

May 30, 2010 by Steve Brandon



Better Access

Hebrews 9:1-14

1. The Symbol (verses 1-7)
2. The Significance (verses 8-10)
3. The Savior (verses 11-14)

I want for you to think of the most powerful and most influential person that you know. This person may be powerful because of the position that he holds (in office, perhaps). This person may be powerful because of the financial resources at his disposal. This person may be powerful because of the influence that he has. This person may be powerful because of the fame that he has received. I'm not talking about you knowing about them. I'm talking about you knowing them. I'm talking about you seeing this person in the airport, coming up to him/her, and having them shake your hand and call you by name and ask you how you are doing.

Now, I don't know a lot of influential people in this world, but I do know a few. I knew a man (who has now passed away) who owned hundreds of millions of dollars. He could purchase anything that he wanted. As a Christian man, he gave large sums of money to charity. He had great influence in the institutions that he supported. I went to high school with a world-famous super-model. She and I were in the same chemistry class together. I know several pastors, personally, who are currently pastoring churches of thousands of people.

Perhaps you know someone famous, like a famous athlete or a politician or a wealthy business owner. Knowing these sorts of people might help to give you access to certain privileges. For instance, if you knew a major league baseball player, you might gain access to some free tickets. If you knew a wealthy business man, you might be able to get an interview with a CEO, which might help to land a job. If you knew an actor in Hollywood, you might be able to access behind the scenes on a movie set. Much depends upon who you know.

Now, when it comes to God, the big question in this life is this: who do you know? Who's going to bring you to the Almighty? Who has the connections to bring you to God? Now, obviously, we know the answer. Jesus Christ is the one who can bring us to God. First Timothy 2:5 tells us, "There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Through Jesus, we have access to God. His death has opened the door to heaven, that we might have fellowship with the Father!

But, I want for you to think what it would be like for those who lived before Jesus. Who brought them to God? The priests brought them to God. They brought them to God by offering up a sacrifice on their behalf. The high-priests brought them to God. On the Day of Atonement each year, the high priest would bring a sacrifice on their behalf. This is as good as they had it. All they had was someone else, a mere man, who would offer up a sacrifice to God for them. But, now, we have Jesus. We have a great-high priest who can bring us to God. And His access to God is better than the access that the priests ever provided for us.

As we have worked our way through the book of Hebrews, we have seen the argument come: Jesus is better, Jesus is better, Jesus is better. Jesus is better than the prophets. Jesus is better than the angels. Jesus is better than Moses. Jesus is better than Joshua. Jesus is better than Aaron and the rest of the priests. Jesus is better than Abraham and Melchizedek. The New Covenant that Jesus brings is better than the Old Covenant, which was brought in by Moses. This morning, the argument continues. Jesus brings Better Access to God. My message this morning is appropriately entitled, "Better Access."

I want for you to read our text: Hebrews 9:1-14. As we read, I want for you to see how the writer argues from the lesser to the greater. He describes the situation during the days of the Old Covenant. He then describes how much better our access to God is in these days of the New Covenant.

Hebrews 9:1-14

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. 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, 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; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 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. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the

cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Let's turn our attention to look at ...

1. The Symbol (verses 1-10)

Hebrews 9:1

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

When God established the Old Covenant with Israel, it came with many rules and regulations of how worship was to be set up and how worship was to be conducted. God was very exact in what He demanded of the priests and of the worshipers. Much of the first five books of the Bible are committed to giving the details of these things. There is chapter after chapter explaining the duties of the priest. All the worship was regulated.

I'm sure that many of us have some measure of familiarity with how things were set up in the Old Covenant. But, how much more did the Jews near the day of Jesus! In our schools, we learn about the government. We learn about the three branches of our government: the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. The House and Senate make the laws. The courts interpret the law. The White House sees that it all comes to pass. Hebrew children grew up learning about the tabernacle and all of the elements of worship, all the duties of the priest. And yet, the author of this epistle carries on for six verses, describing the substance of Old Covenant worship. If they needed to hear these things of the Old Covenant worship, how much more do we need to hear it!

The regulations of the Old Covenant worship began with the tabernacle, which had a large tent-wall surrounding it, consisting of long boards, some 7½ feet high, with curtains in between them. The entire tabernacle was 75 feet wide and 150 long. It had no ceiling, but was open to the sky above. This structure was the center focus of the entire nation. In the center of our cities, we place a city hall. I have even heard that our street signs give mileage directions to the city hall in any given city. In the center of the wandering nation of Israel, they had the tabernacle. Three tribes camped on the north. Three tribes camped on the east. Three tribes camped on the south. Three tribes camped on the west. It was within the curtains of this tent that those in Israel did their business with God.

On one of the ends of the tabernacle, there was a 30 foot opening, where the people of Israel could enter. Should an Israelite walk in the tent, he would quickly come upon the bronze altar. This structure was 7½ feet long and 7½ feet wide, the size of our stage here at RVBC. It was 4½ feet tall. It was where the sacrifices took place (Ex. 27:1-8).

Due to the number of sacrifices that were offered in Israel, anyone who came into the tabernacle would surely see the smoke arise. They would also smell the burning flesh. They would also be prohibited from going much beyond the altar, as this was reserved only for the priests. They had limited access. Now, a little beyond the altar would be the laver, which was a wash basin for the priests to use. Nothing in Scripture is given of its size, so we don't know exactly how large they made it. It was probably something like the size of a large sink (or bathtub).

Beyond the laver was a small, tent-like structure--the tabernacle, proper. It was 15 feet tall, 15 feet wide, and 45 feet long. Over it was draped some curtains of linen to form a sort of ceiling. It had two rooms. The first room was called the holy place. The second room was called the holy of holies. This is where the priests did business before God. It was a sacred place - only the priests were allowed to enter. It was also a dangerous place - people could get killed in the Holy of Holies. It was important for the priests to do exactly as God has prescribed. As I mentioned earlier, the priests were required to wash their hands and their feet before they would enter into the tabernacle. God warned that if they didn't wash before they entered, they would die (Ex. 30:20).

When in the holy of holies, they needed to offer up the incense as God had required. They needed to do it God's way. Nadab and Abihu had offered up "strange fire" upon the altar and were killed instantly (Lev. 10:1-3). For this reason, the Jewish people tied a rope to the ankles of the high priest entering the Holy of Holies. If God struck him dead, they would have a way to pull him out, without going into the Holy of Holies, themselves. Such was the importance of the regulations of worship (verse 1). To have access to God in these times, you needed to do things His way.

Now, the first room of this structure is detailed in verse 2, ...

Hebrews 9:2

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.

This room was 30 feet by 15 feet. On the south side of the room sat a lampstand, with seven lamps (Ex. 25:31-39). One lamp was on a center pole, which stood straight up. The other six branches came out from the sides. One branch came straight up, and six other branches came out from the side with three branches on one side and three branches on the other side. As there was a roof over this structure, this lampstand provided the light for the room.

On the north side of the room sat the table of showbread: 3 feet long, 1½ feet deep, and about 4 feet high (Ex. 25:23-30). Every Sabbath, 12 loaves of fresh unleavened bread were placed upon this table and covered with frankincense. When the week was finished, only the priests could eat it (Lev. 24:5-9). Such was in the holy place.

Hebrews 9:3

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,

The Holy of Holies was the inner room of the tabernacle. It was 15 feet long and 15 feet wide. It was 15 feet tall, forming a perfect cube. This was the most holy place on the planet. This is where God chose to dwell. This is where the high priest would encounter God (as we shall see in verse 7). Verses 4 and 5 describe what was in the Holy of Holies, ...

Hebrews 9:4-5

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; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat;

The altar of incense was 3 feet high, and a foot and a half by a foot and a half. This is where the fragrant incense was placed every morning and evening (Ex. 30:1-10). According to the account in Exodus, the altar of incense was placed just in front of the veil. I'm not sure why the author puts the altar of incense within the veil. Perhaps because of its close connection with the Holy of Holies. Or, perhaps because the altar of incense was placed inside the Holy of Holies at some point in time. Or perhaps because the altar of incense symbolized coming to God. I don't know.

Let's go on to the ark of the covenant. This is a famous piece of furniture in the tabernacle. Essentially, it was a box about 4 feet long and about 2 feet wide. It was about 2 feet tall. It had a removable top, and it stored several items in it. These items were placed in the ark as a reminder to the people of God's character. It was like a box full of precious memorabilia.

In the ark, there was a golden jar, holding a sample of the manna, which God had given every day to sustain the sons of Israel. It reminded Israel of God's sustaining power. There was Aaron's rod that budded. This was essentially a stick, which God had caused to bud with flowers as a sign against those who were rebelling against Aaron and his authority (see Numbers 17). It reminded Israel that they were to submit to God. There were also the tables of the covenant. These were the 10 commandments, written on stone. These tables reminded Israel of everything that God required of them. These things were in the ark. On the lid of the ark were two cherubim, angelic creatures, who spread their wings toward each other, so that the whole ark was in their shade. Now, certainly, we could talk about all of this more. But, as verse 5 says, ...

Hebrews 9:5

... of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

We have spoken enough, so that you get the idea. In verse 6, the language transitions from the articles making up the tabernacle, to the ministry that takes place in the tabernacle. Verse 6, ...

Hebrews 9:6

Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship,

The tabernacle was a hubbub of activity. Every morning, a lamb was sacrificed (Numbers 28:3-4). Every evening, a lamb was sacrificed. Every Sabbath day, an additional two lambs were sacrificed (Numbers 28:9-10). At the beginning of each month, additional sacrifices were made: Two bulls, one ram, seven male lambs, a male goat and an additional grain offerings (Numbers 28:11-15). On top of this, there were a bunch of sacrifices made during each feast and festival, like during the Passover and the day of atonement and the feast of tabernacles. [\[1\]](#)

Those were merely the required sacrifices. As each day progressed, people from Israel would come with their animals and with their confessions. The priest would take the animal, pray over it, slaughter it and sacrifice it before the LORD. The scene would be a bit like our modern-day mall. People coming and going all day long. In so doing, the place was a flurry of activity. So much so that the writer to the Hebrews says that the priests were "continuing entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship."

There was never a dull moment in the tabernacle. But, there was one place in the tabernacle that was quiet. It was the Holy of Holies. Nobody ever entered that room except for the high priest, once a year. It lay dormant all year long, until Verse 7 explains, ...

Hebrews 9:7

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.

The high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which was always on the tenth day of the seventh month. On that day, he would bring the blood of a bull into the holy place and sprinkle it seven times upon the mercy seat, which was the top of the Ark of the Covenant, atoning for his own sins. If all went well, he would leave the Holy of Holies and collect some goat's blood. He would then enter again, sprinkling the blood upon the mercy seat with his finger, thereby atoning for the "sins of the people committed in ignorance" (verse 9). This would address any sin ever committed. The priest would be pleading for the peoples' forgiveness.

OK, so what? We've spent a significant amount of time reflecting upon the Old Covenant worship. So what's the point? The point comes in verse 8.

2. The Significance (verses 8-10)

This is the point of everything in this passage.

Hebrews 9:8-9

The Holy Spirit is **signifying** this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. ...

I find it interesting that the writer didn't get caught up into all of the different ways that the tabernacle might anticipate Christ. Like, "Jesus is the light of the world, like the lampstand in the tabernacle." Or, "Jesus is the bread of life, like the showbread on the table." Or, "Jesus is the one who tabernacled among us." Or, "Jesus is the laver, who washes us from our sins." Or, "Jesus is the sacrifice." Now, all of that is true. It's good for us to think about. But, he points out one thing about the Old Covenant worship." He says, "The way to God is difficult. It is filled with all sorts of rules and regulations, and ultimately, in the days of the Old Covenant, there was only one man who approached God. He was the high priest. And he only approached God but for a few minutes every year. The way to God is difficult."

What a contrast this is to the way in which God created the world. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had access to God every day. They walked with Him in the garden (Gen. 3:8). And yet, now, under the Old Covenant, the way to God is for one man to spend a few minutes each year with God. Something is dreadfully wrong with this picture.

This is what the Holy Spirit is telling us. He says, "The way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing." As long as the temple was standing, access to God was limited. This is the main point of the all the structure that God gave to Old Covenant worship. You do all these things, and ultimately you only have little access to God. Something is not right about this situation. It needs to be fixed.

But, not only is the access time limited, there is also a limitation in what the sacrifices actually did! They were only surface deep. Look in the middle of verse 9, ...

Hebrews 9:9-10

... Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

The gifts and sacrifices of the Old Covenant were skin-deep at best! They could never penetrate deep within to the conscience level. Dealing with sin with sacrifices of animals is like trying to deal with criminals, by placing them in jail. To be sure, there is a cost that's paid by sending men behind bars for the crimes that they have done. And at times, the length served is certainly equal to the crime. But, sitting in jail does nothing for your guilty conscience.

This is demonstrated in the life of Albert Speer. He lived in Germany during World War II. He was the "Minister of Armaments and War Production" in Germany, making sure that the factories continued in operation, making equipment for war. He was so good at what he did that even after the Allied bombing, the production in the factories increased! He was so trusted by Hitler, that the dictator said, "Speer, I'll sign anything that comes from you." After the war, he was tried at Nuremberg, along with the 21 other of the most important captured leaders of Nazi Germany, many of whom were executed for their crimes. What made Speer unique is that he pleaded guilty to the war crimes and said the he was sorry. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

When he was released from prison, he turned attention to writing about his experiences inside the Nazi regime. His book sold very well. At one point, he came to America and was interviewed on Good Morning America in the United States regarding the book that he had written. The interviewer said to him, "You have said the guilt can never be forgiven or shouldn't be. Do you still feel that way?" Speer replied, with a pained look on his face, "I served a sentence of 20 years, and I could say, 'I'm a free man, my conscience has been cleared by serving the whole time as punishment. But I can't get rid of it. This new book is part of my atoning, of clearing my conscience.'" The interviewer pressed the point: "You really don't think you'll be able to clear it totally?" Speer shook his head. "I don't think it will be possible." Jail for twenty years didn't help. A book of confessions didn't help.

Such is the futility of the Old Covenant. You try to get rid of your guilt, but you can't. Speer even gave as much as 80% of his writing royalties to Jewish charities in an effort to absolve his guilty conscience. But, soon after that interview, he went to the grave with a guilty conscience.

[\[2\]](#)

Similarly, the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were never able to deal with the heart of the matter. They were all external.

Those of the Old Covenant dealt with guilt like the Macbeth in Shakespeare's play. Having killed the king, his conscience was pricking his heart. He heard a knock on the door and is frightened, thinking that someone will find out. He was paralyzed in his fear. He looks at his hands, as if he had never seen them before. He saw them as so bloody that to wash them in the ocean would turn the entire sea from being green to being red. Or, as Shakespeare wrote, ...

What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes.

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

Making the green one red. [\[3\]](#)

That's what a guilty conscience will do to you. It will paralyze you. It will crush you until you get rid of the stain. A great Biblical example of this

is David, who said, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (Ps. 32:3-4).

The Old Covenant sacrifices could never cleanse the conscience. And when David finally did confess his sin to the Lord, he said, "You do not delight in sacrifice; otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering" (Ps. 51:16). That was only external. But, then, David speaks the truth, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Perhaps you have a stained conscience. Perhaps the knock at the door has caused your heart to palpitate. Perhaps your sleep has been curtailed. Perhaps you are under the discipline of the Lord, lacking energy. Do you want to be perfect of conscience? If you do, then I have good news. It's not found in the ways of the Old Covenant, washings and regulations, penance, good deeds, works, efforts or pledges. Even these things testified that they were only temporary.

At the end of verse 10, we see that these things were "imposed until a time of reformation" where full and free access to God would come. The time of reformation has come! It has come in Jesus Christ. He is our Savior, who can cleanse us from our sins, deep within. He is our Savior, who can save us from our sins, and bring us to God.

3. The Savior (verses 11-14)

Jesus Christ is our Savior. He can bring us to God, cleansing our consciences completely! Look there at verse 11, "But when Christ appeared."

We need to stop here and look at the first word, "But." This is another one of those "blessed buts" in the Scripture when the canvas is painted all black, and then God breaks in on the scene! Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Ephesians 2:4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. Galatians 1:13, "I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;" Galatians 1:15, "But ... God, ... called me through His grace." Psalm 130:3, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" Psalm 130:4, "But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." And here again in Hebrews, "But when Christ appeared." Let's look at the entirety of verses 11 and 12, ...

Hebrews 9:11-12

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Much of this is review from the book of Hebrews. We see Jesus mentioned as a high priest in chapter 4 (verse 14). We see Jesus entering a heavenly tabernacle in chapter 8 (verses 2). We see Jesus offering up Himself in chapter 7 (verse 27). We see Jesus entering the holy place in chapter 8 (verse 1). We see Jesus entering once for all in chapter 7 (verse 24). But, as the author repeats it here, it means that it is worthy of our consideration once more. Now, as we work through these verses, I want for you to see how each of the phrases talk of how we have greater access to God than ever before.

Jesus Christ is our high priest. The role of the high priest was to bring us to God, and the access that Jesus provides is full and free! You can come to Him anytime. You don't have to wait until the Day of Atonement. He has the ear of God. He is seated at God's right hand. So draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16ff).

Jesus Christ has entered the heavenly tabernacle. His priesthood is of a different realm. It's not merely here upon the earth, attempting to reach God, somehow, someday. Rather, the ministry of Jesus Christ is in heaven, It's in the heavenly tabernacle, from which the tabernacle here on earth derived its form.

Jesus Christ offered up Himself. His sacrifice was supreme. The blood that pleads before the throne isn't the blood that came from an animal, like a goat or a calf. Rather, the blood that pleads before the throne of God is the blood of the God-man, Jesus Christ. His blood is effective in bringing you to God.

Jesus Christ entered the holy place. The Holy of Holies was a mere approximation of the true holy place in heaven. Jesus didn't enter a place here upon the earth. No, Jesus entered the very throne-room of God in the heavens. Jesus can take us right to God the Father. Jesus Christ entered once for all. His sacrifice never needed to be repeated, because it worked! His one sacrifice brought us to God permanently. He didn't have to repeat it. He didn't have to approach God again next year.

Finally, look at what this all accomplished. Verse 12, "having obtained eternal redemption."

I lack the ability to describe these things! It is redemption that lasts forever! Do you have any idea what this means? When you redeem something, you purchase it. When it comes to God, we need to be purchased. Jesus Christ purchased us who believe. And his purchase wasn't temporary. He didn't get us tickets to the ball game so that we can have access to the ballpark today. Nor did Jesus get us season tickets for every ball game this year! No, Jesus purchased our ticket for life! There's no revoking this purchase. It is ours forever. Nothing can take it away from us. What a great Savior Jesus is!

Let's go to Him, empty-handed, not seeking religious works to help us.

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling!

Verses 13 and 14 finish the thought.

Hebrews 9:13-14

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

I love arguments from the lesser to the greater. If it's true for the small case, how much more is it true for the large case? "If God cares for the sparrow, how much more will He care for us" (Matt. 6). Or in Jonah, when God tells Jonah, "If you care for the plant, Jonah, how much more should God care for people, like Nineveh?" And "If those of the Old Covenant who sinned died without mercy, how much more will our punishment be who refuse to believe the New Covenant!" (Heb 10:28--29).

And here, this morning, the argument goes like this: if the Old Covenant sanctified the flesh, how much greater is the cleansing of the New? The Old Covenant brought sacrifices of animals. The New Covenant brings the sacrifice of the perfect Christ! Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God! He never sinned. Hebrews 7:26 calls Him, "holy," "innocent," and "undefiled." Hebrews 4:15 tells us He was, "tempted in all things without sin." That's the very thing that qualifies Him to come to God!

He can cleanse you deep within. He can liberate you from the dead works you try to do. He can free you to genuinely serve God! The only way to God is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12, John 14:6)!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 30, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www3.telus.net/public/kstam/en/tabernacle/details/offerings.htm> is a good link summarizing all of these things

[2] Here's an article that gives great information about Albert Speer's life: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Speer. Kent Hughes tells of the Good Morning America interview in his commentary on Ephesians, p. 33. He was quoting Charles Colson, who wrote about it in his book, *Who Speaks for God*, pp. 76-77.

[3] <http://www.twelfth-night.info/clicknotes/macbeth/Hands.html>