



JESUS
GREATEST OF ALL TIME
THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Lesson 16

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A Better Way To Worship

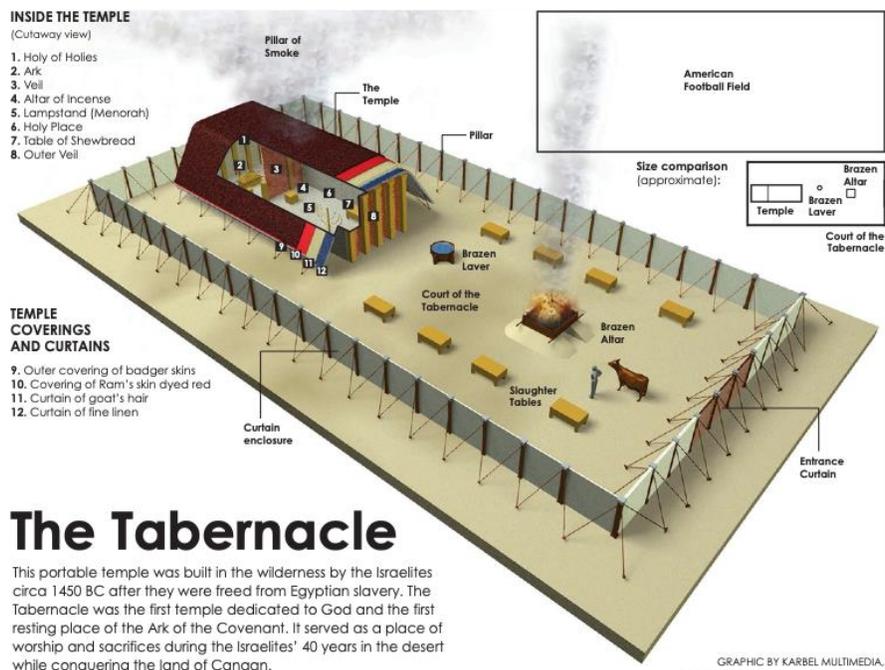
INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 9:1-14

In Exodus 25-27, God commands His people to build Him a tent. Israel was in the wilderness, having just fled slavery in Egypt. The people were wandering around the desert, living in tents. And then God told them to build Him one too. The tent would be the place where Israel would worship God and God would dwell there in some unique way. God is present everywhere, but there was something special about how God was present in the tent (also called a tabernacle).

“The concept of the tabernacle as a ‘tent’ is important and reminds us of two things. First, the Tabernacle was a moveable and temporary structure. It was not fixed in any one location and was constructed so that it could be carried about easily. This meant not only that the presence of God was among his people wherever they were; it was also a reminder that something permanent was necessary.

But, secondly, there was in the Tabernacle an identification of God with his people. They, too, dwelt in tents, as Hebrews 11:9 puts it, writing of Abraham, who, by faith, ‘sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac, and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ (AV). The presence of God in the Tabernacle was thus not only a symbol of God being among his people, but among them in a way that reflected his complete sympathy with them, and his identification with them.”¹



The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The Tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

¹ Iain D. Campbell, *Opening up Exodus*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 103.

Open it

1. During a worship service we pray, sing, hear preaching, greet other people, offer financial gifts, and serve on various ministry teams. What's your favorite part of a church worship service and why?

Read it

Hebrews 9:1-14

Explore it

2. What items were contained in the first and section sections of the Old Testament tabernacle? (Hint: There are eleven items.)
3. What was the name of the first section of the Old Testament tabernacle? The second section?
4. Who went into the second section of the tabernacle and how often?

5. What gets taken into the second section and what is done with it?

6. Jesus makes a superior offering on our behalf. What is it that Jesus offers?

Apply it

7. As you read through Hebrews 9:1-5, describe how Christians in 2021 might find it difficult to connect with the Old Testament way of worship.

8. If you've been a Christian from a young age, are there any things that you miss from what was done in church when you were a child?

The Most Holy Place was filled with items that showed God's faithfulness to His people. The golden urn holding manna reminded Israel of the time God provided food for them in the wilderness (Exodus 16). Aaron's rod was there, serving as a symbol of a time God miraculously showed His people who their priests should be (Numbers 17). There were also the stone tablets that contained the Ten Commandments. Those were given to God's people to show them how He wanted them to live in relationship to Himself and other people (Exodus 20:1-21).

9. Why do you think God found it important to remind His people of the way He had worked in their lives?

10. Do you have any items that remind you of God's faithfulness in your life?

Another item contained in the Old Testament tabernacle was the “mercy seat.” The creation of this seat was described in Exodus 25:17-22. In Leviticus 16, we learn that the first High Priest of Israel, Moses’ brother Aaron, would go into the Most Holy Place one day per year and would sprinkle the blood of animal sacrifices on the mercy seat. Future high priests would do the same thing, one day of the year, every single year. What was the point? In the Old Testament, it symbolized God showing mercy to His people by “passing over” their sins. But in the New Testament, we get a much fuller picture of its meaning.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 3:25 that the mercy seat was really pointing us to Jesus, who would serve as the perfect sacrifice. God passes over our sins because Jesus died on the cross for us. The imagery used in Romans 3:25, points directly back to the Old Testament. And the only other place in the New Testament where it is used is in Hebrews 9:5!

Alva McClain reflected on the mercy seat and its connection to Jesus this way: “God could be just, holy, and righteous on His throne, punishing sin, upholding His law; and yet at the same time He can take a sinner like me, pronounce me righteous, and treat me like a righteous man! God, in Christ, came down and suffered for our sins, and He is righteous because of that.”²

11. What is your reaction to the fact that God graciously “passed over” the sins of the people in the Old Testament for many years before Jesus came to the earth?

12. Is it fair that God passes over our sins? How does this impact how you feel about God?

² Alva J McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, ed. Herman A Hoyt (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1989), 110.

13. Have you ever had trouble believing God really forgives you? Describe what made it so difficult to accept.

Hebrews 9:7 talks about “unintentional sins.” These sins are “those we commit without realizing we are committing them. Due to the pervasive and insidious effects of sin on our entire beings, we can’t even recognize the times we were unaware we were sinning.”³ These unintentional sins led God to set up the high priestly ministry of offering a sacrifice once a year for the unknown sins of God’s people.

14. What do unintentional sins look like?

15. How do unintentional sins show us the broad effects of sin?

³ R. Albert Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference ; B & H Publishing Group, 2017), 129–30.

Hebrews 9:8-9 shows that the structure of the tabernacle, with a division between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, was intentional. It reminded Israel that they could not approach a holy God. But the design was pointing to something else. When Jesus died on the cross, he broke down the barrier between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Matthew 27:51). Now God's people can approach Him with confidence because they are made holy through Christ.

16. What does the creation of the Most Holy Place tell us about God's character?

17. God's people can approach Him whenever they want through prayer. Offer some details on your prayer life. How often do you pray and what types of things do you normally pray about?

Hebrews 9:14 tells us that we are purified from sin in order to "serve the living God." We serve God because of what He has done for us, not in order to earn something from Him.

18. In what ways have you been tempted to serve God in order to earn something from Him?