

# OpenTheo

## Hebrews 8



### Hebrews - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the concept of the new covenant in Hebrews chapter eight. He contrasts the old covenant, which was written on stone and based on laws, with the new covenant, which promises a new heart and spiritual communion with God. Gregg also examines the symbolism behind the tabernacle and argues that it portrays how man approaches God. Ultimately, Gregg highlights the better promises and better covenant of the new covenant compared to the old.

## Transcript

Let's turn to Hebrews chapter eight and we will be picking up sort of a turning point in the argument of the book. It's been obvious that the first seven chapters have concerned themselves with the superiority of Christ over institutions, persons, authorities associated with the law and the old covenant. In this place, he's going to pick up and talk about a new covenant, a better covenant.

Now, all the things associated with the old covenant, whether it's the angels who were instrumental in the giving of the law, or Moses who gave the law, or Aaron who officiated in the tabernacle under the law, you name it. These things have been discussed. It's been clear that these things were temporary.

They were not God's ultimate and Christ is God's ultimate. And since he has come, it makes no sense whatsoever for Christians who know him to be enamored with or to be trusting in or to looking back toward those lesser forms of worship and approach to God. Now, that's exactly what the tabernacle is about.

It was about an approach to God. God was seen as dwelling in the tabernacle in the Holy of Holies. Of course, God dwells everywhere, but in terms of people coming to worship in a ritual way to present themselves before God and bring sacrifices, there was a location that God assigned for all of that, and that was at the tabernacle.

And this was the tabernacle of the old covenant. Not so much in chapter 8, but in chapters 9 and 10, we're going to be looking at the ritual there of that. But chapter 8 is going to point out that there's a covenant that has replaced the old covenant.

The tabernacle, the priesthood, the law, all of that was part of an older covenant. And this is something that many Christians now need to become aware of because they seem to be unaware of it. Christians often seem to be not quite clear on what our relationship is with the old order.

And, of course, even as we speak, it's a very popular thing in some circles for Christians to go back and embrace, not so much the sacrificial system since that's not available to us. Since this book was written, the temple was destroyed, and there's no sacrificial system to return to. But notwithstanding that impossibility, some feel that we should do as much as we can to fulfill the requirements of the old covenant.

It seems to me it should be obvious to anyone looking back and seeing that God himself brought an end to the temple system. God himself eliminated the sacrificial system or any possibility of participating in it. That God was making a statement about the whole thing, about all the rituals associated with it.

But sometimes Christians aren't very good at putting together these things. And they say, well, we can't offer the sacrifices, sadly, but we can do other things that don't require the temple. We can eat kosher.

We can keep festivals. You can't keep festivals. The festivals all were at Jerusalem at the temple.

People say we should be still keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. Why? The Feast of Tabernacles involved going to the temple, offering animal sacrifices, and camping out for a week and offering sacrifices every day. If the sacrificial system is gone, then the festivals are gone because they were all temple-related festivals.

But, you see, this is a matter of confusion to people. Because Jesus said that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. And many Christians read only the first part of that verse, not the second.

The part that says he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets. And suddenly their mind shuts down and says, I got it. The law and the prophets are not destroyed.

The law and the prophets are still in force. And they don't notice the other part where he says, but I came to fulfill them. What he came to do to the law was not to, he was not coming in a violent opposition to the law as if he was its enemy coming to destroy it.

He was coming to bring it to its fulfillment. That's doing something positive to the law. It's bringing about the order that the law anticipated and predicted.

Paul said that, by the way, over in Romans chapter 1. In the opening of the book of Romans, he made this very clear. He said in verses 1 and 2, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God, which he promised before

through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Now Moses was a prophet.

He was the first of the great prophets. And Moses and the prophets predicted this gospel. And then when you turn to Romans 3, verse 21, Paul says, but now the righteousness of God, apart from the law, is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

That is, that there is a righteousness that does not involve all this legal rigmarole of the temple and all that law stuff. That there's a righteousness that's independent of all of that is something that the law itself testified to. That is, when you come and say it's time for those rituals to go, it doesn't mean you're being hostile to those rituals.

They were predicting that the time would come when they would go. And Jesus said, this is the time. In fact, the first preaching in Mark recorded of Jesus is in Mark 1.15. And in the Greek, the first word that Jesus speaks in the gospel of Mark is fulfilled.

In the English version, it reads, the time is fulfilled. But in the Greek, the word fulfilled comes first. And in the Greek, the word that's put at the front of the sentence is for emphasis.

The first statement Jesus made is fulfilled. The time is fulfilled. The law anticipated something more permanent than itself.

And the time for that to come was fulfilled with the coming of Christ. And so he said, I didn't come to destroy the law. I came to fulfill it.

I like to give the illustration of a child growing up. The birth of a child anticipates something. Namely, an adult.

Every child you see, you expect to become an adult. Unless some horrible tragedy happens that interrupts that. Children are the promise of an adult human.

When a child becomes an adult, was the child destroyed? No, he's still around, but he's been fulfilled. He's reached maturity. He's reached the stage he's supposed to stay.

All through his childhood, that was expected that he'd be an adult someday. The child is not destroyed by adulthood. He's fulfilled.

And so the law, in passing away or changing its mode, from a ritual to a spiritual mode, has not been destroyed. The old covenant anticipated a new covenant. And what the writer's going to say in Hebrews chapter 8 is, not only did the law anticipate, the prophets anticipated a new covenant.

Jeremiah, actually, in Jeremiah 31, predicted a new covenant. So it's like, in talking about the passing of an old covenant and the coming of a new, we're not doing violence to the Old Testament. We're simply following what the Old Testament taught and anticipated.

So he says, Now this is the main point of the things we are saying. We have such a high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord erected in man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices.

Therefore, it is necessary that this one also have something to offer. Now, I read that far because it takes that far to really get to the end of the thought, but let me go back to the verses a little bit. He says that the summary or the main point of what has been said in the first seven chapters is now going to be reduced to a certain sentence, that we have such a high priest.

He has mentioned that in chapter 2, in chapter 4, in chapter 5, and extensively in chapter 7, that Christ is a high priest. So that's been his main point, as he puts it. Now, I think the King James says, this is the sum.

I think the word sum is the term used. They used to believe that the Greek word used here meant sort of a summary, but now they believe the Greek word means more of a main focus or a main point rather than a summary in general. So that's why the new King James says, this is the main point.

And that would agree with most new translations, reflecting the understanding of the Greek that has come to be more current. So he says, we've made a lot of points, but one of them is the main point. And that is that we have this high priest.

He's seated at the right hand, he says, of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. Now, I've been pointing out, and I'd point out here again, that the Jewish sensitivities avoided the word God as much as they could. Though they wanted to talk about God, they didn't want to use the word God, lest they cheapen it by too frequent use.

And so they would use terms like, well, a very common one is heaven. They'd just say heaven instead of God. Or something else.

In this case, the majesty in the heavens is simply a euphemism for God. And it's very Jewish to do something like that. He could have just said, he sat down at the right hand of God.

That's what Mark said, writing to Gentiles in Mark 16. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. But to a Hebrew set of sensitivities, you don't say God that much.

So he says, the majesty in the heavens, meaning God, of course. Now, Jesus says, the ministry of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. Now, there's a distinction being made here to the sanctuary, on the one hand, and the true tabernacle.

They are associated with each other, but they are mentioned separately, as separate things. In this case, the sanctuary is a reference to the Holy of Holies. Now, later on, in

chapter 9, the word sanctuary is going to be used to mean the other part of the tabernacle, the holy place.

Sanctuary is just a word that means a holy place. In the tabernacle, there were essentially two holy places. One was holier than the other.

There was the ordinary holy place, and then beyond the veil, there was the holiest place, the Holy of Holies. Both of these are sanctuaries. Both of them are holy places.

Therefore, they can both be referred to as a sanctuary. When he says that Christ is a minister of the sanctuary, I think he's referring to the Holy of Holies in heaven. He's talking about the Holy of Holies in heaven, not the earthly one.

He's going to bring that out very clearly in chapter 9. Chapter 9 is really going to continue on from what he begins here in chapter 8 along these lines. Now, the true tabernacle could be understood to mean the one in heaven also. It would be somewhat larger than the Holy of Holies, but the Holy of Holies would be simply a compartment in the true tabernacle.

When Moses made the tabernacle, God told him to be sure that he made it according to the pattern that was shown to him in the mount. In fact, in verse 5, this writer is going to quote God's command to Moses along those lines. Because he's pointing out that there is something transcendent that the earthly tabernacle modeled.

There are transcendent spiritual realities, heavenly realities, which are patterned for what was built on earth. The tabernacle was a symbolic building. All the details that are given are very tedious to read about in Exodus.

If you start reading through the Bible, you get through Genesis. That's pretty cool. You get through half of Exodus.

That's where you get through the Ten Commandments. That's pretty cool. After that, it really slows down because you start getting a lot of tedious little laws.

When you start getting to the tabernacle, you have a description of the size and shape and composition of every little attachment to the boards and the curtains and the perimeter of the place and then all the furniture. It begins to be very tedious reading all this detail. Then, a couple of chapters are in there, followed by the report of the building of the tabernacle.

The first tedium is in God telling him how to build it. Then, the whole information is given again in all that detail. It says, and they built it.

They built it this way. It goes through all the detail. Why in the world would anyone writing a story, first of all, give all that detail in the first place and secondly, give it twice

to the same readers? Why do we have to hear that? The reason is because that detail was significant.

The writer of Hebrews says the reason it was significant is because it mirrored on earth, its details mirrored spiritual realities. Those spiritual realities had to be correctly represented. If the details were altered by man, then the spiritual reality that was depicting would be miscommunicated.

Very important, God said, don't deviate from the pattern. That was shown you. What is that pattern? Is there a tabernacle in heaven that was shown to him? Some people think so.

Some people think there's a heavenly tabernacle up there with all these features, the courtyard, the altar, and so forth, and the Holy of Holies in heaven. There could be. The book of Revelation depicts John being caught up into heaven and seeing some things that are reminiscent of the tabernacle.

He sees a lampstand up there. Although in the tabernacle, there's a seven branched lampstand, and there are seven separate lampstands in Revelation chapter one. But certainly the idea of seven lamps is reminiscent of the tabernacle on earth.

He sees a golden altar in heaven. He sees the Ark of the Covenant in heaven, chapter 11. He sees the Holy of Holies in heaven.

He sees other things that are related to the tabernacle in his visions in Revelation. Some people say that John being caught up in heaven actually saw the heavenly tabernacle, which also was shown to Moses on the mountain. Moses was to use that as the pattern for building the earthly tabernacle.

That's all entirely quite possible. We can't be too sure about that because John's experiences on Patmos were all very symbolic. It's not necessarily safe to assume that when we go to heaven, we'll see the things he's describing there.

For example, when we go there, I don't know that we'll see Jesus as a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. I think that's a symbolic description of him. I think that he had visions that were symbolic of heavenly truths and realities, but I don't know that he's describing what the average person will see when they go to heaven.

It's like Zechariah had visions and Daniel had visions about beasts and about all kinds of things that are symbolic. When we go to heaven, we'll see the real heaven, not symbolic portrayals of it. I don't know to what degree we're supposed to recognize in John's experiences in being caught up in heaven a literal normative description of what heaven's like.

But if it is, there seems to be a tabernacle up there too. We do know that God did show

Moses, apparently in a vision, a tabernacle pattern. Whether it actually corresponds to a literal tabernacle that's in heaven or not, it's hard to say.

Actually, a lot of things in the tabernacle don't really... Their meaning, as brought out in the New Testament, have more to do with Christ and the church than it would seem extraterrestrial phenomena. In heaven, celestial phenomena. And in saying that there's a true tabernacle, verse 2 here, which the Lord erected and not man, the writer has already indicated that we are the true tabernacle.

In chapter 3, verse 6, he says, but Christ as the Son over his own house, whose house we are. He talks about Moses and building the tabernacle as God's house, but Christ has his own house, us. And therefore, one could argue that the church, the community of saints, is the true tabernacle that the Old Testament tabernacle is depicting.

That there's a spiritual normativeness about the true church that is depicted symbolically in the building of the tabernacle. This could go either way. You could see the true tabernacle, he mentions verse 2, could be the church on earth, the house of God, the tabernacle.

Or it could be that there's a literal tabernacle up in heaven that he's referring to as the true tabernacle. In any case, the sanctuary that he mentions verse 2, that Christ ministers in, is certainly heaven. So, whether the true tabernacle is the church, which is partly in heaven and partly on earth, because some Christians have already gone to heaven and some have not.

But the church, in a sense, fills heaven and earth. And the Holy of Holies, where our chief priest sits, is in heaven. It may be that the whole community of the saved is the tabernacle, whether in heaven or on earth.

Not made clear enough by the author as to which way he's viewing this, but commentators have seen it both ways. Now, it says in verse 3, every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore, it is necessary that Jesus also have something to offer.

If he's a priest, he's got to offer something, right? And this was stated also in chapter 7, the previous chapter in verse 27, just before this verse, or just before this chapter, says, Christ does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's. For this he did once for all when he offered up himself. So, the offering up of himself is a unique priestly function.

All the priests in the Old Testament offered something. They had to have something to offer, like it says in verse 3. But what they offered wasn't themselves, they offered animals. Jesus had something to offer for sure, and that is himself.

Later on in chapter 9, verses 12 through 14, this point is made again. When it says that

Christ has entered into the greater perfect tabernacle in verse 11, it goes on in verse 12, chapter 9, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, he entered the most holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

So, Christ's offering of himself is mentioned in Hebrews 7, 27, but also elaborated on a little bit in chapter 9. Here it is simply said in chapter 8, verse 3, he had to have something to offer, and of course what he had to offer was a superior sacrifice to any offered in the Old Testament. Verse 4, for if he were on earth, he would not be a priest. He would not be a priest, why? Because he was not a Levite.

That was the whole point of chapter 7. Christ is a priest in spite of the fact that he's not a Levite. Chapter 7 says he's of the tribe of Judah, and the law never said anything about any priests of the tribe of Judah. In the Jewish order, there can be no priests of the tribe of Judah.

He could not be a priest if he was here, because, he says, there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law. This present tense makes it very clear that the temple was still standing when this was written. There were priests, even as he was writing, who were offering sacrifices, he says.

And their priesthood was well defined by hereditary considerations. They had to be descended from somebody, and Jesus was not descended from that same person. Therefore, if he was on the earth, there's an earthly priesthood already that would exclude him.

He wouldn't be a priest, but he's got an entirely independent kind of priesthood, and it's not on earth, it's in heaven. Verse 5, those priests serve the copy and the shadow of heavenly things. They serve the tabernacle, which the tabernacle is a copy and shadow of heavenly things.

The idea of a shadow, we have discussed before. We sometimes speak of something as a type or a shadow. A type is kind of a shadow.

The word type, *tupos* in the Greek, means a pattern or really a form. Actually, if you pour some molten liquid into a form for it to harden into shape, that form into which you pour it would be a *tupos* in the Greek, like a jello mold we'd have in our modern time. Or if a person's laying a foundation, they build a frame of two-by-fours and they pour concrete into it.

Once the concrete hardens, they kick away the form. The form only determines the



shape. It only mirrors the shape of the final product.

That's what the word tupos means. A type, tupos, in the Old Testament is something that sort of determined the shape or the features of something. David's ministry is a type of Christ's ministry, for example.

The offering of Isaac by his father. Abraham would be like a type of Christ being offered by his father. These are things in the Old Testament that resemble, in their general form, something that was going to come later that would replace them.

Once the jello has hardened, you remove the mold. You put it somewhere else. You present the jello, not the mold, to people.

That's what a type is. Now, a shadow is a term that the writers of the New Testament used, assuming that this writer is not Paul, because Paul uses it in Colossians 2, verses 16 and 17, where he's talking about some of the Jewish rituals. In Colossians 2.16, he says, Let no one judge you, therefore, with respect to food or drink, that is, restrictions on food and drink like the Jews would observe.

Or, he said, concerning festivals or new moons or Sabbath days. All of these are Jewish rituals. Dietary, festival calendar rituals.

This is all part of Judaism. Don't let anyone judge you about that, he said, because these things were a shadow. Colossians 2.17. These things were a shadow for the time present, but the substance or the body is Christ.

These things, in some sense, depicted the shape of Christ's ministry and Christ's service. And that's what the writer here says, too. The priest that served in the tabernacle, which Christ himself would not even be allowed to be in, if he was here now.

At least if he was here when the temple was standing. Those things were a type or a shadow. They sort of set the form that Jesus would fulfill.

Now, a shadow is an interesting metaphor to use. Paul uses it, and the writer of Hebrews uses it, both referring to the rituals of the Jewish order. They are shadows.

What does a shadow do? Well, depending on the position of the sun or the relationship of the light source from the thing casting the shadow, a shadow might look very much like the thing that's casting the shadow. You could often tell from looking at a shadow, even if you can't see the person, whether it's a man or a woman, certain things about it. In fact, if they have special features that are depicted clearly in the shadow, you could even maybe recognize a person by their shadow.

But it's really not a detailed picture. It's more like a silhouette. A shadow exists because light is absent.

It's the absence of light, not the presence of light, that casts the shadow, that is a shadow. Therefore, if these rituals were a shadow, they in some respect resemble, but they are not the light. They are not the thing itself.

They exist because of the lack of light. It is true that light casts a shadow, but the shadow itself is the absence of light in that spot. Therefore, the Old Testament rituals are not enlightened.

The people who were living under those rituals were still in the dark about the things that were actually depicted in those rituals. Now, Paul brings that out in at least four different passages of his writings. In those passages, he's talking about the mystery of Christ.

He says at least four times that these things were not revealed previously to those ancestors of ours, but it has been revealed by His Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets, he says. He says it in Ephesians 3. He says it in Colossians 1. He says it in Romans 16. He says it in 1 Corinthians 2. All those places he talks about the mystery of Christ was hidden from previous generations, and yet it was revealed to the apostles through the Spirit.

The light came with Jesus, and He enlightened His own disciples when He opened their understanding that they would understand the scriptures, the Jewish scriptures, the law, the prophets. The rabbis were in the dark. They couldn't understand what those things were really talking about.

The best the Jews could do is just be enamored with the ritual itself. But the apostles and prophets, especially through Christ opening their understanding, came to see what the substance is. Behind that shadow, the light shone on the face of Jesus.

When you look at 1 Peter 1, we see not only Paul, but Peter makes essentially the same point. There's good reason to believe that Peter and the contents of his first epistle were influenced by some of Paul's writings, including Ephesians and Romans, in certain aspects. One thing is he's influenced by Paul, apparently by his long sentences.

We have to sometimes pick up in the middle of a sentence, unless we want to spend twice as long dealing with a point we want to make. We'll do that at chapter 1, verse 9 of 1 Peter, in the middle of a sentence. It says, we are receiving the end of your faith, that is the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Now, having mentioned the salvation of our souls, he says, of this salvation, that is of salvation in Christ, the prophets, he means the Old Testament prophets, have inquired and searched diligently who prophesied of the grace that would come to you. Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating. When he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Now, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow in the present new age, new order under Christ, the kingdom age. These things were prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, but they didn't understand them. They endeavored to understand them.

The Holy Spirit was talking about something through them, but they didn't know exactly what it was. They searched diligently to understand more about it. And it says in verse 12, to them it was revealed that not to themselves, but to us, they were ministering.

That is, their words were not going to be understood or appreciated by their generation. It wasn't for their generation to know. It was for us, that is, Christians.

But to us, they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, which things even the angels desire to look into. These things were kept secret not only from the prophets, but from the angels too. This was really a shadowy thing.

This was darkness. There was an image of it, sort of, an image of the truth, but the details were not filled in, just like a shadow of somebody. And the Old Testament rituals and laws were that kind of a shadow.

These people were in the dark. The people who were prophesying, even the angels were in the dark. They longed to look into this.

But he says that God showed the prophets that they were not going to understand it. Their day was not the day for it to be known. Their day was the day for the shadow.

The time would come where the body would appear, which is Christ. And so Paul says these other things were a shadow, but the body is Christ. We see now clearly what God's plan was, and that's what the New Testament is revealing, which the Old Testament could never reveal, but to which it alluded.

And that's what he's saying. These priests, in Hebrews 8.4, not 8.4, 8.5, these priests serve as a copy and a shadow of these heavenly spiritual realities. As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle, for he said, See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mount.

This quotation is from Exodus 25, verse 40. This particular exhortation was given on the occasion that God described how to build the Ark of the Covenant, but a similar statement was made multiple times. In the course of giving the instructions about the tabernacle and its furniture, God would punctuate these instructions by every once in a while saying, See that you make it the way you saw it on the mount.

See that you follow the pattern on the mount. This particular quotation is just a sample of those multiple exhortations that God gave to Moses. Don't deviate on this.

Now, I suppose the author of Hebrews is bringing new light to something that we may take for granted because we've read the New Testament before, but to his own readers, maybe not. Maybe people wonder, why was God so particular about Moses doing it all just right? What does it matter whether the sockets were made out of silver or out of brass? What does it matter if the curtains were of blue, red, and purple, or whether there's a little bit of orange? What does it matter? Why was he so fussy about this? Why does he keep saying, don't change this, make it exactly the way I showed you? Well, the writer of Hebrews says, well, the reason for that is, and this is not actually explained in the Old Testament. This is what the writer of Hebrews brings out.

The reason it was so important is because of its correlation to something spiritual, something heavenly. Things that God wanted us to know that are transcendent realities, which were simply depicted symbolically in the details of this particular building. Now, how so? Well, I have in the past taught a series of 10 lectures on the tabernacle, trying to bring out some of these correspondences.

I will not bother to take the time now to do that. And much of what I have to say is what others have said in their books on the tabernacle. I've read many books by Christian teachers on the tabernacle, and they all have certain differences of opinion about some details, but some similarities too.

And I have to say that when you study the tabernacle and you try to say, okay, what does this detail probably refer to? Once in a while, you get a real big clue from something in the New Testament. A lot of times, in fact, New Testament writers will just allude to something and say, oh, I see, that's how they're understanding that part of the tabernacle. But there's a lot of details that the New Testament doesn't give us any information about.

And I have always said one of the most frustrating statements in the Bible is found in Hebrews chapter 9. In the first five verses, the author is kind of summarizing some of the layout of the tabernacle and its details. He's just summarizing what the Old Testament tells us about the tabernacle without explaining its meaning. And at the end of verse five, he says, of these things, we cannot now speak in detail.

Like I have other priorities right now than to go into this in detail. But had he chosen otherwise, we could know more about the tabernacle's meaning. If he had just gone into more detail, it's frustrating when you want to say, okay, I wonder about all this meticulous detail in the tabernacle.

What does it mean? And here the writer of Hebrews, it looks like he's approaching a discussion of it. He says, we don't have time to go into this. Sorry.

Let's talk about something else. And what a wonderful thing it would have been had he had the time to go into that in detail. We would have fewer questions and speculations

about the tabernacle.

But it is very clear. One thing is very clear. The tabernacle did depict how man approaches God.

And it had three sections. There was an outer courtyard, which was an open air enclosed section with curtains on, with curtain posts. And it was surrounded by curtains, but it was open air.

Within the enclosure of the courtyard, there was a building. We'd call it a building. It was kind of a prefab building.

You could disassemble it and put it back together real easy. It was built out of boards that were held together by metal clasps and things like that, and poles that ran through some loops and things to hold the boards erect. The boards would stand next to each other, just like if you had a paneled house.

And then the board structure, which only was three walls. If you were facing its front, you'd see, and it was being assembled before your eyes, you'd see a wall on your left, a wall on your right, and a wall connecting them along the back, but no wall in the front. Over that three-sided structure was a series of tarps and curtains.

The curtain that was first laid over it was an ornate linen curtain, brightly colored, red, purple, and blue. It had embroidered cherubim on it, and this is what you would see if you were inside the tabernacle looking up, if you'd see the first, of course, tapestry that was there. But above that, there were a series of other coverings, tarps, really.

Leather, ram's hair. One was ram's hair dyed red, one was ram's hair dyed black. The final covering was a leathery tarp made out of what most scholars think is dugong skin, sea cow.

It was called badger skin in the King James Version. You'd have to kill a lot of badgers to make this big old thing, but actually the word badger in the King James, the Hebrew word is now believed by Hebrew scholars to mean something, not what we call a badger, but more of an aquatic creature, a dugong, and its skin would be somewhat waterproof. So this provided a waterproof tarp over the top.

It meant that if you looked at the tabernacle from the outside, you'd see a not very ornate building because it's got this dull, gray, leathery cover. That's really what you see. Underneath it, there's all these symbolic colors and things like that in these other layers.

So this was like a tent, but it had solid walls on three sides. Across the front that didn't have a wall, there was a drapery and an opening that you could go in. Now, you couldn't, but the priest could.

And if you were an ordinary Jew wanting to approach God, you couldn't approach God all the way yourself. That's one difference between the Old Covenant and the New, and the writer's going to bring that out in chapters 9 and 10. The way into the holiest of all was not made available to the average man in the days of the law, and that has changed.

That was symbolized by the fact that when Jesus died, that veil was torn in two that separated between the holy place and the holiest of all. You see, the building that was within the enclosure was 15 feet wide, 15 feet tall, and 45 feet deep. In other words, if you looked at the front of it, it was like a square, but it was three times as deep as it was tall or wide.

That section, that length, was divided so that the last 15 foot was divided from the 30 feet in front of it. So that there was this veil that separated off the last 15 feet, the deepest 15 feet of this building. And therefore, since it was 15 feet wide, 15 feet tall, and now that section was 15 feet deep, it was a cube, 15 by 15 by 15 feet.

In front of that cube was the other 30 foot section, 15 by 15 by 30 feet, it was this dimension. The larger section was called the holy place. In that place, there were a few items of furniture.

If you walked in, on your right, you'd see a table, a wooden table covered with gold. So it looked like a golden table. It would have 12 loaves of bread on it, a table of showbread.

On your left, you would see a solid gold lamp stand with seven branches that was burning oil. And that was providing the only light that was inside of there. There were no windows.

And in front of you, as you walked in, you'd see a golden altar, I think smaller in dimensions than this podium I'm standing at. And it was a place where incense would be burned. But as you looked at the altar, behind that was the veil that was the entry into the Holy of Holies.

You would never go in there. No priest would ever go in there except the high priest once a year. Outside of the building, however, in front of the building, was the larger part of the courtyard, the open-air structure.

And out there, there were two pieces of furniture. If you came in from the east, which was the opening, as a Jewish worshiper bringing an animal, the first thing you'd come to was a big bronze altar. Again, it was a wooden altar, but it was overlaid with bronze, so it looked like it was a bronze altar.

And it had a fire, and that's where you'd offer your animal. You'd give the priest your animal, and he'd offer it as a sacrifice there. Then he would go to the next place, which is still outside the building, this round basin, which is called the laver of cleansing, and he would wash both his hands and his feet.

And then he could go into the holy place. You couldn't, but the priest could. But even he couldn't go into the Holy of Holies.

That was inaccessible except to the high priest once a year. And so you've got this structure. It's got a courtyard where the worshiper himself can come, bring his sacrifice to the priest and have it offered out there in the open air.

The priest, after he washes, could go into the building, but the building itself had two sections. The entry was into the holy place. If he would go beyond the second veil, he'd be in the Holy of Holies, but he wouldn't do that unless it was the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

That's how things were structured. And therefore, the Bible says that, in fact, in Hebrews 9, it says that the very inaccessibility of the Holy of Holies was God's, it says in chapter 9, verse 9, this was symbolic. Verse 8, the Holy Spirit was indicating this, that the way into the holiest of all, that's the Holy of Holies, was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.

This was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered. So you've got this symbolic ritual that shows, among other things, we can't go into detail now any more than he was able to go into detail at the time, we can't at this time go into detail on these matters, but the one thing he does bring out that it symbolized and should be not missed is that God's presence was not something anyone would lightly approach. And, in fact, no one could approach God really, directly, except the high priest once a year.

And he could only do it after a great number of rituals had been performed earlier the same day, so he could get away with it and survive. The idea of the tabernacle, according to the writer of Hebrews, is God was not approachable. And that's what has changed.

Because Christ is the high priest who's gone in to the holy place, and we go with him. He is the forerunner, as we have heard him referred to. And so it was very important to all the details, which we are now passing over, of the ritual and all, had a correspondence to something spiritual that we now benefit from.

And it was because of the direct correspondence of the symbolic building to those spiritual transcendent things that you couldn't really mess with the pattern. Had to do it just the way it was said. There are other things to which this might be an analogy.

And everyone knows one of my pet peeves is people taking marriage lightly, but there's a reason for that being a pet peeve. God made marriage to be a picture of heavenly things, too. It's a covenant relationship that depicts Christ and the church.

And the devil does all he can to try to mess with that and redefine marriage, which of

course becomes something that's an option that shouldn't be, so that marriage can be defined very differently, even now including marriage to the same sex and so forth. And who knows where it's going to go from there. The point is that the messing with the pattern is sacrilegious.

If man had invented marriage, if man had invented worship of God, the tabernacle could have been made according to man's specifications. Man could change marriage if he wanted to, if it was a human invention. But both the tabernacle and marriage, and who knows what other things, too, are things that God instituted to depict spiritual realities, and you can't safely change them.

You need to follow the pattern. If you don't follow the pattern, the thing that's happening is you're doing something sacrilegious, and you're also destroying the message that that's supposed to be communicating. If Moses had changed the tabernacle, then many things about the spiritual reality might be interpreted differently by the observers.

Likewise, I mean, think about it. When you think about how marriage has changed, if that's supposed to depict to the world how the church is to relate to Christ, well, can the church divorce Christ? Can the church rebel against Christ? I mean, obviously, not rightly so, but if that's allowed in marriage, then suddenly the pattern has been shattered. The picture God's trying to give ceases to be the picture of what he wants to depict.

And so the tabernacle, like marriage itself, are divine institutions to portray spiritual realities, and I'm not saying that's the only one. That's the one that is definitely under attack in our society right now. Of course, parent-child relationship would be another kind of thing that depicts our relationship with God.

There may be many others. But what the writer is indicating is God has sought to communicate transcendent truths to people through earthly institutions, the tabernacle being the one that he's focusing on here. And because that is true, it is not safe to tamper with the institution or to build it differently than God's instructions were to build it.

In verse 6, he says, but now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, Jesus has, a more excellent ministry than those priests in the tabernacle, inasmuch as he also is a mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. Now, he has already mentioned a better covenant in the previous chapter. In chapter 7, in verse 22, he said, by so much more, Jesus has become assured of a better covenant, better than the old covenant.

But now he says this better covenant is better because it's built on better promises. Every covenant is an agreement between two parties and both make promises to each other. Many covenants in the Bible were between a conquering suzerain, as they were called, a conquering king, conquering some lesser king, and the lesser king would



become a vassal to the suzerain.

And there was a covenant made between them that if the vassal would do what the suzerain is requiring, then the suzerain would provide protection and so forth. And there's the agreement between the two. There are also agreements that are not hierarchical.

There are egalitarian agreements. David and Jonathan had a covenant together. It was a mutual non-aggressions treaty.

They agreed that their children would not afflict each other and that they'd be loyal to each other and their kids would be loyal to each other. A covenant includes promises. Our relationship with God is more like a suzerainty treaty because we're under him and we pledge our loyalty to him and he pledges protection and so forth to us.

I mean, that's a covenant relationship. Now, the covenant of the Old Testament had promises. If you read, for example, Deuteronomy 28, many scholars say the whole book of Deuteronomy is set up like a classic Middle Eastern suzerainty treaty between a suzerain and his vassals.

You'd have to study those treaties more to see how that may be true, but the whole structure of the book of Deuteronomy, almost all commentators now make this point that it resembles the structure of an ancient Middle Eastern suzerainty treaty. But in chapter 28 of Deuteronomy, as elsewhere, there are promises made. God said, if you keep my covenant, if you keep my word, if you obey my statutes, then you will be blessed.

You'll be blessed in the city. You'll be blessed in the field. You'll be blessed economically.

You'll be blessed reproductively. You'll be blessed in terms of freedom and exemption from invasion from your enemies. And these are the promises God made.

All the promises that God made to the Israelites had to do with this life. Nothing about the next life. And yet, they were good promises.

Certainly enough to motivate Israel to keep the covenant, you would think. But they didn't keep the covenant, and so that covenant had to be scrapped, and a new covenant was made. Those were the promises.

And the writer of Hebrews is going to tell us what those promises are by quoting the Old Testament passage that most clearly predicts the new covenant. So, he actually devotes essentially the rest of this chapter to a quotation. An extended quotation from Jeremiah, chapter 31, verses 31 through 34.

So, we're going to be looking in this passage for those better promises that he's alluding

to. He says, four, verse seven, if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second covenant. But finding fault with them, he says, and now we have this extended quote from Jeremiah.

Now, notice what he's trying to prove by quoting this. He's proving that there was something wrong with the first covenant. It wasn't adequate.

It wasn't the whole story. It was good for the time being. It served its purpose, but there was something better to come.

And if that old covenant had been enough, God wouldn't have ever spoken of bringing another covenant. And if there is, he says, well, did God speak of bringing another covenant? He says, sure, right here. Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt because they did not continue in my covenant and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel in those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbor and none his brothers say no, the Lord, for all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more, unquote. So, this lengthy quote about the new covenant from Jeremiah 31 proves the points that are made by the author in the previous verses. One, in the verse immediately preceding the quotation, he suggests that the first covenant wasn't faultless.

If you had a faultless covenant already, why talk about a new one? If it's not broken, you don't fix it. You don't bring in a new car if your present car is still new, still running perfectly and still all that you want it to be. You don't replace it.

But if you replace it, it's because your old car's gotten old or there's features you want in a new car that your old car doesn't have. So, when you talk about getting a new car, you're implying that something isn't all you want it to be about your old car. God talks about having a new covenant.

It means the old covenant isn't everything that he would like it to be and therefore it's not faultless. But this passage also illustrates what he means by the new covenant being built on better promises. It's a better covenant, has better promises.

What are those? Well, the promises in this passage are not mentioned until verse 10 here. But the promises he names that are better than the promises of the old covenant

are three in number. In verse 10, that God will write his laws in the heart.

The old covenant did not have this as a promise. God gave them laws, but he made no change in their hearts. And that meant insofar as the laws he gave were in conflict with the inclinations of their hearts, they were pretty much on their own to try to resist their own heart's corruption in order to fulfill the law of God.

It was a losing battle. How can you defeat yourself? If two people are fighting, the stronger man will probably win. But if you're fighting yourself, who's the stronger man, you or you? You don't really have the power to overpower yourself.

And if your heart is inclined toward sin and the law says, no, you have to not sin, you have to do the right thing, then there's a conflict between your heart and its own inclinations and the thing that you really know you need to do. And so the Jews were continually falling short of obedience to God's laws because it was something imposed externally. It was not something that was generated from their own inclinations of their heart.

To write his laws on their hearts is a figure of speech, of course, if you actually go to an autopsy of a Christian and you have a chance to look at the heart, you'll find there's nothing really literally inscribed there. God doesn't really write things on your heart. The contrast is between the old covenant where he wrote on stone.

Now he's going to write on your heart. There may be some indication that your hearts are like stone, but I'm going to fix that by writing my laws on them. As Ezekiel said that he'd take out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh, there may be some indication that writing laws on our hearts is a little bit like writing laws on a table of stone because people have a stony heart.

But once the law is written on there, their heart is different. Their heart is no longer a stony resistant heart. It's been engraved.

It's been etched with God's laws so that your heart itself is agreeable with the law. So he's promising an inward change that the old covenant never promised. That's a better promise.

The old covenant said, if you keep the laws, I'll bless you. But of course, there's a subtext. You probably won't keep it because your heart is not right.

And God says, well, this time I'll change something. I'll make your heart right. I'll make your heart different.

And in addition to the passage in Jeremiah, we should cross-reference to the passage in Ezekiel I just alluded to, which is Ezekiel 36, because this is a passage also about the heart and it's also about the new covenant, though the term new covenant isn't used in

Ezekiel. Only Jeremiah uses that term. But it's the same transition from the old era to the new that is being described here and what God will do differently in the new.

And in Ezekiel 36, 25, God says, then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and you will keep my judgments and do them. You see, God gave them statutes and judgments in the Old Testament, but he didn't cause them to walk in it.

He didn't incline their hearts towards it. That was up to them and they couldn't do it. The new covenant says, okay, I'm going to do what you couldn't do.

I'm going to incline you to that. I'm going to write my laws on your hearts. I'm going to change your heart.

And so coming into the new covenant genuinely results in a new heart, and you can't tell if someone's really a Christian. Is it in their heart to obey God? Now, it may be in your heart to obey God, but you still don't do it very well because you've got something else going on. Your flesh.

And the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. And these two are contrary to one another so you can't do what you want to do. Paul said in Galatians 5, 17, there's this struggle, but the reason there's a struggle is because your heart has changed.

You'd just be cruising. You'd just sit on cruise control, just do what your flesh wants you to do. Why fight it? You don't have any motivation to fight it.

You are fleshly. But when you have a new heart, it is against some of the inclinations of the flesh. Now you've got a struggle you didn't have before.

The unbeliever doesn't have that struggle. The Christian has a struggle because he's got a new heart, but he has an old flesh. That will not be forever, but that's the struggle we have now.

But it's good to have a new heart, even if it's more frustrating. Better to be frustrated with your sin than to be sinning and not be frustrated with it. Better to be struggling against your evil inclinations than to just not struggle against them and just do it.

The fact that your heart is on God's side is the proof that you are now receiving the promises of the new covenant. God has written the law on the heart. Then another promise is that they'll all know God.

In verse 11, "None of them shall teach his neighbor, "none his brother, saying, know the Lord, "for all shall know me from the least of them "to the greatest of them." Now this is different than the old covenant because in the old covenant, only a few people really had any contact with God. Only the high priests could go into the Holy of Holies. Only the priests actually had the scriptures.

The people of Israel depended on the priesthood and the Levites to teach them about God. To teach them the scriptures. And therefore, the average Jew had no actual connection with God.

He worshiped a God that was out there, a God that could be approached at Jerusalem, but the worshiper himself couldn't go right into the Holy of Holies and approach God. There was this barrier between the average person and God. Not everyone knew him, other than by hearsay.

But they had to be taught about God by the Levites. New covenant, not so. Everyone has their own relationship with God.

Because his spirit is within you, you have a spiritual communion with God. He teaches you his ways. As a Christian, you don't depend on your neighbor or your brother to say, know the Lord.

You already know the Lord. If you're in the covenant, you do, because that's part of the promises of being in the new covenant, that you will know God. 1 John 2, and verse 27, 1 John 2, 27 says, but the anointing which you've received from him remains in you or abides in you.

And you do not need that anyone teach you, but as the same anointing, that's the Holy Spirit, teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie. And just as it has taught you, you will abide in him. You will abide in Christ insofar as you are being taught by God, by his spirit within you.

You don't need a man to teach you. It's obvious that the writer, that John, in 1 John is saying that the provisions of the new covenant are yours now. You don't depend on others to let you know that there's a God or who he is.

He communes with you himself. You've got a direct line. You've got a direct relationship with God.

That's a better promise than the old covenant. So having the law in the heart, knowing God individually, not just through other people, those are things that are different in the new covenant. And the third promise that's a better promise is in verse 13, no, verse 12, he says, and their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more.

Now, this is going to be something he picks up at the beginning of chapter 10, we won't

go into now. But if you notice chapter 10, verse three, as he's talking about the annual observance of Yom Kippur, he says in Hebrews 10, three, he says, in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. That is because there's never a final sacrifice under the Jewish order.

There's always another one next year and another one the following year. You're always reminded that you're a sinner by the continual repetition of the need to have a sacrifice for your new sins. You're always reminded, but under the new covenant, God will forget your sins.

I'll remember them no more. We'll just offer one sacrifice and leave it at that. And we'll just forget about your sins of the past.

And there won't be this continual reminder as there is in the old covenant. In the new covenant, God takes care of that once and for all and verse 13, then is the commentary of the writer of Hebrews about the passage he's just quoted. He says, in that he says a new covenant, which he did at the beginning of the quote, he has made the first one obsolete.

Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. This point is a side point to what he's really getting at, because he really wants to go into this more detail about the rituals of the tabernacle and how Jesus fulfills them. But the fact that this makes the other ones obsolete is an obvious implication.

And he wants to point that out. Of course, that has ramifications for the readers. If they're thinking about going back to the sacrificial system, you're going back to what isn't there anymore.

As far as God's concerned, it's obsolete. And not only is it obsolete now, it's soon going to disappear altogether. Referring of course, to the fact that the temple and the priesthood would be abolished when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, which could not have been very far off at the time this was written.

He said, it's about ready. It's growing old, it's ready to vanish away. And that is because it is no longer needed.

It's obsolete. It becomes obsolete only because it's been replaced by something better. And so he's going to talk about, especially the atoning work of Christ, replacing the high priestly functions on the day of atonement in chapter nine and 10.

But we'll stop here and come back to that. ♪♪♪