

Text: Heb 9.1-5

I've called our message this time:

The Obsolescence of the Old Place of Worship

I've been wrestling with how to deal with our new passage in Heb 9 all week. The whole argument goes from verse 1 to verse 15, but that's a lot of information to cover in just one week, at least for me it is.

Consequently, we will break up the material.

However, how do you break it up without losing the point? That is my dilemma.

Let's read the passage to show you what I mean:

Read Heb 9.1-15

1. The author discusses the tabernacle in 1-5
2. The author discusses the priestly worship in 6-10
3. The author discusses the appearance of Jesus in 11-15

(rough outline)

In Hebrews, we are constantly comparing and contrasting the Old Testament with the New.

Most recently, we looked at the New Covenant in Heb 8. The chapter ends with this statement:

Heb 8.13 When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Then comes our passage.

The things that are ready to disappear:

The tabernacle [temple]

The priestly worship

The new statement: Jesus appeared, made everything obsolete

So, today we are going to limit our discussion to the tabernacle and talk about its obsolescence, and what that means for us and our relationship to God.

Until Jesus came, there was no way to come close to God except through the means supplied by the Old Covenant. That meant the tabernacle, and later, the temple.

The New Covenant makes the Old Place obsolete.

Proposition: The new way into the Holy Place is not through proper use of furniture, but through proper relationship to a Person.

I. Complex literary structure mirrors complex worship practices

A note on the outline: a little complex and convoluted, reflecting my thinking

A. Hebrew love of parallel thoughts (and chiasms)

1. The big chiasm (1-10):

Divine worship (1a)

Earthly sanctuary (1b)

Expansion on the sanctuary (2-5)

Expansion on the worship (6-10)

2. The little chiasm [chiasm within a chiasm] (2-5)

The first tent and its furniture (2a)

First tent called the Holy Place (2b)

Second tent called the Holy of holies (3)

The second tent and its furniture (4-5)

These parallelisms reflect the ordered, meditative approach of a Hebrew mind — a characteristic of Hebrew writers.

But also a characteristic of devout Hebrew worship – they think much about what God gave them through Moses.

Don't recall where I read this, but it has been said the Psalms are a meditation on the Law — the devout Hebrew thinking about what God gave them through Moses.

B. The Greek “on the one hand” and “on the other hand” construction

1. A feature of Hebrews, pops up all the time in the text

2. Usually the “on the one hand” occurs, and within the same verse, or maybe by the next verse or two the “on the other hand” shows up
 - a. There is an example in v. 6: “on the one hand, priests”
 - b. And then v. 7: “on the other hand, the high priest”
3. In our text, the indicator for “on the one hand” occurs in v. 1 (untranslated in English versions)
4. However, where do we find the corresponding “on the other hand”?
 - a. The correct indicator occurs at the beginning of vv. 5, 7, 11
 - b. The problem for v. 5: a continuation of the description but not a contrast
 - c. The same problem in v. 7
 - d. Which brings us to v. 11: “but [on the other hand] when Christ appeared”

This is the point of the passage – the Old things are obsolete, the New thing [Jesus] is the relevant thing

We can learn from the old things, but we want to be focused on the new thing.

C. To restate my point: “Complex literary structure mirrors complex worship practices”

1. The author gives us a complex literary structure
2. This highlights/emphasizes the complexity of the Old religion, and in the first 5 vv., the complexity of the Old place of worship

II. Physical worship implements limit successful worship experience

A. The point of worship:

1. Access to the Holy Place, where God is
2. Everyone has a consciousness of unworthiness and uncleanness
3. That’s why some sort of religious practice attracts men
4. Man wants to connect with “a higher power” to feel “right” [righteous]

5. Even atheists religiously experience their atheism for the same kind of transcendence (they find “rightness” in their smug superiority over lesser beings)

Note the attitude of Richard Dawkins in a debate with Ayaan Hirsi Ali on Unherd

B. The orderliness of the tabernacle

1. The first tabernacle (“first” translated “outer”) (2)

- a. Tabernacle oriented facing east (door)
- b. On the south side of the 20 cubit by 10 cubit by 10 cubit high tent was the lampstand

A cubit can be anywhere from 17.5 to 20.5 inches long (see Answers in Genesis)

- c. On the north side was the table of shewbread (with the shewbread, twelve loaves)
- d. The name of this tabernacle is “the Holy place”

2. The second tabernacle (3-5)

a. A few notes

- 1) Notice that the text describes the tabernacle as if it is two tabernacles, but really one tent divided by a curtain
- 2) The second tabernacle defined by the “second curtain” (3)

Presumably, the “first curtain” is the door to the holy place, on the east side

- 3) The second tabernacle is called the “Holy of holies” — symbolic of the presence of God

b. The furnishings (and some problems)

- 1) The altar of incense [plain reading appears to be inside H of h]
 - a) OT makes clear this is in the holy place
 - i) Commentaries freak out!
 - ii) Many suggestions, since doctrine of inspiration means no errors

b) Note the sentence structure:

i) Subject: second veil

ii) Action: the second veil “has” a golden altar of incense

c) In the OT, the altar of incense is on the “west wall” of the holy place, *i.e.* the “second curtain”

d) The ark of the covenant is on the other side of the “second curtain,” basically back to back with curtain between

e) The second curtain has the altar and the ark

2) The ark of the covenant is the focal point of the Holy of holies

3) Additional furnishings

a) Golden jar of manna

b) Aaron’s rod that budded

c) Stone tables of the law

c. Final item, the cherubim on the lid of the ark: the mercy seat

1) This is the “throne of God” symbolically

2) This is where the blood of the atonement is sprinkled once a year

C. The author “can’t speak of these things in detail” [because much more could be said]

1. Many interpreters want to speak of these things in detail (and spiritualize them) — an example:

“The author concludes v. 5 with the observation that he does not have the time to go into further detail concerning these things. The meaning is something akin to ‘this is not the time to go into detail about this.’ Semantically, this statement functions to highlight the following paragraph beginning with v. 6. Aquinas’s treatment of Heb 9:1–5 highlights the extent to which he was willing to go to allegorize the Scripture. He likens the first tabernacle as a ‘figure’ of the Old Testament and the second tabernacle as a figure of the New Testament.

He then suggests ‘in another way’ that the first tabernacle is the present church and the second is heavenly glory. Christ is compared to the table of the presence, the 12 loaves to the doctrine of the 12 apostles, and the two cherubim of the ark of the covenant as the Old and New testaments ‘looking upon Christ.’ The reformers Luther and Calvin were at pains to correct such hermeneutical nonsense, though they occasionally fell into similar traps themselves.”¹

2. The trap of making much of trappings

- a. As we’ve said, the point of worship is to overcome our weakness and sin by connecting to the holy
- b. Many ancient Jews missed the point the tabernacle taught, and made the tabernacle [temple] and its trappings the point of contact [rather than a personal relationship with God]
- c. The liturgical traditional religion of Christendom has misapplied the OT in the many magnificent cathedrals, as if you connect best to God in such places
- d. The Mormons likewise have magnificent “temples” that bring them in contact, supposedly, with God

This is a trap. Traditionally, Baptists have plain chapels, with little adornment: we connect to God through a relationship with Christ, not a place.

III. Appearance of Jesus allows believers into the presence of God

- A. On the one hand, we have the tabernacle (1-5), but on the other hand, “Christ appeared” (11)
 1. We will have more to say about this later, but this is our thesis: we have access to God through Jesus
 2. This access brings us right into the “Holy of holies” — we bypass the furniture

¹ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 462.

3. Consider the things “we” have through Christ (Rm 5.1-11)
 - a. We have peace with God (1)
 - b. We have entered into grace by faith (2)
 - c. We stand in that grace (2)
 - d. We exult in the glory of God (2)
 - e. We even exult in present tribulations (3-5)
 - f. We *shall be* saved from wrath (9)
 - g. We *shall be* saved by his life (10)
 - h. We have now received the reconciliation (11)

For all this, when a believer prays, he doesn't go to a special place, he doesn't go talk to a priest, he simply calls on God and is immediately in the Holy of holies, spiritually in the very presence of God, making his requests known to his father.

- B. But the complexity of the Old, though obsolete, speaks to us about the reality of the present
 1. God is still interested in holiness.
 2. Right and wrong are still right and wrong.
 3. In the Old Covenant, earthly things could not really wash away sin (nor can baptism do so in the New). [notice how in v. 1 of our text, the tabernacle is an “earthly” tabernacle — lit, “of the world”]
 4. The New Covenant changes your heart towards holiness
 - a. OT Question: What do I need to do to be holy?
 - b. NT Question: Why do you not want to be holy?

(If you don't want to be holy, are you born again?)

Conclusion:

Proposition: The new way into the Holy Place is not through proper use of furniture, but through proper relationship to a Person.

Do you know the person of Jesus Christ?

Do you love what he loves?

Or are you interested in finding out what part of the world you can “get by with” and still be “ok with Jesus”?