

Characteristics of the Old Covenant

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[0 : 00] We're going to start in Hebrews chapter 9 tonight.

And we will get through, my intentions are to get through chapter 9 We end this spring and next fall. This often comes as a shock to students of the Bible. But the book of Hebrews was written primarily to the Hebrew people.

They had been part of a system that connected them to the ceremonial laws, the rituals, the sacrifices, the earthly priesthood, and the Old Covenant.

And what many did not understand then or now is that all of these things were designed to prepare them for something better and something eternal.

[1 : 24] You must keep steadfastly in mind that everything under the Old Covenant pointed to the everlasting reign of Christ Jesus under the New Covenant.

It's critical that we understand that. And in order to convince his Hebrew audience, and by extension, enlightened Gentile people as well, the author gives us a detailed contrast between the characteristics of the Old Covenant compared with the New Covenant.

Now we see part of this in our focal passage today. We're going to be reviewing Hebrews chapter 9 verses 1 to 7. Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

For a tent was prepared, the first section in which there were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence. It is called the holy place.

Behind the second curtain was a second section called the most holy place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold in which was a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff that budded and the tablets of the covenant.

[3 : 02] Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things, we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having been thus made, the priests go regularly into the first section performing their ritual duties.

But into the second, only the high priest goes and he but once a year and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

So first we shall deal with the old covenant characteristics. Back in verse 1 we just read, now even the first covenant had regulations of divine wisdom and the earthly sanctuary.

Now we have said from the start of our study that the first covenant was not without great value. It was given by God and obviously was of great value to the recipients.

[4 : 23] In the old covenant, God prescribed a special place to worship and also prescribed certain types of worship.

And most of that had to do with the earthly sanctuary which began in the tabernacle and later saw life in the temple which was constructed on the temple mount and destroyed at 70 A.D.

These were established by God but were temporary in nature. For instance today, neither the tabernacle nor the temple exists.

but they provided a beautiful picture of the eternal Messiah who was to come and they introduced a new and better covenant.

Now divine worship under the old covenant had with it certain rites and ceremonies. These were instituted by God and were designed to point people to His Son, the Messiah, who was their Savior.

[5 : 54] And while such worship was ordained of God, these temporary services were held in a temporary sanctuary. And in the following verses we're going to examine three things concerning the old worship.

First, in the old sanctuary, again I'll read, for there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one in which the lampstand, the table, and 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. So here we have a brief description dealing with the old sanctuary and that was later replaced by the temple made of stone.

The emphasis here was on the tabernacle and it was mobile because they moved. They were nomadic. They were journeying toward the Holy Land. It was a place of worship designed by God.

[7 : 31] It served as the first sanctuary. It was the most earthly of the sanctuaries in that it was moved around as the Hebrew people moved around.

As such they would have to tear it down so they could move. It was constructed of animal skins and it was transportable. by design it gave the appearance of impermanence.

In other words it was designed to last for only a limited amount of time. It was not a permanent fixture. It is interesting to note that only two chapters of the Bible really deal with creation.

When it came to the stars which I don't think we're going to see tonight but they sure were out last night. I got up and watched them saw them to describe the creation of the stars God did so in a mere five words.

He made the stars also. And if you want to be technical in Hebrew you only use three words the stars also. Because he was talking about creation.

[8 : 57] But then we come to an earthly transitory place of worship called the tabernacle. And God spends some fifty chapters giving us the details about its construction and about its function.

Minute details. And the tabernacle was important because it was a portrait of Christ. Everywhere you look in the tabernacle you see Jesus.

John MacArthur is a great instructor of this so I shamelessly stole a lot of things that he said about it. This is a little lengthy but that's okay. The courtyard of the tabernacle and kind of visualize this okay in your mind.

The courtyard of the tabernacle was one hundred and fifty feet long and seventy five and a half feet high. Interesting he added the half allowing a large number of people to enter at the same time.

It is a graphic picture of Christ Jesus who said I am the way and I am the door. Had a big door.

[10 : 31] Just as there was only one entrance to the tabernacle there is only one way to God. The only way and the only door Jesus Christ.

Brothers Christianity is exclusive. It's the most exclusive religion. I hate to call it that because it's really not. And it's exclusive not because Christians make it so, but because God made it so.

Throughout the centuries of course, Christians have made the earthly church exclusive in many ways. We kind of put bars on the windows and lock on the doors and dare people to try to get in.

That's wrong. But God has intentionally made His spiritual eternal church exclusive. It can only be entered through Christ Jesus and we're talking about the church that's already in glory.

Many of our brothers and sisters are already there. The first article of furniture in the outer court was the bronze altar.

[11 : 54] It was made of acacia wood. It was sheathed with bronze. it was seven and a half feet square. It stood four and a half feet off the ground and was topped with a bronze grate.

The coals were placed underneath the grate and the sacrifice was placed on top. On the four corners of the altar were horns to which the animal was bound when it was being sacrificed.

the bronze altar is again a perfect picture of Jesus Christ who himself was a sacrifice for sin. The next piece of furniture in the court was the laver or basin that was also made of bronze.

In it the priests would wash their hands. Sometimes they would wash their feet. as they went about the bloody services of sacrifice.

I once read Alfred Edersheim, I believe, a Messianic Jew of a couple hundred years ago and he said the blood in the tabernacle and later temple was above ankle deep often from all the sacrifices.

[13 : 18] So here is a picture of Jesus Christ as the cleanser of his people. Once we have received forgiveness for our sins through Christ's sacrifice of himself, we still need daily cleansing that restores fellowship and joy.

And we saw that when Jesus elected to wash the feet of the disciples. And of course Peter always had something to say. Every church has a Peter, don't they?

Peter has something to say and he said, you're not going to wash my feet. He said, well then you don't have any part of me. Well then wash everything. I don't need to wash everything, Peter.

You've been made clean, but you pick up dust every day.

The dust of sin. And that's what needs to be clean. So we need that daily cleansing that restores fellowship and joy.

Now still moving west across the courtyard we come to the tabernacle proper. 45 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high.

[14:30] The holy place took up two thirds of this area which means that leaves the holy of holies and that means the holy of holies was a perfect 15 foot cube.

Now only the priest could go into the holy place. The people couldn't go in there. Only the priests in the holy place and there were three pieces of furniture.

The writer of Hebrews mentions two because he says I cannot speak in detail. On the left, as the priest entered, there was a solid gold lamp stand, having seven branches, and each of those were filled with the very purest of olive oil.

On the right was the table on which the sacred bread, or called showbread. This table, like the base of the altar, was of acacia wood, overlaid with gold.

It was three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and two and a quarter foot high. Every Sabbath, twelve loaves of bread were set on it, one for each of the twelve tribes, and at the end of the week, the priests and only the priests were allowed to eat the loaves.

[16:03] Farther in and to the center of the holy place was the altar of incense. It too was gold, overlaid acacia wood, one and a half feet square, about three feet high, and on this altar were placed burning coals from the bronze altar in the courtyard where sacrifice was made.

Again, these three pictures, or pieces of furniture, also picture Christ. everything in the outer courtyard was connected with salvation and the cleansing of sin.

Jesus accomplished his sacrificial work on earth outside of God's heavenly presence. The outer court was accessible to all those who will come to him.

But in his heavenly sanctuary, he is shut off from the world, temporarily, even from his own people.

From his heavenly place now, Jesus lights our path.

That's pictured in the golden lampstand. He feeds us. That's pictured in the table of sacred bread.

And he intercedes for us pictured by the altar of incense.

[17:29] In John 9-5 we read, while I am in the world, I am the light of the world, Jesus said. When he left the world, the world was left in darkness and only for believers is he the light of life.

He is the light that directs our paths. He's the one who through the spirit illumines our mind to understand spiritual truth.

He is the one who by the indwelling spirit whom he sent guides us through this world of darkness and getting darker may I add. He is our light.

Jesus is our sustenance. He is our table of sacred bread. He is the one who feeds us every day, who sustains us with the word.

The word is not only our food, but our light. And the oil is the spirit of God who lights the word for us.

[18:47] The altar of incense pictures Jesus interceding for us. The perfect sacrifice becoming the perfect intercessor. Which now brings us to the Holy of Holies.

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies into which only the high priest could enter and that but once a year on Yom Kippur the day of atonement.

In the holiest of earthly places and that was the holiest place on earth was only one piece of furniture the Ark of the Covenant and in the Ark were three very precious articles a golden jar holding manna Aaron's rod which budded and the tables or tablets of the covenant made of acacia wood overlaid with gold it's about three feet nine inches long two feet three inches wide two feet high on the lid was the mercy seat on which the cherubin of glory angelic figures were made of solid gold I'm sure if you watch Raiders the Lost Ark you've seen that it was between the wings of those angels on the mercy seat that

God met men and there I'll meet you and from above the mercy seat from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony I will speak to you about all that I will give in commandment for the sons of Israel that's Exodus 25 22 if God and man were to meet it can only

be there and only through the earthly high priest once a year now we noted three items found in the holiest place on earth a golden jar holding manna manna!

giving manna was one of the most extraordinary miracles in the Bible remember the Hebrew children they're sojourning through the wilderness and they didn't have anything to eat and God gave them manna week after week the manna appeared all around the tabernacle for 80 years it kept to a constant cycle of five days of a single portion and then one day of a double portion and one day of no portion so one day you could take a double portion and that would suffice for the day of no manna now people being people a lot of people tried to gather up more storesome and it became foul and they had to be thrown out Moses said this is what the Lord has commanded!

[22 : 08] let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt and Moses said Aaron take a jar and put an omer of manna in it and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations that's in Exodus 16 32 to 34 as the Lord commanded Moses so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept Christ Jesus is our eternal manna and then there was Aaron's rod which budded Aaron's rod that budded was a miraculous sign from God to confirm Aaron's authority as the high priest of

Israel and to end the rebellion of some of the people some of them had gone into rebellion the rod was one of twelve rods one from each tribe that were placed before the Lord in the tabernacle the next day only Aaron's rod had sprouted buds blossoms and almonds while the others remained dry the rod was kept as a token against the rebels and a reminder of God's choice of Aaron the rod also symbolized the life resurrection and ministry of Jesus Christ who is the true high priest he's the one who bears fruit in and through his people and then we have the table of the covenant it probably makes more sense to us if we use the word tablet in place of table but the

Bible uses table so we use that as well it was the two stone tablets on which the ten commandments were written by the finger of God now whether this was the original tablets which would be in pieces because Moses threw those down when he caught the people sinning or was it the replacement tablets which God provided is not known it's not known Aaron's rod sign from God to confirm Aaron's authority as the high priest of Israel to end the rebellion of the people and it symbolizes Christ Jesus as does the Ten Commandments it's his law now we've studied the fact that only one man was qualified to meet with

God and that was the earthly high priest he could only meet once a year in an elaborate ceremony that had to be perfect if the high priest were flippant did something in violation of the scriptures that governed such a meeting God could and would strike him dead we have Nadab and Abihu the sons of Aaron to be an example of that got intoxicated offered strange fire went into the holy of holies where they had no business going and God consumed them the bottom line was that for the most part men had no access to God direct access none the regular priest could not meet with him and the sons of Israel could only get as far as the outer!

court the only item in the holy of Hoses was the ark and that piece of furniture represented Christ because he is the true mercy seat he's the one that provides us mercy in the new covenant which we'll get to not tonight those who meet Christ for eternal life are ushered into the presence of God the Father in the true holy of holies it's now in heaven and we should not forget that this is always poignant to me the same holy God whom the Jews could not meet with we can meet with as children coming before their father we have access through

[27 : 21] Christ's blood to the father but we should bear something in mind when we meet with the father and we should do that every day many times a day he is still the same holy God and we should not come flippantly or in violation of scripture we can have fellowship with God solely on the basis of the blood shed by the Lord Jesus Christ there's no other way to gain access but through the blood Hebrews 9 verse 6 to 7 now when these things have been so prepared the priests are continuing into 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 an ignorance there was much to do in the sanctuary of the old covenant the priests would trim their wicks add oil to the lamps put incense on the altar of incense replace the twelve loaves of bread the picture there is there's always work to be done there was always work to be done they were continually ministering to the people that is a beautiful picture of

Christ who continually works for his children and who does not cease from enlightening his children or feeding us or interceding on our behalf his work does not end he is an ever living and an

everlasting high priest he ever lives to make intercession for his children for his people the true work of Christ is embodied in the description provided for us in verse 7 this is the high priest entering the holy of holies once a year on the day of atonement to make intercession for the people and that beautiful example is contained in Leviticus chapter 16 I encourage you to read that and read it often now the ceremony was a perfect picture of the atonement provided by Christ but under the old covenant it had its limitations the people could never really know whether their sins had been forgiven or not they hoped they had they wished they had that does not describe us it's a far cry from our knowledge based upon our understanding of the atonement the sacrifice of Christ this is what John says in his first epistle these things I have written to you that believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life first John 5 13 he wants you to know he wants his children to know they have eternal life God wants us to know what the old covenant Jew could only hope for or speculate about but he wants us to know and it's a beautiful picture in the epistle of 1 John it's brief five chapters read it often read it often well it's a little early but I'm going to end there we're going to pick it up there next time and we'll be finishing out the old and getting to the new and then we'll close down for the summer so let's close with a word of prayer brothers thank you father for your grace your mercy and the peace we have which comes with knowing Christ and him crucified lord may we be found worthy and worshipful and may Jesus be honored in our lives honored in our families lives and our church's life and lord we look forward to that day when we will see you face to face now we see you by faith and we thank you for that in Jesus name amen you