



**GOOD NEWS**  
for the unsaved  
WORLD!

(#163)  
Symbols and realities (part 1).

1

**Holiness is a serious matter.**

Even the symbolism that represents holiness is a serious matter.

- ⇒ The Old Testament ceremonial rituals and regulations are like "pictures," teaching us about God's holiness, about our need for holiness, how sinners can have access to a holy God, and much more.
- ⇒ These things were *not* to be taken lightly. Distorting them or not taking them seriously reflected one's attitude toward God and holiness. Such an attitude could also lead other people astray.
- ⇒ Under the New Covenant, we have *no obligation* to practice the Old Covenant rituals. But we can still learn much from them.

2

**What if we don't understand some of the Old Covenant practices?**

- We might not understand the reasons for some of the Old Covenant practices (though there is much we *can* learn about them).
- If our views are in conflict with some of the regulations and practices, the problem is *not* God and his Word! We might have misunderstood something, or we might not know the context, or we may have been influenced by the world's values.
- In such a case, we can *trust* God – rather than criticizing or standing in judgment over him. There is a good reason for all of those things – whether or not we understand what the reason is.

**TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK!**

We are *created* beings, with a limited (finite) understanding of reality. We also are *sinful* beings, with a distorted understanding of reality. *On both accounts*, we have no right to argue with God or to disregard what he says!

3

**Symbols vs. reality (when it involves salvation and holiness).**

- *Both* are a serious matter. But the symbols cannot accomplish what the realities can.
- Since the realities have arrived, we must pursue *them*, instead of the symbols that tell us about them.

The [ceremonial] law is only a **shadow** of the good things that are coming\*—not the **realities** themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.  
Hebrews 10:1 (NIV)

CHRIST solved this problem. He accomplished the REALITIES!

\* (These "good things that are coming" have now come. They refer to Christ and what he has accomplished – Hebrews 9:11.)

4

**Being a "symbol" doesn't mean the Old Covenant regulations weren't "real"!**

**The Old Covenant pointed to what God would do in the future; but it did more than that.**

- ✓ It dealt with *real* needs, with *real* consequences.
- ✓ There were *real* blessings or curses (depending on the nation's response to the covenant).
- ✓ It taught about *real* spiritual needs.
- ✓ It provided a *real* (though temporary) covering for sin, if combined with trust in God. (Christ would accomplish the *permanent* covering for sin).
- ✓ God was *really* in the Most Holy Place (though access was severely limited, until Christ provided full access for those who belong to God).

5

**The Old Covenant regulations had a purpose.**

- They did not *save*; but they *taught* about salvation.
- One's attitude was also important. "Doing" things – as merely a ritual – was not enough. Just like us, they needed to rely on God.
- Even for the Jews, there was symbolism in what they did – and it could teach those who were willing to pay attention.

**Example:** God used the "cutting off" of circumcision to teach the need for us to be "cut off" from our sinful natures.

Therefore, **circumcise your hearts** and don't be stiff-necked any longer.  
Deuteronomy 10:16 (CSB)

**Today, the "symbol" aspect of the Old Covenant stands out, because Jesus accomplished all that the sacrificial system represented.**

The New Covenant also has a few symbols – baptism and the Lord's Supper being the main ones. These also are serious matters.

6

Being under the New Covenant *doesn't* mean the Old Covenant regulations ceased to have meaning.

- ⇒ The Old Covenant practices still have value, even though *doing* them is no longer necessary:
- They teach us about Christ and what he did.
  - They show us the superiority of what Christ accomplished (compared to what the Old Covenant accomplishes).
- ⇒ We will be illustrating this with the "Most Holy Place" that was in the tabernacle/temple.
- This is the place where God resided.
  - The New Covenant also has a "Most Holy Place"; but it's the *heavenly* reality, not the *earthly* symbol.

7

Violating the Old Covenant regulations was a serious matter. ★ Violating the New Covenant realities is even more serious. ★

*For those under the Old Covenant, rejecting it had severe consequences. But the consequences are even worse for those who reject the realities that the symbolism pointed to.*

THEM

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses **died without mercy** on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

US

How **much more severely** do you think someone deserves to be **punished** who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an **unholy** thing the blood of the covenant that **sanctified** them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."

*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Hebrews 10:28–31 (NIV)

8

Access to God, in the Most Holy Place... Symbol vs. reality.

There has always been a need to be holy.

- The apostle Peter told us about our need to be holy.  
But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "**Be holy, because I am holy.**"  
1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)
- Where did he get this from? He was quoting one of the Old Covenant regulations!  
I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and **be holy, because I am holy**. ... I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore **be holy, because I am holy**.  
Leviticus 11:44a, 45 (NIV)

*Following this command in Leviticus are many examples of what it means to be holy. This includes regulations related to moral, civil, and (being under the Old Covenant) ceremonial matters.*

9

We can learn from the "Most Holy Place" in the tabernacle/temple.

The tabernacle and the temple served the same purpose. The tabernacle could move from place to place; the temple was at a fixed location (and replaced the tabernacle).

For Israel, the tabernacle/temple was a *necessary* part of life for having a right relationship with God.

For us, it is a picture of even greater things – which Christ accomplished on the cross.

- **The Most Holy Place** was an *inner* room inside the building, and separated from the *outer* room (called the "Holy Place") by a curtain. This room was unique and special, in that the glory of God (a special manifestation of his presence) resided in it.
- But to qualify for God's presence, the building had to be made according to *God's* blueprints. (He also empowered various craftsmen with the needed skills for doing the work.)

10

THE ORIGINAL TABERNACLE.  
DESIGNED BY GOD... INHABITED BY GOD.

- God gave specific instructions for building the tabernacle and all that was in it. It wasn't just a fancy design that someone invented; rather it was *a picture of something in heaven*.  
[The Old Testament priests] serve at a place that is **a pattern, a shadow**, of what is in heaven.  
Hebrews 8:5a (GW)
- *Representing something in heaven?!?* No wonder God warned them to make the tabernacle *exactly* the way he told them to!

When Moses was about to make the tent, God warned him, "Be sure to make everything *based on the plan I showed you* on the mountain."  
Hebrews 8:5b (GW); quote Exodus 26:30.

Moses built this tent *exactly as God had told him*. He used the model he had seen.

Acts 7:44b (GW)

11

It was more than just a matter of "symbolism."

- God, who *is* "holy," was going to have a special presence in the "Most Holy Place" in the tabernacle.
- This place – and the presence of God – could not be entered, except for once a year, under strictly regulated conditions. *Any other attempt to enter would result in death!*

The account of God coming to reside in the tabernacle:

- Here is the account of God's *glory* – a special visible manifestation of himself – coming (in a cloud) to the completed tabernacle. (After this, his presence – his *glory* – would take up residence in the Most Holy Place.)

Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and **the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle**.

Moses could no longer enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down over it, and **the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle**.

Exodus 40:34-35 (NLT)

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**THE TEMPLE THAT KING SOLOMON BUILT.**  
DESIGNED BY GOD... INHABITED BY GOD.

- The temple built by Solomon was also based on specific instructions given by God. When David gave Solomon the plans, he said:
 

David said, "All of this I put in writing as **the LORD directed me** and gave me insight regarding the details of the **blueprints**."  
1 Ch 28:19 (NET)
- In this temple, God was also present in a special way. Here is what happened when Solomon dedicated the temple...
 

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the other sacrifices, and **the Lord's glory filled the temple**.  
2 Chronicles 7:1 (GW)
- Here, as in the tabernacle, God's presence would reside in the Most Holy Place.

13

**A FUTURE TEMPLE, DESCRIBED BY EZEKIEL.**  
DESIGNED BY GOD... INHABITED BY GOD.

- This temple has not been built (yet); but it also has a design that is based on specific details given by God. These details begin in Ezekiel 40.
- This temple will also contain the glory of God.*

When I looked, I saw **the Lord's glory fill the Lord's temple**. I immediately bowed down.  
Ezekiel 44:4b (GW); see also 43:1-5.
- There are many speculations about this temple, and how the prophecy will be fulfilled.
- We will leave it for God to determine. If the first coming of Jesus tells us anything, it shows us that *prophecy will be fulfilled... but not always the way we expect!*

14

**★ Some observations – then and now. ★**  
Under the Old Covenant:

- Though *today*, we may stress the symbolism, *back then*, these things were an important part of life ("reality"). They were a necessary part of having a right relationship with God.
- Here, we have observed that God was actually there, in the Most Holy Place. But the building had to be built according to God's plans.
  - ❖ Because of sin, access was extremely limited – only by the high priest, and only after he had been ceremonially cleansed.

But only the high priest entered the inner room [= Most Holy Place], and that **only once a year, and never without blood**, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that **the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed** as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.  
Hebrews 9:7-8 (NIV)

15

Under the New Covenant:

- When the symbolism was fulfilled by Jesus, complete access to the Most Holy Place [the reality in heaven] was made possible.
- This fact was shown by another symbolic action: the tearing of the temple curtain, when Jesus died on the cross.

Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. Then the curtain of the temple was **orn in two from top to bottom**.  
Mark 15:37-38 (CSB)

**"TOP TO BOTTOM," BECAUSE GOD DID IT!**

- The Most Holy Place in the temple teaches us about God's holiness, and the fact that sin *cannot* be in his presence.
- The fact that the tabernacle/temple had to be built according to God's instructions is because it represented *heavenly* realities. It may also suggest that *we can't come to God on our own terms*.

16

**NOW, WE HAVE ACCESS TO GOD!**  
★ Take advantage of this fact! ★

We can enter with confidence!

(Symbolized by the torn temple curtain.)

Jesus – both high priest and sacrifice!

We can trust Jesus, because he has cleansed us.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV)

17

**WHAT ABOUT THE TEMPLE THAT EXISTED DURING THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA?**

⇒ *This temple did have significance. God did tell them to build it!*

**HOWEVER:**

- There was no blueprint given by God (though the design may have been influenced by what Ezekiel wrote).
- The Most Holy Place was *empty*; the glory of the Lord was not present there.

⇒ **To learn more about this, we will have to wait until next time.**

Our goal is to look at the *transition* from the Old Covenant reality (which *for us* is a "symbol") to the New Covenant reality.

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## Today's MISSION:

**We have the realities!**

(They were not available under the Old Covenant.)

**Learn about these realities!**

(Learn even from the Old Covenant temple system.)

**Appreciate these realities!**

**And pursue the way of life that allows us to enter God's presence!**

Make every effort ... to be holy;  
**without holiness no one will see the Lord.**

Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)

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