

**The True Tabernacle**  
**Hebrews 8:1–6**  
**February 11, 2024**

A few years back I mentioned Anthony Doerr’s Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *All the Light We Cannot See*. The main character in that book is a sixteen–year–old young lady named Marie–Laure. By her name, maybe you can tell that she’s French. You *can’t* tell from her name, however, that the novel is set during WWII. Nor would you know that she’s blind.

Marie’s mother died early in her life. Because of that, much of the novel orbits around her relationship with her father, which is tender and healthy. He happens to be quite good with his hands, something of a craftsman. So, imagine you’re a father, skilled in that way, living with your blind daughter in Paris in the 1930s and 40s, trying to figure out how she might navigate the world she can’t see in the days ahead. What might you do to help her?

What he does is build a detailed model of the city they live in. It fits on a large table in their home. Marie doesn’t necessarily know *all* the reasons her father spent hundreds of hours carefully constructing this model of the city they live in. Doerr even writes that the model “serves as little more than a tiny and insufficient facsimile” of the world. Yet, her father “persists in asking Marie–Laure to run her fingers over it, to recognize different houses, the angles of streets,” etc.

Then on one cold Tuesday in December, she and her father walk down the path they took every morning. At the end of that path, he picks her up and spins her around and says, “Now, you’re going to take us home.” She’s six blocks away. She fails the first time. In fact, Tuesday after Tuesday she fails. In–between attempts she’d go home and study the model again, counting benches, trees, lampposts, and doorways. Her father would say, “One centimeter at a time.” And on each successive Tuesday—little by little—she’d lead them closer to home. Four blocks away would become three and then two. Until, on a snowy Tuesday in March, Marie–Laure finds the trunk of the chestnut tree that grows past her fourth–floor window. Her father’s hands are soon under her arms, lifting her up, swinging her around, because his blind daughter had safely walked them all six blocks home.<sup>1</sup>

Her repeated failures remind us that the model was *not* the city. In fact, in the book she details the differences. Her model smells like dry glue and sawdust. Its streets were empty. Again, the model and her city were not the same thing. Yet the model helped her get there. It was the pattern of something else.

It was a pattern intended to picture something even more real. And that picture was intended to accomplish something.

Now, with that in mind, let’s zoom out and ask two basic but important questions of the Bible in its entirety.<sup>2</sup> The first question is this: from Genesis to Revelation, what story is the Bible telling? What’s the one thing all the other things are about? It’s not a trick question. The entirety of the Bible is about a Man from Nazareth named Jesus. All of it, from Exodus to Esther to Elijah to Ezra to Ecclesiastes to the Epistles and to the Eschaton. What story is the Bible telling? His story.

But the second question is this: *how* does the Bible tell that story? Well, first, the story develops. If you’re reading through the Bible and you’re in the latter chapters of Genesis, for example, you know that there is *so much* to come. You read that Jacob has a son named Judah. You know the significance of that. But you don’t know everything *yet* in Genesis 30. There is development. And if we were to flip to the right side of the book, we’d be reminded that Scripture *says* it does this. Jeremiah 31 said something over here. Next week Hebrews 8 will quote extensively from it, showing us *how* it was fulfilled later on.

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<sup>1</sup> See Anthony Doerr’s *All the Light We Cannot See*, 35–41.

<sup>2</sup> Both of these are taken from Mitchell Chase’s helpful *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory*.

Alongside those things, if we're considering *how* the Bible tells this story, we dare not miss the imagery. As the story develops, metaphor and symbolism abound. With Judah, for instance, Jacob told his sons, **The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet** (Gen 49:10). So, it's not *just* that Someone significant came from Judah's line, it's that Someone from Judah's line would have both scepter and ruler's staff. 1 Samuel develops that. Matthew 1 develops it a bit more. Hebrews 1 explains it further. And Revelation puts quite the bow on it. The imagery is part of the development.

And then—to go even further into the *how*—there are historical events, people, places, or institutions that picture events, people, places, or institutions to come. In Exodus, lambs are slain on the first Passover (Ex. 12:21). In Leviticus, a scapegoat is sent off into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21). A veil is hung in the temple. We could go on. Thing after thing—person after person—picture, foreshadow, and anticipate something ahead.

There's a particular story the Bible intends to tell us. God aims to make Himself known to us through His Son. And then there is a *way* the Bible tells us that story.

And now to address this theologically. If we're convinced that the point of human history is for God to reveal Himself to His people, and if we *also* are convinced that that God aiming to do so is all-powerful, sovereign over every second, then we should have *little* trouble believing He can reveal Himself in countless ways.

And once we're *there*, convinced of the truths in the above paragraph, the Bible can open up for us. And that includes priests, laws, Melchizedeks, covenants, and tabernacles. Are they patterns? Patterns intended to picture something else, something to come, something better? And is that picture intended to accomplish something *in* us, something that's also better?

In our text today we'll consider, first, the true tabernacle. Second, we'll consider the true tabernacle pictured. Third, we'll consider the true tabernacle promised.

## 1. The True Tabernacle (vv. 1–2)

Verse 1: **Now the main point in what has been said is this.**

When we hear verse 1, we're reminded that the author's said a *lot* in Hebrews 7. He rewound the tape all the way to Genesis 14 to an obscure and mysterious character named Melchizedek. In taking us there, he's told us what Melchizedek's name means, expanded our thinking in describing him as **without father, without mother, without genealogy** (7:3), and told us—in quite *interesting* logic<sup>3</sup>—that the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

Of course, in some sense that was to get the cart before the horse. Because these Jewish Christians weren't *comparing* priesthoods. They didn't have categories for one *other* than the Levitical one. So, we might say that the author's taken us to Melchizedek to show us that there is, in fact, *another* line than the one they knew, *another* order.

And he takes us to what Psalm 110 said about this better priest/priesthood to show us that the old wasn't sufficient. Perfection—meaning full forgiveness, the transformation of believers, and *that* into eternity—wasn't attainable under the old priesthood (7:11). Those priests weren't close to perfect. They had to sacrifice for their own sins. They couldn't make *us* something they weren't themselves. Further, they couldn't secure anything—access or otherwise—for very long. Because they just kept dying.

So, if we desire a salvation that is full and forever, then those priests and that priesthood just wouldn't do. If we want full and transformative salvation, we need a Priest that was Himself holy,

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<sup>3</sup> 7:10

innocent, and undefiled (7:26). And if we want a salvation that endures forever, we need a Priest that became so **according to the power of an indestructible life** (7:16).

Again, the author's said a lot in Hebrews 7. In essence, he's said: "*this* is what you need." And chapter 8 begins with, in essence, "*this* is what you have."<sup>4</sup> Verse 1: **Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.** We couldn't exhaust a single one of those prepositional phrases (*at* the right hand, *of* the throne, *of* the Majesty, *in* the heavens). But we can be certain that the High Priest we *needed*—the One described in chapter 7—is the High Priest we *have*. And He—representing *us*—is seated in the highest place.

Priests didn't normally sit down.<sup>5</sup> There's no chair among the tabernacle furniture. But the throne of our Priest is the throne of a King. And He's not just sitting; He's ruling in the place of supreme authority and highest honor.<sup>6</sup>

To focus a bit on this *place*, because that's what this passage does, note how this important verse sounds *almost* exactly like how the author began in chapter 1:3: **When he had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.** Chapter 8:1 is quite similar. But it's not *exactly* like chapter 1. He's added a couple things. It's not only that the entire Bible develops, within letters we find development.

We see that development in the clauses he adds to Hebrews 1:3 in Hebrews 8:1. In chapter 1, he said something about the right hand, but now it's **the right hand of the throne**. That's a purposeful addition. For another addition, in chapter 1 this Majesty is **on high**. In chapter 8, to be *more* specific, it's **the throne of the Majesty in the heavens**.

What's the point of showing you the differences between Hebrews 1:3 and Hebrews 8:1? By adding "throne" and "heavens," the author's emphasizing something about the *place* where our Priest-King sits. And both additions hint at the language ahead, again emphasizing the *place* where He ministers.

And if you're unconvinced, then read where he goes from verse 1 into verse 2: **we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.** I put a picture of the Israelites' tabernacle in your sermon notes.<sup>7</sup> It's worth visualizing. In part, as we'll soon see, it's intended to point you to something else.

We're *not* talking about the temple of Solomon's day, but the portable and temporary tabernacle that traveled with the Israelites.<sup>8</sup> The initial instructions for the construction of it are in Exodus 25–41. To help us visualize it, we'll consider three spaces. The *first*—the tabernacle courtyard—was roughly twice as long as this room.<sup>9</sup> In that outer courtyard was the bronze altar for burnt offerings as well as the bronze basin for ceremonial washings. All Israelites could enter this outer courtyard.<sup>10</sup> However *within* the courtyard was the actual tabernacle tent that only priests could enter. After offering sacrifices and performing the ritual cleansing, they'd pass *through* the first veil into the Holy Place. That's the *second* space we consider. The Holy Place was 30 feet long and 15 feet

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<sup>4</sup> Al Mohler, *Hebrews*, CCE, 120.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ*, 129, "The idea of a seated priest was virtually a contradiction in terms."

<sup>6</sup> Dana Harris, *Hebrews*, EGGNT, 16.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration-02-tabernacle/>

<sup>8</sup> See Harris, 192. It's possible the author chose tabernacle language rather than temple language because of the wilderness emphasis back in chapter 4. It's *also* possible he chooses it to emphasize the temporary nature of it all.

<sup>9</sup> 150 feet long by 75 feet wide.

<sup>10</sup> G. K. Beale, *God Dwells Among Us*, 57.

wide. It's smaller than this room.<sup>11</sup> Within it were the golden lampstand, the table, and the golden altar of incense.

As you know, there's another veil *within* the tent. That veil led into the *third* space we'll consider—the Most Holy Place—into which only the High Priest could go. And he alone could go in on just one day a year, the Day of Atonement.

If you say, “All this sounds a bit silly,” I might ask, “Have you thought too little of God's holiness? Or have you thought too little of our sinfulness? Or is it both?”

I describe it to you so that, like Marie-Laure, you might run your fingers over it. It's intended to lead you somewhere. That's one reason why the instructions for its construction and the details concerning how the priests are to enter are so meticulous. We're to see something in it as well as something it points to.

First, it teaches us about who God is. It makes clear that God's people ought not assume access. A thrice holy God dare not be approached on *our* terms. In that sense, He's not safe. He's holy. And yet, this tabernacle was where a Holy God dwelt *among* an unholy people. It was called the “Tent of Meeting” for that reason. The tabernacle communicated *both* His holiness and His presence.

Now back to Hebrews 8. This High Priest who's taken His seat is, v. 2, a **minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man**. The tabernacle of Exodus and of the wilderness taught God's people something about Him, but it also pointed to another place.

Recall that in verse 1 the idea of throne was added. *Where* is God's throne? Recall Acts 7, when Stephen is standing before some of the most “Jewish” people in the first century. Standing among them, in the city of Jerusalem, he quotes Isaiah 66: **The most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: Heaven is my throne** (Acts 7:48–49)

Again, what were the two words added in Hebrews 8:1 to Hebrews 1:3? Throne and heaven.

By the way, we have no categories *at all* for *any* of this, if there's no Old Testament.

Note secondly,

## 2. The True Tabernacle Pictured (vv. 3–5)

Verse 3: **For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.** The author of Hebrews already said something akin back in 5:1: **For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.**

*Both* verses say at least two things. First, high priests are appointed. Second, they are appointed to offer something. The priest didn't minister empty-handed.<sup>12</sup> In chapter 5 this assertion is more general, as in, this is an essential aspect of the priest's vocation. But in chapter 8 the author's saying that *this* High Priest he *just* described in chapter 7, it's necessary that *He* also have **something to offer**.

Verse 4 goes on: **Now if He were on earth.** To pause there, that “if” is a big “if.” Because that's, in fact, *not* where He is. He's *not* on earth. Verse 2 just told us He's a minister in the sanctuary and in the *true* tabernacle. He's taken His seat at the right hand of the throne. *That's* where He is.

However, this “if” is integral to the author's argument. Verse 4: **Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law.** As we noted in chapter 7, much of the “Law” the author speaks of had to do with what

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<sup>11</sup> 81' x 56'

<sup>12</sup> Mohler, 121.

particular people might serve as priest and what precisely those priests were to do. We might call much of that instruction the ceremonial aspects of the Law.<sup>13</sup> Chapter 7 went on to say that the Melchizedekian priest was *not* a priest on **the basis of a law of physical requirement** (7:16). He, instead, belongs to a tribe **from which no one has officiated at the altar** (7:13). In essence, verse 4 *continues* the contrast. This priest is *not* of the earthly kind, meaning, *not* a priest according to the order of the Mosaic law.<sup>14</sup> His priesthood—His ministry as a priest—is of a different order.

And not to get ahead of ourselves, but that *also* means He ministers in a different location. And that's verse 5 goes on to imply by way of contrast, describing those who offer gifts according to the Law. As they do so, they, v. 5, **serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things**.

So, again maybe like Marie-Laure, run the fingers of your mind over this pattern that points to something else. We might ask, among a series of questions, "What *precisely* is a copy and shadow of heavenly things?" Verse 5 continues: **just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."**

So, what precisely is a copy and shadow of heavenly things? Those former priests serve a copy and shadow of heavenly things *in the tabernacle*. From its very beginning, from the construction of it in Exodus 25, to its use generation after generation, it signified—pointed to—a greater reality.<sup>15</sup> The tabernacle is what we call a "type."<sup>16</sup> What does that mean? A "type" is a person, place, institution, event, or thing in salvation history that anticipates, shares correspondence with, escalates toward, and resolves in its antitype.<sup>17</sup> That's a long and complicated definition, but it's a helpful category for us to consider. And it's key to understanding *how* God tells us what He intends to tell us.

If we're convinced that the point of human history is for God to reveal Himself to His people, and if we *also* are convinced that that God aiming to do so is all-powerful, sovereign over every second, then we should have *little* trouble believing He can reveal Himself in countless ways.

We could've introduced typology language sooner, but maybe it lands today because you've seen it over and over *already* in the book of Hebrews. People, events, institutions, and various other things in the Old Testament have been described as anticipating, and then escalating, and then resolving in something in the future. This is how Hebrews speaks of Moses in chapter 3. It's how Hebrews utilizes the wilderness generation, Joshua, and the Promised Land in chapter 4, the High Priest in Hebrews 5, and Melchizedek in Hebrews 7. There are more, of course. To that list we'll add the veil, sacrifices, the holy place, Mount Zion, and "outside the camp," before we end this book.

Today we understand the tabernacle to function in the same way. We know this to be true, in part, due to the three terms used in verse 5 to describe it: copy, shadow, and pattern.

God showed Moses something on the mountain. After that, when constructing the tabernacle, Moses was to make all things according to what he'd seen, that *τυπος* (*tūpos*) or pattern. That's Exodus 25:40. In that passage, we don't know *everything* about the tabernacle quite yet. There's development. But then Hebrews 8:5 comes along and tells us that those things are a copy and shadow of something else: heavenly things. And *that's* why verse 2 says there's something called the *true* tabernacle.

Why is this brought up here at this point in Hebrews 8? Because it's in *that* place—the true tabernacle—that our High Priest ministers. Again, the essence of the whole argument is summed up

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<sup>13</sup> **For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also** (7:12).

<sup>14</sup> Tom Schreiner, *Hebrews*, EBTC, 244.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner, 245.

<sup>16</sup> A category that comes from the word in verse 5 translated "pattern": *τυπος* (*tūpos*)

<sup>17</sup> That Mitchell Chase's definition, 38.

in verse 1: **Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.** It's crystal clear. If He's a priest, *where* is He ministering? Is He like the other priests, bringing His offering into an earthly, man-made tabernacle? No. Verse 2: He's **a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle.**

Maybe you've seen the clip of the lady sitting at the foot of her stairs painting a white wall. And as she does so, she keeps going over and over a particular spot. It's a bit darker than every other spot she can see. No matter how many times she goes over it, it doesn't turn bright white. At one point it even seems like she looks at the roller for a second, pondering whether or not she's losing her mind. But what's *actually* happening? That darker spot is her shadow.

We laugh because it's absurd. You've seen cats chasing a shadow.

But that's precisely what these Jewish Christians were being tempted to do. We know some of their mindset from Stephen's speech in Acts 7. In that sweeping biblical theology of Israel's history, he exposes what they trusted in: the land, the law, and the temple.<sup>18</sup> All those were good things, of course, but by the time Jesus came they were continually missing the purpose behind each one of them. Because they misunderstood the Law, they didn't recognize the Author of it when He put on flesh and stood in front of them. And because they misunderstood the tabernacle, they missed the One to whom it pointed. When the Word became flesh, He'd "tabernacled" among them (John 1:14).

Good things He'd given were latched onto; and He Himself dismissed. A.W. Pink puts us in the mindset of these Jewish Christians reading this letter, writing, "Although the sun had risen, the moon had not yet disappeared."<sup>19</sup> There was a superior glory, no doubt. But the comforts of their past were still on the scene. This was a priesthood they'd known. It was something those around them trusted in.

But Hebrews reminds them of the temporary nature of that which they were drifting toward. While in Exodus, the fact that the earthly tabernacle was based on the heavenly would be a positive thing, in Hebrews it reveals the inferiority and impermanence of that earthly sanctuary.<sup>20</sup>

What temporary thing are we trusting in? If it's a good thing, given by another, why not trust the One who gave it?

There's a true tabernacle. The old pictured it for us, pointing us to it. Note, third:

### 3. The True Tabernacle Promised (v. 6)

We'll pick up with this verse next week, but it shows us that the *point of pointing* out the true tabernacle isn't necessarily to tell us *where* it is, but *what* is happening there, and *who* is doing it. After calling the tabernacle of the Old Testament a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, where the Levitical priests served, the author writes of the High Priest we have, the One **seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens** (v. 1). What is He doing?

Verse 6: **But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry.** That clause summarizes the first five verses.<sup>21</sup> He's *not* a priest on earth (v. 4). He's obtained a more excellent ministry, Priest-King in the *true* tabernacle, the heavens. What's He doing there? Though His atoning work is finished, His advocating work is not.<sup>22</sup> I was deeply encouraged by these words: "Stroke follows

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Longenecker, *Acts*, EBC, 337.

<sup>19</sup> A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 436.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 408.

<sup>21</sup> Harold Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermenia, 220.

<sup>22</sup> Mohler, 120.

stroke, each driving home the last . . . It is not only a living Christ, but a Christ enthroned, a Christ in power. It is not only a Christ in power, but a Christ of ever-active sympathy, constantly (if we may so speak) at the Father's ear, and constantly pouring out intercessions for His struggling people on earth."<sup>23</sup> The priests in Exodus had some incense and offered up a prayer for a few moments. He's obtained a more excellent ministry. And it's not close.

Verse 6 goes on, **by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant.** There's a better covenant, one promised in Jeremiah 31, and explained further in next week's text. His priestly ministry is in something of a new administration. Back in chapter 7, we noted that Jesus is the guarantee of this better covenant. He's the pledge of it, guaranteeing that it will be eternally effective.<sup>24</sup>

Here, in chapter 8, we note that He's also the mediator of it.<sup>25</sup> As we go on into the book, we'll see two *other* occasions where the author refers to Jesus as the mediator of this new covenant—9:15 and 12:24—and in both places His role as mediator is tied to His death.<sup>26</sup>

But how else do we know that He's the mediator of a better covenant? Verse 6 concludes, **which has been enacted on better promises.** The ESV understand the new covenant to be better, **since it is enacted on better promises.** What are those promises? We'll note three. First, rather than on stone, God will write His law on hearts (8:10). Second, this new covenant isn't like national Israel; each and every covenant member will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest (8:11). And, for the third reason of a thousand, though under the old covenant there remained an unrelenting need for constant sacrifices,<sup>27</sup> this covenant is marked by forgiveness that is full, final, and forever. He's a better mediator. Therefore, God **will remember their sins no more** (8:12).

The main point is of *all* this is that a majestic Priest is seated in the true tabernacle, not in the shadow or pattern that preceded, but what those things pictured and pointed to: a better priest, in a better tabernacle, ministering on behalf of a people as the mediator of a better covenant based on better promises.

Could you have understood *half* of that sentence if not for Exodus, Leviticus, and the balance of the Old Testament?

## Conclusion

A question for today is this: What if God orchestrated all of human history—tabernacles, temples, priests, sacrifices—so that you'd know *better* what Christ is doing right now in heaven for you? And so that you'd know what He's done so that you might join Him.

Wonder no more. That's precisely what He's done. He's entered, through the veil, into the most holy place. And in that place, the throne of God—heaven itself—He's seated, ministering on our behalf. How did *He* enter? He *too* must have something to offer (v. 3). So, He offered Himself. **But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all** (9:11–12). And He did so that we might have confidence to enter too (10:19).

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Lewis, *The Glory of Christ*, 406.

<sup>24</sup> Schreiner, 231.

<sup>25</sup> Moses mediated the first. Jesus is better than Moses (3:1–6), as is the covenant He mediates.

<sup>26</sup> Schreiner, 242.

<sup>27</sup> Mohler, 123.

