
Words of Truth

Hebrews 9:1-10

By: Brian A. Yeager

“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Hebrews 9:1-10).

After a chapter discussing the vanishing of the Law of Moses (Hebrews 8:1-13), the context is transitioning to the changes in the sanctuary and then again to the changes in the priesthood. Under the Law of Moses, the children of Israel were to make God a sanctuary (Exodus 25:8-9). That sanctuary was to be revered (Leviticus 26:2). Later, Solomon was to build a new sanctuary that we know as the temple in Jerusalem (I Chronicles 28:9-12). Included in those instructions were the courses for the priests and the Levites, for the work and service to be done in that sanctuary (I Chronicles 28:13-21).

Going back to the days of Moses the sanctuary was in a tabernacle [tent] (Exodus 26:1-30). The children of Israel were given instructions as to what the Lord wanted within the tabernacle (Exodus 25:10-40). Then there was a second veil and behind that was the most Holy place (Exodus 26:31-33). Then, the ark of the covenant and other items were placed therein (Exodus 37:1-29). What was done, was as Moses commanded (Exodus 40:20-21). Aaron's rod that budded had to be added later because the event concerning his rod had not occurred when the first tabernacle was constructed (Numbers 17:1-13). The tables of the covenant were overshadowed by cherubims. This is where the Lord said He would meet with Moses (Exodus 25:17-22).

It is interesting to note that the penmen of this letter said “of which we cannot now speak particularly” concerning the mercyseat. Was it the glory of God upon the mercyseat they could not speak of particularly? Was it that there was no need to speak further of these things? Were there limitations concerning these things because the ark of God was not with Israel any longer? I do not have any answers on this point. We can go backwards and read about the pattern concerning these matters (I Chronicles 28:11), but from this text we gain no further information.

The letter then points to the service of the priests in the first tabernacle (i.e. Exodus 27:21). Into the second place, the most holy place, the high priest entered alone with blood sacrifices for his errors as well as the people’s errors (Leviticus 16:1-20). It is here that we begin to see the point of this context. The temple was going to be destroyed, as Jesus prophesied, in the first century (Matthew 23:37-24:34). The temple therefore did not matter any more. What did matter is how sins would be dealt with. If not within the temple, where would they be dealt with? If not the blood of unblemished sacrifices, with what/whose blood would their sins be dealt with? If the Jews struggling with the transition from the old law to the new would’ve just reasoned here, they would’ve seen the need for something better.

The writers of this letter declared that the Holy Ghost made a statement through the way sins were dealt with in the past. The people did not come before God. They had an imperfect man standing before God on their behalf. This should have screamed loudly to them that the system was not perfect. Yet, we know that people do not always make the proper necessary inferences (John 21:20-23). Their consciences were not able to be cleansed. When we proceed into the next chapter, we will read this: *“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Hebrews 10:19-22). The things of old were only a figure of the true (Hebrews 9:24).

The language in the last passage of this study reminds me of Colossians 2:4-23. The physical things of meats, drinks, washings, etc. had become all too important to the Jews. As we discussed in our previous study, the children of Israel were foretold of a better covenant to come (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The saints in the churches of Galatia erred by going backwards towards some of the things written in the Law of Moses (Galatians 1:6-9 and Galatians 5:1-11). They were told that there was a “fulness of time” regarding Christ coming into this world and the changes He brought (Galatians 3:22-4:5). The terms used in our current study are “the time of reformation.” To the carnally minded Jew, this meant a restoration of the physical kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). Thankfully, that is not what our Lord meant. Jesus came to restore mankind to a relationship with God that did not, could not (Acts 13:38-39), exist under the Law of Moses (II Corinthians 5:14-18 and Colossians 1:12-20).