

**Text:** Hebrews 9:1-10

**Title:** The Meaning of the Tabernacle Ministry

**Truth:** The sanctuary and its service symbolized the need for a better covenant.

**Date/Location:** April 10, 2011 at FBC

## **Introduction, v. 1**

### **A. Reviewing the Old Covenant**

Verse 1 turns our thoughts back in time to the first / old covenant. This covenant was obsoleted by the new covenant (8:13). But the old covenant did have a divine service and a sanctuary that was housed inside the fenced-off courtyard structure.

### **B. Caution on Finding Symbolism in the Tabernacle**

### **C. Do not Focus on the Building**

## **I. The Structure of the Tabernacle, v. 2-5**

The section focuses entirely on the tabernacle building and service, as opposed to the later temples. They were in essence the same kind of layout and had the same sacrifices.

### **A. Holy Place, aka Sanctuary, v. 2**

1. Lampstand. It was a golden 7-lamp candelabrum. It was meant to illuminate the holy place 24x7 (Exodus 25:37, Lev. 24:2-4).
2. Table. The table was made of what is probably Red acacia wood, what the KJV calls Shittim (shi-teem') wood. It was overlaid with gold, had carrying rings, a decorative molding, and it was 36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 27 inches tall.
3. Showbread or Bread of Presence. Leviticus 24:5-9 tells about this bread. Fresh bread was set out every Sabbath day on the table. The old bread was eaten by Aaron and his sons.

### **B. The Most Holy Place or Holiest of All, v. 3-5**

1. This second room was walled off from the holy place by a fabric veil called the "second veil." See Exodus 26:31-34. The first veil was the "door" to the holy place, the first room.
2. Golden Altar of Incense (NKJ has "golden censer"). There is some difficulty understanding how Hebrews refers to this piece of furniture—what it was and where it was, but I understand it to be the altar of incense described in Exodus 30:6 as being in front of the

veil near the ark. Its use is described in Lev. 16:12 as part of the Day of Atonement ritual. It is not inside the second veil, but just outside of it.

### 3. Ark of the Covenant

The ark was overlaid with gold. Alongside of or inside of the Ark were the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the Tablets of the Covenant. The contents of the Holy of Holies changed over time, and eventually after the Babylonian destruction of the temple, there was no more Ark or anything. It is said that when Pompey entered the holy of holies in 63 B.C. that he found nothing there.

### 4. Cherubim on top of the Ark

These were images (Exodus 25:18), the making of which was sanctioned by God as an exception to the general prohibition against making such images. Cherubim were first mentioned in Genesis 3:24 as guards of the Garden of Eden. They are guardians of God and His holiness.

### 5. Mercy Seat Overshadowed by the Cherubim

This was a "golden slab" (Bruce) that was not just a lid for the Ark, but was the "atoning cover." It is where blood was sprinkled and where propitiation was made for the sins of the priest and people.

### 6. Our author says that he does not have time to speak about all these things in detail.

## II. The Service of the Tabernacle, v. 6-7

### A. Priests Always Used the First Part, v. 8

1. **Always** is a key word because it points out that the priests were busy doing their work all the time, every day.
2. What services are we talking about?
  - a. Keeping oil in the lamp, trimming it (Ex. 27:20)
  - b. Burning incense every morning (Ex. 30:7)
  - c. Replacing the showbread weekly (Lev 24:8)

### B. Priests Very Rarely Used the Second Part, v. 7

1. **Once a year** is an important contrast to the **always** of verse 6.

2. **Alone.** Likewise, the Holy of Holies was very restricted as to the personnel who could enter.
3. **Always With Blood.** If the high priest did not have the proper sacrifices, He would die before the Lord in the holy of holies. The blood (animal lives) were offered for sins he committed and people committed in ignorance.

### III. The Symbolism of the Tabernacle Ministry, v. 8-10

- A. We already learned in 8:1-5 that the old tabernacle was a copy and shadow of heavenly realities. It was built according to the plan that God showed Moses on the mountain (Exodus 25:40, 26:30).
- B. Its structure and service did symbolize something—something that indicated the limitations of the old covenant.
  1. When verse 8 says **the Holy Spirit indicating this** we could understand it to mean that when the Spirit inspired the Mosaic texts, He was “saying something deeper.” The trouble with that approach is that the deeper thing is left unsaid and is at the mercy of the reader to figure out.
  2. A better interpretation is that the Spirit is presently, through the author of Hebrews, revealing (making clear, declaring) these truths. There is no hidden meaning. Rather, the revelation of the symbol is open.
- C. Symbol of the Structure’s Restricted Access, v. 8
  1. The **Holiest of All was not yet made manifest.** This was the case **while the first tabernacle was still standing.** The **first tabernacle** does not refer to a first structure as opposed to a later one. Rather, the **first** refers to the outer portion of the tent, the holy place. This part of the whole structure had a first veil and the furniture, and a second veil separated it from the holy of holies.
  2. While this was the case, there was no way to just enter the presence of God; you could not even see the presence of God from the outside. The structure itself obscured and restricted access to God. How to get inside was not evident at all. How could one have close fellowship and a relationship with God instead of one “afar off”?
  3. The way inside would not be evident until humanity beheld “The Way” (John 14:6, 1:14).
- D. Symbol of the Service’s Imperfection, v. 9-10

1. Even at the time of writing of the letter to the Hebrews, sacrifices were being offered, as we learned in 8:4-5. But no one was cleansed and had a clear conscience because of the first century Jewish rituals. The service/ritual was only concerned with food, drink, washings, and fleshly ordinances—external stuff, not internal things. And, the offerings were continuous and repeated.

2. How was *it*—the outer tabernacle—a symbol?

- a. It was a symbol in the form of a building for the present time.
- b. In summary, the outer tent, or holy place, is a picture of the Old Testament. You were stuck going only so far in your approach to God, but no farther. In the NT era, in effect, we have entrance into the holiest of all through the blood of Christ.

D. This was to be the case until the time of reformation—when there was a new order—the order of the Messiah. This new order was mutually exclusive with the old.

The new order was quite different than the old:

Open access	versus	restricted access.
Perfection	versus	imperfection.
Complete	versus	incomplete.
Conscience	versus	externalities.

## Conclusion

This truth about the tabernacle’s symbolism should push the Jewish reader to stay with Christ or step over the line in faith to come to Christ so that he could get a perfected conscience and have access to God. The old system could never provide that with its repeated and restricted ritual.

Christians, we can be thankful that we have the reformed way, and not the old way. Compared to what you have now in Christ—think of the comparative lack of assurance and closeness in your relationship to God if you had to do the old sacrificial system.

Are you not sure you are a true Christian? Acknowledge that you are a sinner and that sin is wrong before God, believe that Christ the Lord died and rose for you to pay your sin debt to God, and call upon Him to save you. This is a skeleton explanation of what we call “faith.” It is faith that saves—faith alone. No rituals, no good works, no food and drink restrictions will save your soul. Only Christ can do that through faith.

MAP