

Hebrews 9:1-10 – The Earthly Tabernacle

Jesus is our great high priest who ministers in the true dwelling place of God in heaven. Jesus' priestly ministry is much more excellent than the priestly ministry of the Aaronic priests. Jesus is also the mediator of a better covenant. The Old Testament tabernacle, sacrifices and Aaronic priests were shadows and patterns of the reality to come which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In chapter 9, the shadows of the tabernacle, sacrifices and priests are compared and contrasted with their corresponding realities.

Read Hebrews 9:1-5.

Verse 1 talks about "the first". ESV, KJV, NASB and NIV all have "first covenant". NASB has "covenant" in italics which means that the word is not in the original text. Since the end of chapter 8 talked about the first covenant versus the new covenant, it is logical that "covenant" is what "first" refers to. According to verse 1, what did the first covenant have? ESV and NIV have "regulations for worship". NASB has "regulations for divine worship". KJV has "ordinances of divine service". BDAG agrees with the ESV and NIV given the context of this verse. ESV has "earthly place of holiness" while NKJV, NASB and NIV have "earthly sanctuary". BDAG suggests "earthly sanctuary" for this verse. (9:1)

Verse 2 talks about the tabernacle. It starts with the first section of the tabernacle. What was that section called? What furnishings were in this section? The bread of the Presence, or showbread, was in the Holy Place. Who was allowed to eat this bread? See Leviticus 24:5-9 and Matthew 12:4. ESV, NASB and NIV have "Holy Place". KJV has "sanctuary". BDAG says in this context it means "Holy Place". When compared to the end of verse 3, the translation of "Holy Place" is consistent. (9:2)

Verse 3 talks about the second section of the tabernacle. What was this section called? What separated this section from the Holy Place? Some translations have "Most Holy Place" while others have "Holy of Holies". BDAG has "Holy of Holies" for this verse. (9:3)

What was in the Holy of Holies? The golden altar of incense was in the Holy Place in the tabernacle and also in the second temple. "Altar of incense" is one word in the original text and only occurs once in the New Testament. It can mean "a censer" or it can mean "altar of incense". BDAG prefers "altar of incense" given the context of the tabernacle. Some try to use the meaning "censer" to explain that the writer of Hebrews was not saying that the altar of incense was in the Holy of Holies. "Altar of incense" seems to be the best translation but it does not resolve its location. The urn for the manna was described as "gold". "Gold" was not in the Hebrew text of Exodus 16:33 but "gold" is in the Greek translation. (9:4)

“Cherubim” occurs more than 50 times in the OT but only occurs in the NT in this verse. The cherubim overshadowed the mercy seat. What was the mercy seat? It is one word in the original text and it appears in verse 5 and in Romans 3:25. BDAG says it is a “place of propitiation” and gives the translation “mercy-seat”. We are teased with the mention of all these articles of the tabernacle but the writer of Hebrews did not want to get side tracked from the priesthood of Christ. (9:5)

Read Hebrews 9:6-10.

What were the regular duties of the priests for taking care of the Holy Place? Could a Levite enter the Holy Place? Could a priest, who was not the high priest, enter the Holy Place? See Luke 1:8-9. (9:6)

Who was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies? How often was the Holy of Holies entered? What needed to be brought into the Holy of Holies and why did it need to be brought? ESV has “unintentional sins”. NKJV, NASB and NIV have “sins ... committed in ignorance”. This is one word in the original text and only occurs once in the New Testament. BDAG says it means “sin committed in ignorance/unintentionally”. What about sins like David committed when he had Uriah killed? Was that unintentional? What sacrifice could be offered for that sin? (9:7)

Verse 8 is translated in a variety of ways. One of the problems is how to translate the phrase “the way to the holy things”. ESV has “the way into the holy places”. NASB has “the way into the holy place”. NKJV has “the way into the holiest of all”. NIV has “the way into the Most Holy Place”. “Way” which is usually translated “road” is used in a similar way as it is in John 14:6 (I am the way). Another problem is how to translate “the first tent”. This is the same phrase as was used in verse 2 where it referred to the Holy Place. ESV has “first section”. NASB has “outer tabernacle”. NKJV and NIV have “first tabernacle”. What does this verse mean? Under the priesthood of Christ, we are encouraged to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence. See Hebrews 4:16, 10:19-22. (9:8)

For the beginning of verse 9, ESV has “which is symbolic for the present age”. NASB has “which is a symbol for the present time”. NIV has “this is an illustration for the present time”. NKJV has “It was symbolic for the present time”. Does “the present time” refer to the time of the first covenant or to the time after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension? Why were the gifts and sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priests ineffective? According to verse 10, what else did the Mosaic law include besides gifts and sacrifices? Why were these regulations ineffective? What was the “reformation”? ESV, NKJV and NASB have “reformation”. NIV has “new order”. The word only occurs once in the New Testament. (9:9-10)