

• *The tabernacle was a shadowy and ritualistic foretaste of the gospel*

• *The ceremonies also have spiritual lessons for us*

• *The first compartment represented the age of the old covenant*

1. Imperfection in the worship of God

• *None of the people of Israel, not even the ordinary priests, were allowed to go inside the holy of holies*

• *There is a level of fellowship with God which is greater than anything the Old Testament saints ever knew*

• *The first compartment – a symbol of the first covenant when worshippers were outside the tabernacle altogether*

Our writer is making the point that the tabernacle was a shadowy and ritualistic foretaste of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The furniture¹ symbolized the gospel. Now he makes the point that the ceremonies followed by the priests and by the high priest also have spiritual lessons for us². ⁶*After these things were made ready in this way, the priests went continually into the first section to carry out their religious duties.* ⁷*But only the high priest goes into the second section, and he only goes in once per year. He does not go in without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins which the people have committed in ignorance.*

The first compartment represented the age of the old covenant. ⁸*By this regulation the Holy Spirit shows that the way into the holy places is not yet made open as long as the first section still is being used and admired.* The last phrase is difficult to translate. Robert Young's literal translation has 'the first tabernacle having yet a standing'. J.N. Darby translated it 'while as yet the first tabernacle has its standing'. The NCV has 'while the system of the old Holy Tent was still being used'. It refers to the time before Jesus came and means 'while the first tabernacle – symbolizing the first covenant – has status in the eyes of the people of God.

1. In old covenant times there was imperfection in the worship of God. Of course we admire many of the heroes and saints of the Old Testament. When we look at Moses and David and Elijah, and especially when we read the book of Psalms, we admire them as great men of faith. And yet Hebrews makes it clear that there was something defective and inadequate about the worship of the Old Testament saints. They did not know the name of Jesus. The Spirit was not yet given as fully as he would be given after the glorification of Jesus. The conscience was not perfectly satisfied that God could accept us despite our sinfulness. Hebrews 11:13 says, 'These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...' They could see the gospel and they had a glimpse that somehow God would be their Saviour, but they were seeing things 'from afar'. The tabernacle symbolized this, in that none of the people of Israel, and not even any of the ordinary priests, were allowed to go inside the holy of holies.

What this means positively is this. There is a level of fellowship with God which is greater than anything the Old Testament saints ever knew. This is an amazing thing to say (for we know what deep fellowship the psalmists had with God) and yet this is what is implied in the fact that the holy of holies was for many centuries inaccessible. As long as the tabernacle was being used and the **first** compartment was the one being mainly used and admired by the priests, it symbolized that the deepest level of fellowship was not yet available. ⁹*This is a symbol for the time that was then present, during which gifts and sacrifices were offered that could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper.* (i) Some words here are often translated 'the present time' but 'the present time' is not a time when Moses' sacrifices are offered (unless, writing before AD 70, our writer has the temple in mind). (ii) Perhaps there should be a full-stop after 'the present time', and it means 'this entire picture-language of the tabernacle is a picture for us in the present gospel-age'. Then the next sentence goes back to expound the tabernacle. 'According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered...' (iii) I prefer a third approach. I take the phrase to mean 'the time **then** present' (as in the KJV). The much-used first compartment was a symbol for the first covenant, the time when worshippers were mainly outside the tabernacle altogether, and priests were allowed only into the first section. The sacrifices were entirely symbolic. They had no real spiritual power. ¹⁰*They only deal with foods and*

1 9:1-5

2 9:6-10

drinks and various washings; they are external and fleshy regulations imposed until the time comes to set things right.

• The law was really very weak and did not convey any gospel blessings

2. The coming of Jesus Christ was a 'time...to set things right'

• The temporary provision which was only symbolic is ended

3. So now the blessings of the new covenant are available

• Eternal – not merely annual – redemption

The law was really very weak indeed. It had no power in it. It was full of symbols and rituals that symbolized the gospel but did not convey any gospel-blessings themselves. It was an 'imposition', something forced upon the people with limited and temporary value.

2. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was a 'time...to set things right'. It was the time when all the fleshy and weak ordinances of the Mosaic law should come to an end, a time when the fullness of spiritual blessings would come with the Lord Jesus Christ. The ritual of the Mosaic law was only temporary, 'imposed until the time...to set things right'¹⁴.

Verses 11–12 are one long complicated sentence. 'But Christ, arriving as the high priest of the good things we now have in the greater and more complete tent (not made by any human being and not belonging to this world), entered the Most Holy Place once-for-ever taking with him not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.' We can break it down into shorter sentences. ¹¹*But Christ, the high priest of the good things we now have, arrived in the greater and more complete tent. It was not made by any human being and does not belong to this world.* ¹²*He entered the Most Holy Place once-for-ever taking with him not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, and so he secured eternal redemption.* Christ came to 'set things right', that is, to end the temporary, symbolic, fleshy tabernacle, and begin the ministry in the true tabernacle, which is heaven itself. The coming of Jesus as the one who is to give all the blessings of the new covenant, was the abolition of the old covenant and the commencement of the new covenant.

3. Now that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ has 'set things right' the blessings of the new covenant are available. Jesus has entered 'the greater and more perfect tabernacle' – heaven itself. In the very moment when he entered into heaven he obtained for us 'eternal redemption'. Not annual redemption (as in the Mosaic Day of Atonement), not temporary redemption (as if Jesus might throw us out of his covenant if we are unworthy) – but eternal redemption. He now is our high priest at the right hand of the Father, ministering to us all of the blessings of the new covenant. Christ is the high priest of the good things we now have. What are they? They include: the knowledge of Jesus and the events of his life (not clearly known before they happened), plus the work of the Holy Spirit enabling us to know what Jesus has done for us.

14 9:10



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