

Hebrews Lesson 11 Article

One Christmas my younger daughter put an easy-bake oven at the top of her Christmas gift list. She squealed with delight when she found it among her gifts on Christmas Day. The oven came equipped with a cupcake mixture to which you added water. It had a small metal baking pan and used the heat of a light bulb. She couldn't wait to try it out. We opened the mixture, added water, poured it into the pan, switched on the light bulb, and waited with anticipation. As the minutes ticked by, we saw the cupcake rise, brown, and reach an "almost edible" appearance.

When it was ready, we removed it from the oven, cut it into several small pieces, and munched on it as a family. The best thing about the cupcake was that it was warm. Its taste was bland, and it had a sticky, half-baked texture. No one expected prize-winning baking to emerge from the oven. This was a "play" oven intended to prepare children to graduate upward to the real oven in the kitchen. The "easy-bake" oven was a copy of a real oven, and its food was a pale imitation of baked goods from the kitchen. Real food came from the kitchen, not from a child's play oven.

The sacrifices and offerings of the earthly tabernacle were like an easy-bake oven. They are not the real thing. They could never remove the stain of sin. They could only make an offerer ritually pure before God. They provided an instructive picture of the perfect sacrifice which Christ would one day offer. Still, activities in the tabernacle represented only a copy of what Christ could effectively do in heaven. Real forgiveness came from Christ's death, not from the impressive offerings repeatedly given in the tabernacle. Only the death of Jesus could overcome sin once and for all.¹

The old sanctuary was full of symbolism, not least in its message that it alone could not meet the deepest needs of men and women (v. 9). From the days of the wilderness tabernacle the truth of God's holiness had been illustrated by the law of God; this was kept in the sacred ark and overshadowed by the atonement cover that spoke of God's way of bringing hope to people condemned by that law.

We ought to ensure that the buildings where we worship send out the right message, which includes awe as well as welcome. Supremely, our new 'sanctuaries' should speak of a work of salvation accomplished and available for all who respond in faith. So a church does not have an altar speaking of sacrifice repeated, but a Holy Table with a meal of fellowship offered by our victorious High Priest to his redeemed family. How different from the solemn annual ritual of the Day of Atonement detailed in Leviticus 16, and mentioned here in verse 7.²

By His merely saying that a new covenant was coming, God rendered the old one **obsolete**, no longer valid. In fact it would disappear. The human writer of Hebrews could not have known how literally this truth would be fulfilled within a few years of his writing. When Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he destroyed the Temple—which had been completed only for a short time. Without the Temple, there was no altar, no Holy of Holies. There could therefore be no sacrifices and no ministering priesthood. And without a priesthood and its sacrifices, there could be no Old Covenant. It was finished. When verse 13 was written, the **obsolete** covenant was **ready to disappear**. In less than five years, it had completely disappeared.

The old sacrificial system actually was over when the veil was split in two and Christ's sacrifice was complete (Matt. 27:50–51; Mark 15:37–39; Luke 23:44–46). At that time, Christ's unique, never-to-be-repeated sacrifice was finished with the result that all men in Christ had direct access to God (1 Tim. 2:5–6). The destruction of the Temple completed the closing of the Old Covenant—by removing the place of sacrifice that no longer served a purpose.

The age of the Mosaic law and the Levitical priests was over. The age of the Son was come forever.³

¹ Lea, T. D. (1999). *Vol. 10: Hebrews, James*. Holman New Testament Commentary (165). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Hacking, P. H. (2006). *Opening up Hebrews*. Opening Up Commentary (53–54). Leominster: Day One Publications.

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Hebrews*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (217). Chicago: Moody Press.