

Hebrews 9

The Old & the New, the Outer & the Inner, the First & the Second, the Copy & the Real

It's probably worth reading this whole chapter straight through to get a clearer picture of what the writer is saying here but, before we do, here are some pointers that may help us:–

1. The whole chapter follows on from the last verse of **Hebrews 8**, which basically says that the old covenant has been made 'obsolete, growing old and is ready to disappear'. Remember that at the time that this book was written, the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing, a permanent (as they thought!) version of the Tabernacle as revealed to Moses in the wilderness, and constructed under his supervision. AD 70 would see it totally destroyed.
2. Fairly obviously we can see that, all the way through this chapter, he is comparing the Old Covenant (= 'Old Testament') with the New Covenant in Jesus.
3. Most of our English translations in **9:2, 6 & 8**, refer to the 'outer' tabernacle or tent. The actual Greek word used throughout this chapter is 'first', in contrast with the second (inner) tabernacle/tent called the 'Holy of Holies' or 'holy place' (although 'holy place' is also used once to describe the outer tabernacle, **9:2**). The outer tabernacle was the first that the high priest came into before progressing into the second. Again, some translations say 'inner' in **9:7**, where the Greek says 'second'.
4. The writer also uses the same word 'first' to describe the old covenant, and links the old covenant with the outer ('first') tabernacle/tent, especially in **9:8**.
5. **9:23-25** describe the fact that the tabernacle/tent/temple constructed by humans ('made with hands') was a **copy** of the actual realities of the presence of God 'in the heavens'. See also **9:11**.

So, on with the chapter . . .

9:1-5 Even if it was about to disappear, the tabernacle/temple had some arrangements which were significant, but the writer simply summarises them before moving on to look at the parallels between the old priests in the tabernacle and our own High Priest in the real Holy of Holies.

9:6-10 The common people were able to enter the outer court of the tabernacle, which was open to the elements, but only the Levitical priests could enter the first/outer tent, where they performed all the requirements of daily worship.

The second/inner tent, the 'Holy of Holies', was where the ark of the covenant was, and where the awesome Presence of God would be encountered. There is a lovely simple statement from the LORD to Moses in **Exodus 25:22**: *"There I will meet with you;¹ and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."* The 'sons of Israel' knew for generations to come that the LORD was actually visibly present with them in the holy place. Sometimes the Presence overflowed into the whole place, as in **1 Kings 8:10-11, 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, 7:1-3** !

Even if there may not have been much evidence of the presence of God in the temple that was then standing in Jerusalem,² the readers of this letter knew that was what had been

¹ See also **Exodus 29:42,43, 30:6,36, Leviticus 16:2, Numbers 7:89, 17:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, Psalm 80:1, Isaiah 37:16**. (Also **Numbers 4:1-20, 7:4-9** on how the ark should have been handled in **2 Samuel 6** !)

² Although Zacharias's vision in **Luke 1** and the tearing of the veil into the Holy of Holies (**Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38**) indicates that the LORD had still made his presence felt from time to time!

originally designed.

I believe that **9:8** is a prophetic statement which basically said that the temple was about to be removed. It was still standing at that time, but all its functions were now totally redundant, temporary until 'a time of reformation' (Greek: 'a time of making straight') which had now arrived.

9:11-14 BUT – and here come the differences – when the Messiah appeared as high priest of good things to come, he didn't just enter into an inner tent with the ark of the covenant, not even to just (!) the presence of God above the cherubim; he entered the greater and more complete (even more complete than complete!) 'tabernacle' of the actual presence of God in the heavens. That 'tabernacle' is not 'made with hands',¹ in other words, it is not even part of 'this creation'.² **Genesis 1:1** says that '*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*'. The Holy of Holies that Jesus entered is beyond and before that 'beginning' !!

Given the 'scale' of which we are reading, and comparing it with the arrangements of the Old Testament tabernacle, the writer says 'how much more . . . ?' This is off the scale! We are not just thinking about ritual cleansing and purification (yes, they 'worked' to a limited extent) but now being totally purified in our consciences through the effectiveness of the blood of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. Now we can really serve the living God! Wow!

9:15-22 Blood, death and covenants. Striking statements in these verses:–

1. Jesus' death means that those who 'transgressed' (i.e. crossed the line) under the old covenant can be redeemed by being called and will then receive the promise of the 'inheritance of the ages'.

2. Ordinary 'last wills and testaments' only apply when the people making them have died. Even the old covenant needed blood to be inaugurated (= 'made new', 'put into effect'). The 'book (scroll) of the Law' and the people themselves were sprinkled with blood, along with the tabernacle and 'all the vessels of the ministry' (= 'liturgy'). If we read the OT accounts of the setting up of tabernacle worship, we may be surprised, even shocked, by the repeated use of blood to purify everything (it may not seem very pure to us!), but perhaps now we can see why: it was all to do with setting up a covenant – which was only going to be made complete through the blood of Christ!

9:23-28 Now that we have seen the fulfilment of how it is all made complete in Christ, the comparisons are increasingly obvious:–

1. Jesus has entered the real Holy of Holies, not just a man-made copy.
2. 'Better sacrifices' – in other words, the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God on the cross – are needed to enter that real holy place.
3. Jesus, our High Priest, appears NOW in the real presence of God for us.
4. It's done! He doesn't need to keep offering sacrifices incessantly.
5. Now is the 'consummation of the ages'; Jesus 'has been manifested to put away sin.'
6. Death is followed by judgment.
7. In the same way, Christ has already dealt with sin and will return with full salvation for those who are eagerly awaiting him. Sin is no longer an issue!

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¹ The word means 'made from existing materials', just as we would normally make anything.

² This word means 'created out of nothing' – something only God can do!