

The Limitations Of The Old Covenant

Hebrews 9:1-10

Introduction

The reoccurring word in Hebrews is “better than”. The Lord Jesus is “better than” the prophets (1:1-3); better than the angels (1:4-2:18); Moses (3:1-18); Joshua (4:1-13); the High Priest (4:4-6:12); Abraham (6:13-7:10); Melchizedek (7:1-10); Aaron and priests (7:11-8:6) and Sacrifices (8:7-10:39). Why is Jesus a better priest? God made Jesus a priest after the order of Melchizedek (chapter 7) and that priesthood is administered under a superior covenant, the New and the everlasting covenant (chapter 8). Now in chapter 9 we see that Jesus exercises His priestly duty from a better sanctuary. The author gives five reasons why the Old Covenant Sanctuary in all of its beauty and splendor and glory was still less—still inferior to the New Covenant Sanctuary.

1. The Old Covenant Sanctuary is worldly of this earth on the earth (v.1).
2. The Old Covenant Sanctuary is a mere shadow of things to come (vv.2-5).
3. The Old Covenant Sanctuary had a very limited access to the people (vv.6-7).
4. The Old Covenant Sanctuary was temporary (v.8).
5. The Old Covenant Sanctuary was ineffective in changing the heart (vv.9-10).

The writer will contrast the earthly sanctuary (vv.1-10) with the heavenly sanctuary (vv.11-15). The writer will give us information about this earthly sanctuary which will serve as an illustration of the limitation and weakness of the earthly tabernacle—it could not cleanse the human heart!

The Old Earth Bound Covenant (v.1)

Hebrews 9:1–10 (NKJV) Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

The expression “earthly sanctuary” means man made. The Lord instructed Moses about its pattern and construction but in the end it was made from materials that were brought by the Jewish people.

Moses was given the pattern to build the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Later a more permanent Tabernacle would be built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Both were laid out according to Divine Instructions and Heavenly specifications.

What was the value of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and the Temple? They were divinely appointed. The services were to be carried out under God’s divine direction and instructions.

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But it was still man made.

Many Jews believed that the Temple was proof of God's favor and God's presence.

The Old Shadow Of Things To Come (vv.2-5)

2For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary;

We are given a glimpse into the Old Tabernacle in the Wilderness. "the first part" (here and v.6) refer to the first part or the first section of the tabernacle also known as the holy place.

A tabernacle was prepared; and the articles of furniture are described.

1. The Seven Armed Golden Menorah with oil burning lamps.
2. The Table of showbread; twelve cakes of bread; or the bread of the Presence.
3. The Golden Alter of Incense, on which the Holy Incense burned morning and evening.

The pure gold menorah was to be kept burning from "evening till morning, continually" (Lev. 24:3). The consecrated showbread was placed on the table; one for each tribe; it was changed weekly on the Sabbath and the priests were allowed to eat the old bread (Lev.24:5-9). This table was made of acacia wood and then overlaid with pure gold (Ex.25:23-24).

Jesus is the light. Jesus is the Bread that came down from heaven. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb that is offered on the altar and sacrifice. Jesus is the incense that ascends into heaven.

What does all of this mean? The furniture meant something—and was kept in the outer room—which led to the veil which divided the inner sanctuary from the outer sanctuary.

The place was called *hagia* (*neuter plural of the adjective hagios*); we might think of these as precincts—or areas of increasing holiness. One was called the Holy Place and the other was called The Most Holy Place. These two rooms comprised one building—called the Sanctuary.

3and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All,

A thick veil separated the holy place from the most holy place.

4which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;

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What is this? Two more pieces of furniture. In this most holy place was a golden censer or the golden altar of incense and the gold covered ark of the covenant. Like the Table of Showbread—the Ark of the Covenant was made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. The dimensions are described in the Bible as 2 1/2 cubits long and 1 1/2 in both height and length. A cubit in ancient times is thought to be about 18 inches but some scholars argue whether the actual length may have been different in the times of Moses. The Egyptian royal cubit was 20.62 inches. This calculation would mean the Ark was 51 inches by 31 inches by 31 inches or 1.3 meters by .8 meters by .8 meters.

Inside the ark were treasures of the past; the golden jar of manna, Aaron's budding staff, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

We discover in the Scriptures that when Solomon built the Temple about 940 B.C. the only things in the Ark were the tables of stone (1 Kings 8:9). What happened to the jar of manna and Aaron's budding staff—is anyone's guess.

5and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

The author speaks of the golden cherubim of glory overshadowed the mercy seat. They are described as having the face of a human with wings and bodies of animals.

One of the great mysteries of all time is what happened to the Ark of the Covenant? Where is it? Some have suggested that it was hidden during the time of the Jewish Revolt and perhaps stashed in one of the hundreds of limestone tunnels underneath the Temple Mount. Some cite the passage in the Matthew's Gospel; "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split" (Matthew 27:51). Some suggest that Matthew's citation of the rocks splitting—carries no explanation.

The Old Access (vv.6-7)

6Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.

The author shifts emphasis from the items of worship to the nature of worship.

Only the priests had access to a certain part of the tabernacle and only the high priest had access to the holiest of all.

7But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;

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In a helpful little booklet entitled “Hebrews Covenants in Contrast” Gene Fadeley writes;

The nature of the old worship showed its shortcomings. It had common priests serving daily in the Holy Place and each year the imperfect high priest would enter the Most Holy Place. Each year, he would first kill a bull for his own sins and those of his family. He carried the fire and incense into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it seven times around the ark. He then killed one goat as a sin offering for the people. He carried the blood of the goat into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the people. The people would anxiously await his return from the Most Holy Place. His return would signal to the people that God had accepted the sacrifice. He would then send the scapegoat away into the wilderness signifying that their sins were carried away” (p.41; second printing; 2000).

What’s different now? The heavenly sanctuary is available, accessible to all through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Temporary (v.8)

8The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.

The veil or the curtain (v.3 and here) reminded people that access to God was not yet open.

When Jesus died on Calvary’s Cross the curtain or veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom! The irony is that the religious leaders either sewed the curtain back together or installed a new curtain.

The Old Ineffective For Changing Hearts (vv.9-10)

9It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—

While the veil or curtain remained the sanctuary was divided between the holy and the most holy place. This veil was a symbol a picture of God’s relationship between Himself and His people Israel. When Jesus died the veil was torn and the need for an earthly sanctuary abolished. The need for an future sacrifice abolished.

The service of the Old Tabernacle system was “symbolic for the present time”—a temporary picture; a momentary glimpse; an imperfect picture that pointed to a more perfect picture. Jesus is the perfect picture. The Old Tabernacle system was the symbol and the person and work of Jesus is the substance.

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The KJV translates this “Which was a figure of the time then present”; it comes as a surprise to note the Greek word is (*parabole*) —to place side by side—compare—illustration—

Gifts and sacrifices were offered. But even those gifts and sacrifices could never make those who offered the gifts and sacrifices “perfect in regard to the conscience”.

What is the passage saying? These gifts and sacrifices could not provide complete cleansing, complete remission. The evidence? The people retained a guilty conscience. They were not free from the guilt of sin.

What about those earlier offerings? Day after Day and Feast after Feast and Celebration after Celebration the offerings were made. But the rivers of blood could not cleanse the hearts and consciences of the Priests or the People.

What did the Old Covenant really provide? It fell short in every category. What does the New Covenant provide? It is adequate, sufficient, super sufficient. Because of the limits and inadequacies of the Old it was absolutely imperative that the New be believed and embraced.

Are you free from the guilt of your sin?

10concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

What do foods and drinks and various washings all have in common? They are visible and external. What are these fleshly or carnal ordinances? These are the rituals and these are the ceremonies that dealt with the externals but had no power to reach into the soul and cleanse forever! They were temporary acts—always pointing to the future—to Jesus—pointing to the much needed grace of God in the Son of God that would require a Cross.

The word translated ‘reformation’ is interesting. It is the Greek word (*diorthosis—only here*) comes from a verb (*diorthosis*) “set on the right path” here possibly new order (NIV)—the New Order that replaces the Old Order found in the Mosaic Law.

Will a man made Temple or religious ritual or religious ceremony make you acceptable to God? If you go to the right Cathedral and participate in the right ritual or participate in the right ceremony will that make you make you acceptable to God?

Approaching God with gifts and sacrifices never made a single man or woman acceptable to God. Such acts deal with the physical, the material, the temporal. They cannot remove guilt. They cannot make sin go away.

Only Jesus can set you on the right path. The great day of reformation—the day when the material becomes spiritual—the day when the natural becomes supernatural—the day when the

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temporal becomes eternal and food and drink and water and worship and rule and regulation becomes something else—Jesus our food and drink. Jesus our well of eternal water. Jesus our rule and regulation!

The shadows—the externals—the faint copies—become real. No wonder religion leaves the soul empty and the spirit unsatisfied. No wonder religion leaves the soul unassured.

No wonder Jesus warned the religious leaders; “The Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is tight by the precept of men” (Isaiah 29:13). Do you honor God with your lips but your heart is far away? Did you really think that friendship with God was food and drink and water and denominational worship—rather than Spirit filled Worship. They that worship God must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

Only Jesus can make you acceptable to God.

Conclusion

We sometimes fall into the trap of valuing the religious symbol more than the righteous substance.

We live in a world where even Christians seem to value entertainment more than serious instruction.

Three men were marooned on a desert island. Suddenly a genie appeared and said, “What would you like to have? Any wish is yours.” One man said, “I miss my family in Colorado”—and whoosh he was gone. The second man said, “I miss my brokerage firm in Boston and I wish I could go back to work” and whoosh he was gone. Then the third man said, “I’m lonely, I miss my friends, I wish they were back.”

So many people are stuck on a religious island. They miss their religion. Jesus has never seemed to satisfy them. They have a golden menorah but no light. They have fresh bread from the oven but no bread from heaven. They swing their censor of incense but their prayers are never heard. Jesus is the light. Jesus is our bread from heaven. Jesus is the reason are prayers can be heard.