

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #16

Hebrews 9:1-10

I have often heard it said in a variety of contexts that “it is not what you know, but who you know.” I must admit there are certainly situations where that is very true. For example, on more than one occasion, I have been graciously invited to attend some pro-sports athletic events - baseball, football, hockey and basketball. At various times, I have had the privilege of having access to some high-dollar seats, not because of who I am, but because of who I am with. I have sat in skybox seats, not because of what I know, but because of who I know.

When it comes to our having access to God, it is not so much what we know as who we know. If we are in a relationship with Jesus Christ, we have an amazing access to God. This access to God is only something Jesus Christ can give us. No priest under the O.T. law could even begin to give sinful people access to God, like Jesus Christ.

Now having access to God was no light matter. What is absolutely amazing to observe from a careful analysis of Scripture, is that there are only two main O.T. chapters in Scripture devoted to God’s amazing work of creation (Genesis 1-2) but there are about fifty chapters in the Scripture devoted to the sacred tabernacle and its worship. **Obviously God wanted people thinking very seriously about the possibility of having access to Him.**

In O.T. times access to God was highly regulated and it was a very complex regimented system. No one, not even the greatest human high priest, could have access to God any time he wanted, and he certainly could not take other people in with him and give them access to God like he had once a year. But Jesus Christ could and did change all of that and that is the point of this part of Hebrews.

What the writer is interested in doing is showing us that the Priesthood ministry of Jesus Christ is far superior to the Levitical priesthood and Levitical system in giving us access to God. In **chapter 7** we saw that the Priesthood of Jesus Christ was far superior to the O.T. law. In **chapter 8** we saw that the Priesthood ministry of Jesus Christ guarantees us a better covenant. In **chapter 9** we see that the Priesthood ministry of Jesus Christ guarantees us access into a better sanctuary. Jesus Christ can get us direct access to God. The point is:

JESUS CHRIST IS GOD’S SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST REDEEMER, BECAUSE HE MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR ALL TO HAVE A SUPERIOR GRACE ACCESS TO GOD WHICH NO O.T. PRIEST OR O.T. TABERNACLE COULD EVER GIVE.

What Jesus Christ offers under the new covenant of grace far supersedes anything a priest could give under the old covenant of the law. Jesus Christ makes it possible for a much better relationship with God and a much better system of worship than the O.T. law could ever offer. What this writer does is compare the first covenant that occurred in the O.T. tabernacle with the second covenant that is offered by Jesus Christ. **In these verses there are two main O.T. descriptions and one main N.T. application.**

DESCRIPTION #1 – The description of the Divine worship in the earthly tent sanctuary.
9:1-5

In **verse 1** we learn that the first Mosaic Law covenant featured an earthly sanctuary, and very important regulations had to be followed in order to worship God. The first covenant had an earthly sanctuary with highly regulated worship.

The word “worship” (λατρεία) specifically has to do with Divine worship, which has as its objective to worship and serve God (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 265). So if one were to worship God, one had to follow these regulations. Worship was not some free-for-all expression of emotions, but it was regulated in close connection with the “earthly sanctuary.”

The first word of **verse 2** in the Greek text is the word “tabernacle” (σκηνη) which specifically refers to the tent tabernacle constructed in the time of Moses as opposed to the Temple which was standing in Jerusalem (*Ibid.*, p. 408). It was basically a large oblong tent.

It is more than just a coincidence that the writer uses the illustration of the “tabernacle/tent” and not the Temple because the Temple was stationary and the tabernacle was not. **The earthly “tabernacle/tent” was temporal and transitory as opposed to being eternal and permanent.** When God led Israel out of Egypt, He established a temporary dwelling tabernacle or tent, which was a place where people could have access to Him. By virtue of the fact it was a tent with stakes driven into sand, shows that this was not a permanent structure. **This, of course, is the intended purpose of the illustration; to contrast the limitations and temporality of O.T. law worship with the eternal N.T. grace worship offered by Jesus Christ.**

So the first thing the writer of Hebrews wants to inform us is that under the O.T. law, in order to have access to God, people must follow the highly regulated rules pertaining to the tent/tabernacle, which was the place where people worshipped God and had access to God.

The O.T. law tent where people worshipped God was known by four different names:
1) Tabernacle (Exodus 25:9); 2) Tent of Meeting (Exodus 35:21); 3) The Tabernacle of the Testimony (Exodus 38:21); 4) The Tent of the Testimony (Numbers 9:15).

The tabernacle tent that was first set up at Mount Sinai was something God specifically revealed to Moses under the O.T. law. The blueprints for the construction and worship are found in Exodus 25-40. It was to be built to prescribed specifications. It was a tent-like structure surrounded by a courtyard. The courtyard featured north and south walls that were 100 cubits long and east and west walls that were 50 cubits wide (Ex. 27:9-19; 38:9-20). A cubit was about 18 inches which means that the entire enclosed tent complex area was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 7.6 feet high.

The actual tent/tabernacle proper (Ex. 26:1-37; 36:8-38) was located inside the tabernacle boundaries. It was 45 feet long by 15 feet wide (Ex. 26:7-8). There were two rooms inside this tent. There was the outer room, called the Holy Place, where only priests were allowed. There was an inner room, called the Holiest Place or Holy of Holies, where only the high priest could enter once a year. Outside of the tabernacle was a courtyard and in the courtyard stood an altar where the sacrifices were offered and also a bronze wash basin or laver.

Now the writer of Hebrews does not spend time in the outer courtyard area, but immediately goes inside the tent to point out some specific items. What is very intriguing to see is that when we go through the book of Exodus and then look at this text, instructions are first given for articles of furniture and not the house. When most places are built, you have the blueprints for the main structure first and then you select the furniture. **But what we see when it comes to God, these items become the crux of access to Him.** The tent or tabernacle contained these furniture items and it was these furniture items that gave people access to God.

There were a total of seven items of furniture that existed in the tabernacle of which the writer mentions five:

- 1) The golden ark of the covenant*
- 2) The mercy seat*
- 3) The golden altar of incense*
- 4) The table of shewbread*
- 5) The golden lampstand*
- 6) The bronze laver or wash basin
- 7) The altar of bronze

In these verses the writer carefully selects two parts to the earthly tent/tabernacle to show what was involved in having access to God. **His ultimate purpose, as verse 11 states, is to show the superiority of Jesus Christ is giving us worshipful access to God under the new covenant of grace (verse 15).**

Tent/Tabernacle Part #1 - Room #1 - the outer part of the tent/tabernacle - the Holy Place.
9:2

Now the writer presents two key facts pertaining to the outer part:

(Fact #1) - There was the lampstand. **9:2a**

The lampstand was located on the south side of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:35; 40:24). It was a seventy-five pound solid gold lampstand that had a central shaft with six branches which extended from its main stand, three on one side and three on the other side (Ex. 25:32). It is interesting that in the outer courtyard bronze is used, but once you get into the tent, gold is predominant and two items were made from pure gold - the lampstand and the mercy seat. The blueprint for this lampstand is given in Exodus 25:31-40. Seven lamps sat on top of the golden stand that burned with olive oil.

Its primary purpose was to give light and also to reveal that it is God who gives light to people allowing them to even see anything connected to Him. This is a perfect symbol of Jesus Christ who is the true light that comes into the world (John 1:9). We don't need the lampstand to have the light of God; we have Jesus Christ who is the true light of God.

(Fact #2) - There was the table and sacred bread. **9:2b**

On the north side of the outer wall was a small wooden table overlaid with gold (Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16; 26:35; 40:22). Every Sabbath day twelve fresh loaves of bread were to be set on the table in two rows, six in each row, as a lasting covenant before the Lord (Leviticus 24:5-8). Those twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Later these loaves would be eaten by the high priest and his sons as part of their share of the offerings (Ex. 24:9). The primary purpose of this is to reveal that it is God who is able to meet the needs of His covenant nation. This pictures God's "sustenance, provision and supply" for His people. He is a God who will always provide for His own.

Of course one question immediately would come to our minds and that would be, what about Gentiles? There doesn't seem to be any provision here for sinful people like us. This Mosaic system had specifically to do with Israel and it didn't even get too many of the Israelites into a close relationship with God. But now Jesus Christ not only offers us salvation, but also all of the blessings of God. He gives us access to all of the benefits and provisions of God for His people. You and I, under this new grace system, have access to all of the provisions and sustenance of God that the nation once had.

Part #2 - Room #2 - the inner part of the tabernacle - the Holy of Holies. **9:3-5**

Inside the tabernacle was a second veil called the Holy of Holies.

(Fact #1) - There was the golden altar of incense . **9:4a**

There are two altars in the tabernacle area - one was the altar of bronze and the other was the altar of gold. The first altar of bronze deals with sinners and the second altar of gold deals with saints. The altar of gold has to do with holiness and the altar of bronze has to do with sin .

Now the golden altar of incense actually sat just outside of the Holy of Holies as one was going to enter. It initially appears when you read **verses 3-4** that it is sitting inside the Holy of Holies. It actually sat directly in front of the inner veil that covered the entrance into this sacred place. The point is easily explained by the participle "having" which begins **verse 4**. The Greek participle "having" (εχουσα) means to continually have to do or to continually be involved with something. What this grammatically means is that the golden altar of incense does not actually sit in the Holy of Holies, but its purpose continually has to do with it. As W. H. Griffith Thomas said, it has a close connection to having access to God (*Let Us Go On*, p. 109).

This was key place in having access to God. It was a small wooden altar overlaid with gold (Ex. 30:1, 3, 6). The purpose of this altar was not to offer a sacrifice for sin, but to burn incense as a sweet aroma of praise and thanksgiving from a grateful people. Twice a day Aaron and his successor burned incense on this altar (Ex. 30.7-8). It is Jesus Christ who has made it possible for us to praise God and worship God.

Through the work of Jesus Christ, we not only have access to God, but we are a praise to God.

(Fact #2) - There was the ark of the covenant. **9:4b-f**

Inside the holy place was “the ark of the covenant,” which is sometimes called “the ark of the testimony” (Ex. 25:22). The writer points out four main features:

Feature #1 - It was covered with gold. **9:4c**

The ark was a wooden chest overlaid inside and out with pure gold (Ex. 25:10-11). This speaks of the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ, humanity, and Deity inseparable forever.

Feature #2 - It contained a golden jar with manna. **9:4d**

This clearly spoke of God providing life for His people (Ex. 16:33-34).

Feature #3 - It contained Aaron’s rod. **9:4e**

This also contained Aaron’s staff that had budded (Num. 17:10). This spoke of the continual ministry of the high priest in behalf of the people.

Feature #4 - It contained the written Word of God. **9:4f**

This contained the two stone tablets on which God had written His commandments (Ex. 24:12; 25:16). This spoke of the significance of God’s Word in regard to His people having access to Him.

(Fact #3) - Above the ark were the cherubim. **9:5a**

Two cherubim were representative of high-ranking angels who were parallel to each other, with their heads facing each other and their wings spread upward (Ex. 25:20). Having access to God is serious heavenly business.

(Fact #4) - The cherubim overshadowed the mercy seat. **9:5b**

It is interesting that the writer says, I am not going to speak in great detail about these things right now, which means he could have if he had wanted to. What this means is that a great exposition of the O.T. tabernacle matters did not bear on the point he was making.

I have heard many preachers who don’t seem to understand this point. They ramble and tell stories that have no value as far as understanding a text. They need more of the mindset of the writer of Hebrews.

The covering of the mercy seat means a couple of things: 1) The mercy seat was protected; 2) The mercy seat was limited. The mercy of God was not open to just any one at any time. That is the point.

The point the writer of Hebrews is making here is that it was impossible for some average sinner to get into this sacred place and have access to God. Only priests were permitted in these areas; and as far as the Holy of Holies, only one high priest went in one time a year. No sinner like you and me had access to God under law, but Jesus Christ gives us that under grace.

DESCRIPTION #2 – The description of the priests' service in the earthly sanctuary. **9:6-7**

Now after the tabernacle had been carefully prepared, the human priests went to work.

Action #1 - The priests continually enter the outer part for Divine worship. **9:6**

This verse right here proves that the Mosaic Law could not even get the priests into a real close relationship with God. As S. L. Johnson said concerning the O.T. system, these priests could get close but not real close (*Hebrews* 9:1-10, p. 8). Now the priests were always in the outer area performing their duties for worship. They were involved in “endless repetition” that as Herschel Hobbs said “seemed to lead nowhere” (*Studies in Hebrews*, p. 82). Nothing permanent was ever accomplished by the O.T. priests. There was no permanence to having any access to God.

Action #2 - The high priest enters the inner part once a year. **9:7**

Only one priest a year had access to God on the Day of Atonement which was the tenth day of the seventh month of the year (Lev. 16:29). Only one person a year could have intimate access to God and actually be in His presence one day a year. He was the high priest and not the average sinner from the streets. For the first time in Hebrews we come to the critical noun “blood” used in a context of access to God. This word was used in 2:14 in speaking of the humanity of Jesus Christ, but starting here this is critical for access to God (9:12 (twice), 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25; 10:4, 19, 29; 11:28; 12:4, 24). **It is only Christ's blood that gives sinners access to God.**

Leviticus 16 graphically describes the process. The high priest had to wash himself, put on linen garments, bring two goats and present them before the Lord, and cast a lot to see which goat died and which one went free. Then he took a bull and sacrificed it for his own sins and those in his own house, and then he took a censer of burning coals from off the altar, with sweet incense and the blood of a bullock, and he went in through the veil into the Holy of Holies and put it in the fire that a cloud might cover the mercy seat so that he wouldn't die. Then he took some blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat seven times for himself and for the ignorant sins of the people (Lev. 16:14). That high priest always entered via a blood sacrifice for himself and the ignorance of the people (Numbers 15:22-26, 28).

One might ask, well what about those sins that were not sins of ignorance? What about those sins that were intentional? What about a guy like David who intentionally went out and sinned against God? How could David be cleansed when his sin was an intentional sin? It is obvious that he could not be cleansed by the Mosaic Law; He would have to be cleansed by pure Grace. This tabernacle business doesn't show this at all. What about Gentiles? This seems to be all about Israel and O.T. worship. Where do we fit in?

APPLICATION – The symbolism and application of the Holy Spirit. **9:8-10**

Now look carefully at **verse 8**; the Holy Spirit had not yet disclosed how willful sinners could have any access to God. There was no means of entrance for sinners into the presence of God. The Holy Spirit had not yet revealed God's system of Grace. While the tent/tabernacle was standing, the Holy Spirit had not revealed how any sinner, including a willful sinner, could have complete access to a Holy God.

Back in the days of the O.T. tabernacle, the Spirit of God revealed “no access” to God. But when Jesus Christ came, the Spirit of God revealed all sinners may have access to God. The point is Jesus Christ under grace gives you and me total access to God. Jesus Christ makes it possible for sinners from the slums of the streets to have intimate access to the Holy God. He washes away all our sin, both sins that were in ignorance and sins that were intentional. Grace takes you into the presence of God which is something the O.T. law could never do.

Verse 9 says that all of those tabernacle issues were symbolic for a specific time - a time when Jesus Christ would set all things right with God. In other words, the gifts and the sacrifices and the food and drink restrictions and the various washings could never make any one right with God. It could not take away sin. At best it could cover sin. As **verse 10** says, these things were temporary until “a time of reformation.” That word “reformation” (διορθωσις) refers to the time when Jesus Christ would straighten everything out for sinners so they could have access to God (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 118).

None of the things done in the O.T. law worship could straighten out any sinner. Nothing in that system could make any worshipper “perfect in conscience.” The word “conscience” becomes critical in Hebrew from this point on (**9:9**, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18). It seems to refer to the matter of having a conscience that is aware of sin versus being so clean that your mind realizes you have been cleansed of sin and have access to God.

The O.T. law cannot do one thing for your conscience. It cannot purge your heart and mind. But Jesus Christ can. Jesus Christ can clean up your mind and clean up your heart.

God offers all sinners His Son and His Grace. Do you understand what being a Christian really means? It means that you have access to God. God offers any one access to Him. But in order to have access to God, it must be in accordance with His way of access which is Jesus Christ. When you believe on Him, you will have complete and total access to God.