

## Do Churches Have Sanctuaries?

Hebrews 9:6-28

Hebrews, Day 30

*By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age) . . .*

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. . . .*

*Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. – Hebrews 9:8-9, 11-12, 23-26, ESV*

What do you call the large, central room of a church where the people of God gather for worship? Is it a sanctuary? The word “sanctuary” means “holy place.” Do churches have sanctuaries? We know the Tabernacle and Temple did. They had both a Holy Place and a Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies. But what about churches?

The language of Hebrews 9 is complex and dense, and we won't be able to fully unpack all of it in these devotionals. Today I'd like to focus on the language of “holy place.” Hebrews draws a contrast between the holy places of the old covenant (the earthly sanctuaries of the Tabernacle and Temple) and the real heavenly holy place of the new covenant. Under the old covenant, the priests would enter the holy places with the blood of animals, but when Christ inaugurated the new covenant, He entered into the heavenly sanctuary – the real holy place – with His own blood.

The ineffective nature of the old covenant sacrifices was shown in the fact that they had to be made over and over again. The complete perfection of Christ's sacrifice was shown in the fact that He made His sacrifice once for all. He died once, presented His sacrifice before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary, and it was finished.

Interestingly, the language of Hebrews says that Jesus did this “at the end of the ages.” Look back at the opening words of Hebrews, and you'll see it says we are living “in these last days.” Jesus' death and resurrection marked the close of one era of human history – actually, of all previous ages of human

history – and the beginning of the end, the start of “the last days.” Why? Because the way of access into the real, eternal, heavenly sanctuary has been opened by Jesus’ perfect sacrifice for sins.

So, do churches have sanctuaries? No. Our sanctuary is in heaven. And yet, while churches do not have sanctuaries, churches are sanctuaries. Believers are living stones being built into an eternal, living Temple for God. When we gather for worship on the Lord’s Day, we are gathering as the sanctuary of God and we are lifted by the Spirit into the real holy place, into the presence of God in heaven. Churches are sanctuaries and become doorways to the heavenly sanctuary when we gather for worship on the Lord’s Day in these last days.

That’s a powerful picture of what Jesus has done for us, in opening access to heaven itself and in making us His holy dwelling place. It should change the way we view gathered worship on the Lord’s Day. We are being given a weekly foretaste of our final ingathering, a regular time to anticipate and participate in real heavenly worship.