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:1-10). And why did he do this? The author did this because, as he stated earlier in **Hebrews 8:1-6**, he saw the Old Covenant sanctuary and everything associated with that sanctuary as a shadow, that prefigured the present heavenly high priestly ministry of Christ.

And because he saw the Old Covenant sanctuary in this particular way, he could use the Old Covenant sanctuary as a teaching tool to illustrate for His readers truths concerning Christ and the superiority of His ministry, and more specifically the superiority of His offering.

But before he could use the Old Covenant sanctuary as a teaching tool to hammer home these particular truths concerning Christ and His superior ministry, the author obviously felt led by the Spirit to provide for his readers an overview of the sanctuary under the Old Covenant in **Hebrews 9:1-10**. And these are the verses that we will be examining this morning.

So how did the author begin? The author began by identifying two aspects of the Old Covenant sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1). So now let me read for you **Hebrews 9:1** and see if this is not so and what does this verse say? It says this, "**Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.**" So did the author in this verse identify two aspects of the Old Covenant sanctuary? Yes, he did. There was the "priestly service aspect" of the New Covenant sanctuary and then there was "the physical aspect" of the New Covenant sanctuary.

So where do we find the priestly service aspect? Look at the very first part of the verse, "**Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship.**" These regulations contained in the first covenant or in other words the old covenant dictated what? They dictated how priestly service was to be carried out in the Old Covenant sanctuary by the priests of Israel.

And where do we find the physical aspect of the Old Testament sanctuary being introduced in this verse? Let us continue to read the verse, "**Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship** (and then what does it say?...) **and the earthly sanctuary,**" which of course would be referring to the physical aspect of the Old Covenant sanctuary.

So after having introduced both of these aspects in **verse 1** what did he do next? He described them. So which aspect did he describe first?

The author began with a description of the **physical** aspect of the Old Covenant sanctuary (Hebrews 9:2-5). So now let me read for you these verses and let us consider the description of this Old Covenant sanctuary as supplied by the author of Hebrews here in **verses 2-5.**

And what do these verses say? They say this, "**For there was a tabernacle, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. (3) Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, (4) having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold in which was a gold jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; (5) and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.**" So what are these verses describing? These

verses clearly are describing the Old Covenant sanctuary of the nation of Israel.

So what can we learn from these verses about this sanctuary? First of all looking at the beginning of **verse 2** we see the word "**tabernacle.**" This helps us to understand exactly what specific Old Covenant earthly sanctuary this author had in mind when he wrote these verses. It would appear that this author when he wrote these verses was thinking about the first Old Covenant sanctuary of Israel, that tent like structure that had been erected in the wilderness, based on the instructions given in the Law in **Exodus 25-30.**

Based on those instructions we know that this tabernacle was encompassed by a courtyard that measured 150 long by 75 feet wide, which in turn was marked off by a fence of white linen, which had one single opening on the east side, that measured 30 feet wide.

When a worshiper entered, through this opening that contained the tabernacle, he would have immediately encountered "**the altar of burnt Offering**", a large bronze altar, 7 1/2 feet square, 4 1/2 feet off the ground, with a bronze horn on each of its corners where animals, waiting to be sacrificed would be tied. This is what a worshiper entering through that opening would have immediately encountered.

This altar was as far as a layman could come. And it was at this place that the worshiper would lay his hands on the head of his "sin offering" just prior to that sin offering being sacrificed by a priest (Leviticus 1:4).

And then what was behind this bronze altar? Behind the altar and a little to the right stood "**the bronze laver.**" This was a washbasin for the exclusive use of the priests.

And then what was behind the laver? The tabernacle was behind this laver or in other words this tent like structure that served as Israel's first Old Covenant sanctuary, was behind this laver.

And what were the dimensions of this tabernacle? It was 15 feet in height and 15 feet in width and forty-five feet long.

And how many rooms did it have? It had two rooms. There was the "outer one" referenced in **verse 2** and which was called "**the holy place.**" And then there was the second room that could only be accessed through "**the holy place,**" which was referenced in **verse 3** and that was called "**the holy of holies.**" These two rooms were not the same size. "The Holy Place" or in other words the outer room was twice the size of the inner room or in other words "The Holy of Holies."

So what was inside these two rooms? In the outer room or in other words in "the holy place" there were a couple of different items according to **verse 2**. There was the "**lampstand**" that according to the Law was on the left side of the room and was made of solid gold with three branches coming out each side with one branch in the middle for a total of seven branches. The author also told us in **verse 2** that there was a "**table**" and "**the sacred bread.**" This table according to the Law was 3 feet long, 1 1/2 feet wide, and 2 1/4 feet high covered with gold and was on the right side of the room. And what was on the table? "**The sacred bread**" was on the table or in other words the twelve loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel were on the table.

Now it would it appear from our text that this was all that there was in this outer room. But this would not be so. There was one more thing. And what was this other thing? It was "**the golden altar of incense**" that was positioned just outside the second veil leading into the Holies of Holies. And how do we know this? We know this because **Exodus 30:6** makes this very clear.

But this is not where the author of Hebrews placed it. So where did the author of Hebrews place the "**the golden altar of incense?**" He placed it, according to **Hebrews 9:4**, in the "inner room" or in other words, he placed it in the "Holy of Holies."

So how do we revolve this problem? This is how: In a spiritual sense the altar of incense actually was said to stand "**before the Lord**" in **Leviticus 16:12** and "**before the ark of the testimony**" in **Exodus 40:5**. So how could these passages represent the altar of incense in this way, if the altar of incense was NOT in fact in the Holy of Holies but rather in the Holy place just inside the second veil? These passages were able to represent the altar of incense in this way, most likely because, the altar of incense was just in front

of the veil that separated "the holy place" from "the holy of holies" and therefore when that veil was opened on the Day of Atonement it was as if spiritually speaking the altar of incense had been joined to the Holy of Holies.

And I believe this is why the author placed the "altar of incense" in the Holy of Holies rather than in the "holy place." In other words this author was not emphasizing where it was physically connected on the Day of Atonement but where it was spiritually connected on the Day of Atonement.

And what was so significant about these pieces of furniture in the Holy place? Because the lampstand, the table of showbread and altar of incense, like the Old Covenant sanctuary, were all shadows of the New Covenant reality. They were all profoundly prophetic of Christ, our great heavenly high priest who is not only our light represented by the lampstand (John 1:4,5,8:12), our food as represented by the bread (John 6:35ff), but also our intercessor as represented by the altar of incense.

But the author didn't stop there. He went on to speak of what was in the inner room or in other words the Holy of Holies.

And what did he tell us was in that room as we continue to read **verse 4** and through **verse 5**. He told us that the "**Ark of the covenant**" was in that room. And what did he tell us about this "**ark?**" He told us that it was "**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 (5) and above it were the cherubim of glory (or in other words angelic creatures of glory) overshadowing the mercy seat (or in other words the lid that covered the box or in other words the 'ark' that contained the items that he had listed).**"

And how did he conclude this section? He concluded this section by telling his readers that he did not in effect have the time to talk about these things in further detail. So what did the author do next?

The author then described the priestly **service** aspect of the Old Covenant Sanctuary (Hebrews 9:6,7).

The author first of all talked about the priestly service aspect that took place in the first room. Let me read for you **verse 6**, “**Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle (or in other words ‘the holy place’) performing divine worship.**”

So what would the priests do in this room? The priests would be coming in daily to offer up incense on the golden altar both morning and evening and at the same time the candlestick would be tended to both morning and evening (Exodus 30:7,8). And in addition to this the 12 loaves of bread on the table would be changed out once a week (Leviticus 24:5-8). So obviously the priestly service in this room was very active.

But this certainly was not the case with the inner most room or in other words "the Holy of Holies."

The ministry in this room was far more restricted as this author pointed out in **verse 7** because first of all only the high priest could enter it. Secondly, he could only do so once a year on the Day of Atonement and thirdly, he had to bring blood as offering for both his sins and the sins of the people. And this is all detailed for us in **verse 7**.

And what was the specific kind of sin that this blood offering was meant to atone for according to **verse 7**? The sins committed in ignorance, or in other words unintentional sins. All other sins, or in other words intentional sins could not be atoned for under the Old Covenant sacrificial system.

So after the author detailed the priestly service aspect of the Old Covenant sanctuary in **verses 6-8** what did the author do next?

The author concluded by highlighting the deeper **significance** of what he had just highlighted as revealed by the Spirit about the Old Covenant offerings (Hebrews 9:8-10). So what was that deeper significance?

The Old Covenant offerings could not provide access to God (Hebrews 9:8). So now let me read for you **verse 8** and what does it say? It says this, "**The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place (or in other words into the place that God dwells) has not yet been disclosed while the outer room is still standing**" or in other words, the inner room

cannot be accessed as long as the outer room continued to block the way into the inner room even in spite of the offerings of the priests under the Old Covenant.

So this was the first thing that the author believed the Spirit was highlighting based on what he had presented about the Old Covenant Sanctuary. So what was the second thing? This was the second thing:

The Old Covenant offerings could not make one **acceptable** to God (Hebrews 9:9-10). Let me read for you **Hebrews 9:9-10 "which** (referring to the 2 room tabernacle under the Old Covenant) **is a symbol for the present time"** (or in other words at the time this epistle was written. And what was it a symbol of at that particular time? Let us continue to read. And what does it say? It says this, "**Accordingly** (pointing back to the that 2-room tabernacle and the priestly service that took place in it and in conjunction with that author goes on to say ...) **both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience (10) since they relate only to food and drink, and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.**"

The author pointing back to the symbol of that 2-room tabernacle and the priestly service that took place in it and in conjunction with it, was in effect telling them that it could never get rid of their guilt associated with their sin for that system was never designed to do that.

That time of cleansing waited for a different time or other words "**the time of reformation.**" And what would that have been referring to? It would have been referring to the time when Christ offered Himself up as the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

The Old Covenant Sanctuary both in terms of its physical aspect as well as its priestly service aspect were meaningful and purposeful, in fact very purposeful. But they were limited, imperfect and temporary, and therefore ultimately unsatisfactory. They pictured Christ and His priestly ministry but they could not do the work of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

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May God give us the grace as we reflect on the Old Covenant sanctuary to be reminded of the Superiority of Christ's New Covenant high priestly ministry and **offering**.