

Hebrews 9:1-7

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The Old Covenant had regulations for worship, and the Pauline Author explains some of them here. He will then proceed to show how these look forward to and teach of Jesus.

Recalling that this letter is written to a Jewish audience, there would have been great familiarity with the entire story of Israel coming out of slavery in Egypt and being led across the wilderness. It was in the wilderness that Moses was instructed by God to build a tabernacle upon which God visited His tangible presence among them (Exodus 25:9): *Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary* (v 1).

The Pauline Author reminds his readers that the tabernacle had two rooms: the outer room called the *holy place*, and the inner room called the *Holy of Holies*: *For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies* (vv 2–3).

The lampstand (Exodus 25:31–40) served as a reminder to the Israelites that they were to be the light to the world and point people toward God, who is ultimately the light to the world (John 8:12). In Matthew 5:13, Jesus applies this idea when He tells all believers that they are now to serve as the light to the world.

The sacred bread was also kept in the outer room; on it were 12 loaves of bread (Leviticus 24:5), symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. In John 6:35 Jesus speaks of Himself as being the bread of life; the loaves seem to represent the sustaining power of God to the Israelites since Jesus is the sustaining power for every believer.

Beyond the first room, there was the *Holy of Holies* divided by a curtain, or the *second veil* (Exodus 26:33). Within this inner room, called the Holy of Holies, was *the ark of the covenant, covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant* (v 4), inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

The *golden altar of incense* was to create a sweet-smelling environment in the tabernacle; every morning incense was to be offered, to create a perpetual aroma pleasing to God (Exodus 30:7–8). Ephesians 5:2 invokes this image to say when believers walk in love, they create a sweet-smelling aroma that pleases God.

Above the ark of the covenant were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship (vv 5–6).

All the priests offered sacrifices daily for the sins of the people, but not for those sins *committed in ignorance*. Once a year on the Day of Atonement the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the unconscious sins of the people: *But*

into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance (v 7).

The Pauline Author is going to show that the Old Covenant's earthly sanctuary and regulations for worship are a shadow of the greater New Covenant. The Holy of Holies was very restricted, it could only be entered once a year by the high priest to offer sacrificial blood. Christ is qualified to enter the holiest place of the true tabernacle in heaven since He is our high priest. He entered the heavenly tabernacle one time, and He offered His sacrificial blood on our behalf once and for all.

The Pauline Author is in the middle of making an argument that religious practice must not be substituted for true faith of the heart. In writing about the practices of the Old Covenant, the author says *but of these things we cannot now speak in detail* (v 5). He is building a case that the true service of faith of the believer is not found in religious practice, but in a purified heart of faith, resulting in the worship of obedience in our daily walk.

Biblical Text

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ² For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³ Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴ having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.