
THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Part 2

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In Part 1 three basic observations were made concerning the return of man to God's presence and fellowship through Christ. First, that which was lost through Adam's disobedience was restored in a greater, transcendental manner through Christ's obedience (Rom.5:12-21; Phil.2:5-11). It was further seen that the new, heavenly Jerusalem in Rev.21-22 fulfills the earthly paradise of God in Gen. 2-3. Second, in carrying out his redemptive purpose, Israel was the chosen nation of God, whose New Testament consummation in Christ brought forth the New Creation of God's dwelling with men (Matt.24; Acts 3:19-21; Rom.9-11; Rev.21-22). This is the biblical history and setting for the world-changing eschatology in New Testament scripture. From this perspective Jesus said, "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Third, it follows that Christ's mission to open up the new and living way into the presence of God (Heb.10:20) is achieved through his fulfillment of God's promises to the fathers of Israel (Rom.15:8; Heb.6:11-20). There is not a single aspect of New Testament salvation that does not pertain to the specific, exclusive salvation that God promised Israel - a comprehensive salvation that swallows up every vestige of divine purpose and promise in scripture. This fundamental truth will stand against any and every contrary "wind of doctrine" fabricated by "the trickery of men".

It is not without significance, therefore, that the things which John said "must shortly be done" (Rev.22:6) in connection with the "at hand" Revelation of Christ (1:1-3), takes in the coming of Israel's promised new heaven and earth, the new Jerusalem, and the greater, more perfect tabernacle of God (Rev.21:1-3; Isa.65:17-19; 66:22; Ezek.37:26-28). The Old Testament is the background for what is written in Revelation. The entire series of "at hand" events falls within the scope of Christ's mission to restore all things (Acts 3:19-21). Through the imparted Spirit this mission is culminated in Christ's "new world" presence (parousia) or revelation in the end of the Jewish age. From Matthew through Revelation the eschatological focus is on the consummation of the one and only salvation that is of, by, and through Israel (Matt.10:23; 16:27,28; 24:1-10; 26:64; 28:20). By design it is extended to "all families of the earth" (Gen.12:3; Gal.3:8; Rom.15:27).

This means that the destruction of earthly Jerusalem was linked with the ultimate arrival, full manifestation, and exclusive presence of the New Jerusalem - the city in Revelation that fulfills God's presence and dwelling among his people. Will this stand? Does it have the full, unequivocal support of scripture? Is Christianity Israel's promises fulfilled in Christ? Are Christians now in the house of God's presence? Are we IN the New Jerusalem? Do we have unrestricted access to "the tree of life"? Can we NOW drink of the "pure river of water of life" that flows "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev.22:1)? And can the church today legitimately extend the invitation to others to "come" and "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (v.17)? Or is this invitation merely a matter of coming now with the prospect of later on entering the city, eating of the tree of life and drinking of the water of life? What saith the scriptures? What has been "disclosed" by the Spirit in the New Testament? In the words of the prophet, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa.8:20).

THE GREATER AND MORE PERFECT TABERNACLE OF GOD

No study of man's restoration to God's presence is complete that ignores what is taught in scripture about the true tabernacle of God, which fulfills the earthly, typical, Mosaic tabernacle. We find in Ezek.37:26-28 that when the greater, messianic sanctuary is placed in the midst of God's redeemed Israel, then is realized forever the dwelling of God among men (Rev.21:3-7). Has this been accomplished? In answering this question we will focus on the tabernacle typology in Hebrews chapters 6-10. Attention is called to four basic observations:

Observation One: The two contrasting tabernacles are rooted in the two covenants. The "earthly sanctuary" or Mosaic tabernacle was an Old Covenant arrangement (Heb.9:1). But the true tabernacle, "which the Lord erected, and not man" (8:2) springs from the New Covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15). God had promised to make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer.31:31-34). Accordingly, this promise bears directly on the time frame for the coming of the "greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands" (Heb.9:11). The changing of the tabernacles is tied to the changing of the covenants. This is made clear in Hebrews.

But when and how is this change consummated? The commonly accepted view of instantaneous change at the cross rather than by means of the cross does not have the support of scripture. Rather, this view glosses over the obvious transition period, the "disclosing" ministry of the Spirit, and the imminency of end-time consummation in the apostolic writings. There is abundant evidence that every facet of eschatology in New Testament scripture pertained to the full outworking of the change for which the cross was the decisive event. The changing of the covenants and consequently of the tabernacles is no exception.

If, for example, covenantal change was consummated at the cross, what is the meaning of Paul's "hope" in 2 Cor.3:12? Who would brazenly deny its direct bearing on a covenant-determined change peculiar to Paul's time, to the effect that the saints were "being transformed" into the image of Christ (v.18)? "From glory to glory" in verse 18 refers to the respective glories of the two covenants in verses 9-12. "For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech" (NKJV). Notice the verb tense in verse 11. Paul didn't say that the ministry of the Old Covenant "HAS passed away", but rather it "IS passing away". If the change were completed, why the presence of "hope" in verse 12? Did not Paul say, "...hope that is seen (realized) is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees" (Rom.8:24)? Clearly, the decisive event, the cross, already was seen (realized), but the change effected by the cross through the Spirit was transpiring in Paul's time. The Old Covenant cosmos had not yet "vanished away" (Heb.8:13). This does not detract from the power and centrality of the cross but rather confirms it. The cross was the power of the change and the surety of the end under discussion throughout Hebrews. This is a crucial factor in capturing the meaning of Christ's end-of-the-age appearing in 9:28 that was "eagerly awaited" by the saints of that time. They could see this cross-determined Day approaching (10:25).

If, therefore, the Old Covenant with its earthly sanctuary was "ready to vanish away" when Heb. 8:13 was written, it follows that the coming of the

greater tabernacle of God was, as John affirmed, "at hand" at the time he wrote Rev.21:3 and 22:6-10. In scripture there is no gap between the covenants or the tabernacles, but such is created by interpreters when the coming of the tabernacle in Rev.21:3 is lifted out of its end-of-the-Jewish-age setting and shifted to an alleged end of the Christian age. This is manifestly incorrect. The earthly types and shadows of the law were followed immediately by the spiritual or heavenly antitypes. A realized antitype does not become a type of a yet greater antitype, e.g., a greater tabernacle, new Jerusalem, New Covenant, etc.. That would be the case, however, if Revelation 21 and 22 have not been fulfilled. The problem is that interpreters have allowed the things "at hand" in Revelation to get "out of at hand" in their ignoring the New Testament's transitional framework. And if "at hand" can have a two-thousand year elasticity (as some who used to know better are now saying, but hoping not to be overheard by the Dispensationalist), what would forbid Heb.8:13 - "ready to vanish away" - from having the same flexibility? Is the Old still vanishing away today? If not, why should the New still be coming? If the book of Hebrews teaches anything at all it teaches that the types do not "vanish away" centuries before the arrival of the antitypes.

Observation Two: The Mosaic tabernacle was earthly (9:1), and typical (8:5; 9:9,23), having fleshly ordinances (9:10). But the tabernacle erected by Christ (8:2) is heavenly, not made with hands (9:11). The "heavenly things" (vv.23,24) were called "the good things to come." They were foreshadowed by the law (9:11; 10:1). But now they have been fully disclosed by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 1 Cor.2:9-12).

We make this point to establish the fact that because something is said to be "heavenly", this doesn't mean that it lies beyond Christianity. The word "heavenly" denotes the higher plane of the new things in Christ. See, for example, the heavenly country and Jerusalem of Abraham's faith (Heb.11:9-16; 12:22-24). The heavenly things are unquestionably "other-worldly," meaning of another world in the sense of not belonging to the Old Covenant cosmos or age. Therefore, in saying that Christ entered "into heaven itself," the writer's focus is on the true, heavenly tabernacle of which the earthly holy places were the "copies" or representations (9:23,24).

That "heaven" in 9:24 denotes the realm of "the greater and more perfect tabernacle" (9:11) is confirmed in 6:18-20. In speaking of the surety of God's promise to Abraham (vv.11-17), and therefore of "the hope set before us" (the "us" referring to the saints of that transitional time who had "fled for refuge"), the writer next identifies the realm wherein this hope or promise soon would be realized. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

The entering of Christ "into heaven itself" in 9:24 is parallel in meaning with his entering as the forerunner into "the Presence behind the veil" in 6:19,20. The greater, heavenly tabernacle is in view in both passages. In the Old Testament tabernacle the Most Holy Place, called the "Holiest of All" (9:3,12), was the place of God's Presence. It was entered by the high priest "alone once a year" to make atonement for himself and the people (9:7). It was symbolic of the greater Holy of Holies to come, the Holy Spirit indicating thereby "that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing" (v.8,9). The writer's intent was to draw attention to the change that was occurring at that time. Already the true Holy of Holies, "the Presence behind the veil," had been entered by Christ, the "High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (6:20).

Equally noteworthy, Christ enters into God's Presence (the true "Holiest of All") as "the forerunner," the clear implication being that a "new and living way" was being opened for the saints to follow (Heb.10:19-22). To this end they were exhorted to have boldness to enter into the Holiest; i.e., into "the Presence behind the veil." John sees the consummation of this in Rev.21:3. Unlike the earthly Holy of Holies that was restricted to the high priest alone annually, the heavenly tabernacle becomes the habitation of all the saints in the Presence of the True and Living God (Rev.22:4). But when is this realized in fullness? What is the time of the end in Heb.3:6,14; 6:11; 9:28; 10:19,25,36,37? This question leads to our next observation.

Observation Three: In contrast to the earthly tabernacle the heavenly consists of only ONE compartment. In the Old Testament a Holy Place

stood before the Holiest of All (9:1-8), but in New Testament fulfillment the outer compartment is intentionally left off. Check it out. The writer of Hebrews said, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands,...but into heaven itself" (9:24). We have seen that entering "into heaven itself" is parallel with entering the Holiest of All (6:19,20). Nothing is said about a first (outer) and a second (inner) compartment in the greater tabernacle. Nothing is said about Christ's sanctifying a Holy Place, or passing through a Holy Place into the Holy of Holies. Nothing is said about the saints' being in a Holy Place that was attached to the Holy of Holies entered by Christ.

Far from this, it was in the shadow of the passing of the earthly tabernacle (Heb.8:13) that the saints were exhorted to have "boldness to enter 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" (10:19,20). The exhortation was not, "now that you have entered the Holy Place, have boldness to enter into the Holiest of All when the church age ends." The end and the consummated change in Hebrews is rooted in the passing of the Jewish age, as is the case in the Olivet discourse and Revelation. Already the saints were tasting the powers of the age to come (6:5), the reference being to Christianity, the world subjected to Christ, not to angels, (2:5). Already they were the house of Christ, and partakers of Christ, if they held fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end (3:6,14). They could see the Day approaching, (10:25). The "promise" in 6:11-20 would be received (10:36) at the "soon" coming of Christ (v.37).

Observation Four: The second coming or appearing of Christ in 9:28 is essentially involved in the coming of the greater and more perfect tabernacle. This is so clear from the context (which takes in chapters 6-10) that it is inconceivable that interpreters ignore this important factor in the tabernacle typology. Lifting Christ's appearing out of verse 28 and extending it centuries beyond the consummation of the Old Covenant counters every argument of the writer in Hebrews on the "more excellent ministry" of Christ (8:6) and the coming good things of the greater tabernacle (9:11). The covenant-changing, age-changing, kingdom-coming setting in Hebrews simply cannot be dismissed. (See 12:18-29 in particular.)

In the immediate context the priestly function of Christ in putting away sin (9:26) takes in more than his death, or his entering into the "Holiest of All" with the blood of atonement. As was the high priestly pattern under the Law, Christ appears from "the Presence behind the veil" (6:19) not only to bless the waiting congregation ("those who eagerly wait for Him", 9:28), but now, much more, (in contrast to the earthly pattern) he appears to receive his own unto himself. To this end he was "the forerunner" (6:20) and from this perspective the saints were exhorted to have boldness to enter into the Holiest (10:19).

The Old Testament saints could not be received into the "inner sanctuary" because their high priests could not "put away sins" with "the blood of bulls and goats" (10:4). "In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year" (v.3). But it is different with Christ and his sacrifice. The writer pointed out, "but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (9:26,28).

The events of Christ's death and second appearing fall within the same end-of-the-age time frame. The extension of the Jewish age beyond the cross to the destruction of Jerusalem is clear enough in Matt.24:3. Equally clear is Christ's appearing or revelation in connection with the latter event (Lk.17:30,31; 1 Pet.1:13; Rev.1:1-3). The full end or "vanishing away" (Heb.8:13) of the age of death and condemnation (2 Cor.3:7-11) is the framework for Christ's second appearing "apart from sin". This change is the focus of his appearing from within the Holiest of All "for salvation." Concerning this same consummation Jesus said, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mt.24:13). With this same end in view Paul said, "for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom.13:11). Peter addresses the same salvation in writing that it was "ready to be revealed" (1 Pet.1:5) "at the revelation of Christ" (v.13). It was "ready to be revealed" because the Old Covenant was "ready to vanish away" (Heb.8:13). Hence, in view of the soon appearing of Christ (10:37), the writer of Hebrews exhorted the saints not to join those "who draw back to perdition" (to the ways of the Old Covenant, vv.26-29), but to be "of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (v.39).

How then, in the name of all that is reasonable, can Heb.9:28 be interpreted independently of its tabernacle context? There is no change of subject between 9:29 and 10:1. What Christ does in 9:26-28 in putting away sin is immediately followed in chapter 10 with what the sacrificial system of the Law could not do. And in light of this the saints were exhorted to hold fast and have "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus." The time was drawing near. Christ's appearing in 9:28 cannot be cut off from the "approaching Day" and his "soon" coming in 10:25-39. It's all related to the "shaking of the things that are made" (the earthly things of the Mosaic covenant) so that "the things which cannot be shaken may remain" (the heavenly things of the New Covenant).

If, however, sin still has not been put away, and if the saints still have not entered into the Presence of God, what is the difference between New Testament Christianity and Old Testament Judaism? In what way is the heavenly tabernacle superior to the earthly? And since the earthly has passed away, and if Christ only is in the heavenly, where does that leave Christians today? Surely it can be seen that both the writer in Hebrews, and John in Revelation, were describing the church in its New Covenant glory against the background of the passing of the Old Covenant order. (To be continued).

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