

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING

John Stott has written: 'either we glory in ourselves and in our own achievements, or we glory in Christ and in his achievement on the cross. There is no possibility of compromise.' What do you think he means? Do you agree?

QUESTIONS

Re-produce the drawing of the Tabernacle (*from page 2 of these notes*).

Re-reproduce and together fill in (from 9:1-10) the following table ...

	Holy Place	Most Holy Place
what was in there?		
who entered there?		
when did they enter there?		
what did they take with them?		
what did it achieve?		

READ 9:11-28

Make of list (on a big piece of paper?) of the things in v11-14 that make Jesus' ministry superior. (*Perhaps use the headings in the table above as the basis?*) What do we learn about where Jesus enters? why is it better to enter there?

Make a list (on a big piece of paper?) of what we're told about Jesus 'blood' (ie his sacrificial death for us). (*See page 3 of these notes for list.*)

This entire chapter is filling out 8:13 ... the old covenant is obsolete because the new covenant has begun. For what reasons do we need to have this explained to us today (in that we're not being particularly attracted to the old covenant)?

CONCLUSION

'Drift' back to Jewishness was a danger for the first reader's of *Hebrews*. How would this passage help them to realise that was a stupid thing to do? Assuming that none of us are currently being attracted to Jewish systems and practises (!), can you think of ways in which this warning might help to 'keep' us?

What do you think is 'the word of exhortation' (cf 13:22) to us from this chapter?

How could you use this chapter to help the Christian who says ...

- 'I don't understand why we need to read all about sacrifices and priests'
- 'why is there so much about 'blood' in the songs we sing – it's disgusting!'
- 'I feel far away from God'
- 'there's stuff in my past that makes me feel so guilty and dirty'
- 'I worry that I might fall away like 6:6 ... might God then not forgive me?'

Hebrews 9:1-28



Theme of *Hebrews*

Hebrews is written because of an urgent problem: the readers are on the verge of apostasy. Apostasy is the opposite of conversion; it is 'falling away from' or 'throwing away' Christ (3:12; 4:11; 5:6; 10:35). That is the 'sin' in Hebrews, and the 'temptation' they face is 'drift' (2:1). But their drifting is surprisingly not into irreligion, but back into the Jewish faith from which they had converted.

The main argument (to warn them against this drift) is that in Jesus God has spoken his **final word** (chs 1-4) and completed a **finished work** (chs 5-9/10): why go back to the 'shadow' (cf 10:1)? All of *Hebrews*' dense theology is included to serve the main application of this 'word of exhortation' (13:22).

Theme Sentence for 9:1-28

The old covenant must 'vanish' since the covenant Jesus mediates is so much better. (cf 8:6, 13)

How this passage fits in

We are coming to the conclusion of the big section about the work of Christ. He is our great high priest who goes right into heaven and the presence of God, taking with him the evidence of his sacrificial death for me. Because he has done that, I can now have confidence to draw near to God's throne (4:16).

The danger is that the first Christian readers might not 'draw near' but rather 'fall' or 'shrink back' ... potentially, they are like a grown man sucking on a baby's bottle (5:11-13), or continually laying again foundations but never building the building itself (6:1-2), or, most vividly, they are joining in with those who crucified the Son of God (6:4-6). 'How shall we escape if we neglect this great salvation?' (2:3) and instead stick with 'a copy and shadow' (8:5)?

If that old covenant is now 'obsolete' (8:13) - such a shocking thing for those early Jewish converts to read - 9:1-28 must show exactly how the old covenant's buildings, employees, paraphernalia etc have indeed been left 'standing' (9:8-9) back in the present age after 'the reformation' that Jesus began.

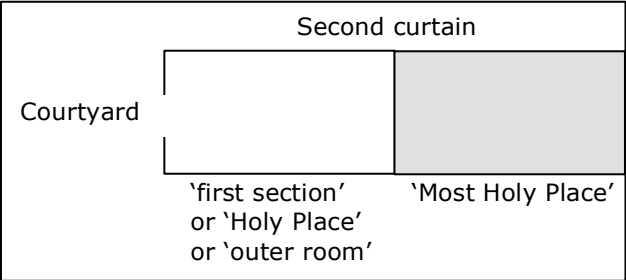
Application

- understand more clearly what Jesus has done for every Christian.
- understand that what Jesus has done for every Christian is so much better than any other suggested way of how to relate to God. And because that is so, any other way of relating to God is over and done with.
- treasure the precious sacrificial death of Jesus for us.
- wait for Jesus' return (for he will bring actually salvation we need) rather than chasing after anything else, even if may claim to offer salvation.

Commentary

The Old Covenant (9:1-10)

(a) **its setting** (1-5): the tabernacle
The writer chooses to describe ‘the tabernacle’ (the mobile temple completed in Exodus 40) rather than the (more-permanent) Temple (built by Solomon, rebuilt by Ezra and then very recently replaced by Herod) as the place where the ministry of the Old Covenant took place ... but the layout is basically the same. The whole point of the first room was to deny access to the second room!



The Tabernacle

(b) **its ministry** (6-10): the priests and their sacrifices
Only Priests could enter the Holy Place, and only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place (and only do that once a year). And any entry was only allowed after he’d made sacrifice for his own sin and for that of the people.

You could say that the motto of the entire old covenant system was **never without blood** (7, 22) ... everything needed to be covered with blood, according to God’s instructions, to achieve atonement, forgiveness and cleansing. That motto has not changed in the new covenant ... the difference is that the blood is now the blood of the Lord Jesus, shed once for all on the cross.

We’re told that this is *symbolic* (9 lit. ‘a parable’) (cf 8:5 ‘a copy and shadow’). Through both the setting and the ministry of the old system, the Holy Spirit (who we know still speaks 3:7) is making just one simple point (8):

- although God is present with his people to care for them and forgive them, they could not come close to him: the way is not yet opened.

The New Covenant (9:11-28)

Why Jesus’ ministry as High Priest is superior (11-14)
• he serves in the heavenly tabernacle, not in an earthly copy
• he offered his own (unblemished) blood, not the blood of animals
• he went through to the Most Holy Place, into the presence of God, and was not restricted to the outer court
• he obtained eternal redemption, so doesn’t have to repeat an annual sacrifice
• he achieved inward forgiveness for us, not just outward ritual cleansing

11 ‘When Christ appeared’ was the time of ‘reformation’ (10) - a word that suggests ‘reconstruction in the interests of improvement’: out with the old, in with the new! Since we’re speaking about ‘the world to come’ (2:5), it’s not surprising that 12:26-27 suggests that this is the moment when a new world is made. Now, ‘the good things ... have come’ (12)!

11-12 **the new setting** is heaven itself: Christ enters ‘the greater and more perfect tent ... not of this creation’. He goes not into ‘an earthly place of holiness’ (1), but ‘into heaven itself’ (24). This helps us to understand all the arrangement of the old tabernacle/temple: it was always a ‘copy of the true things’ (24), to suggest to us about the real entry into the real presence of God ... something not easily achieved, and ‘never without blood’, but nevertheless eventually to be achieved by Jesus.

13-28 **the new ministry** is by Jesus himself (‘our great High Priest’ from ch 7-8), and in particular, by his own blood.

‘Blood’ in the Bible is a sign of a life violently ended, either given or taken in death. In our passage, ‘blood’ is interchangeable with ‘death’ (15) and ‘sacrifice’ (26), so the ‘blood’ of Christ refers to his sacrificial death on our behalf. It comes to mean virtually the same as we mean by ‘cross’.

This sacrificial death/blood of Jesus is ...

- more effective* (13-14)
This argument depends on the fact that the blood of animals (offered on the annual Day of Atonement) genuinely achieved something. If their blood did, then ‘how much more’ will the blood of Christ. But what will be achieved is not just something outside me (the ritual purification of ‘our flesh’), but something internal, the purification of our conscience. As 10:2 hints, it’s only after Jesus that I can feel really clean inside.

- necessary* (15-23)
Here the ministry of Jesus is similar to (rather than different from) the ministry in the old covenant: both need a death.

The word for ‘will’ and ‘covenant’ is the same, meaning something like ‘legal settlement’. We are used to the idea that if granny leaves us money in her will, we cannot access it until granny has died. In the same way, God’s legal contract with us requires a death (to redeem us from our punishable transgressions) before we can access the inheritance he’s keeping for us. Everything in the old covenant, it seems, had to be blood-spattered, graphically making this point that a death had happened.

- final* (24-28)
If Jesus has entered heaven (rather than just going behind a curtain), if Jesus has made an offering once that works for-all-times-and-people (rather than having to repeat it annually) and if he has offered himself to ‘put away sin’ (rather than annually reminding of it cf 10:1), then sin really is dealt with! Imagine you and I standing in front of a masterpiece by Rubens and grabbing a paintbrush and a pot of paint to ‘improve’ it: how absurd! In the same way, I cannot add anything to the work of Jesus for me without taking away from its value. All has been done.