

8. The Ministry and Covenant of Jesus Superior to the Old Covenant

Chapter 7 concluded with the teaching that Christ is a superior high priest, and his priesthood is superior to that of the old covenant. Heb 7:12 showed that the change of the priesthood required a change in the law: "12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law." The first verse of chapter eight summarizes the discussion of the high priest that preceded it.

A High Priest at the Right Hand of Majesty in Heaven

Heb 8:1-2

8:1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Jesus is our high priests who sat down at the right hand of God. The writer calls God the "Majesty in Heaven." This places the sanctuary in heaven, this sanctuary is the true sanctuary. Later in the Heb 9:24, the writer elaborates, "Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence." That the sanctuary is in heaven shows that God's will is complete and finished.

A Superior Covenant and Superior Promises

Heb 8:3-6

3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

Since all high priests offer gifts and sacrifices, it was necessary for to have something to offer. This sentence becomes the foundation of the better sacrifice offered by Jesus. However, men offer their sacrifices from the earth, prescribed by the law. The sanctuary of the law is only a copy and shadow of the true sanctuary in heaven. Here, the writer begins a long and sustained metaphor on how the things of the law are copies and shadows of the heavenly things from Christ. God instructed Moses to make everything according to the pattern shown him, because they were shadows of heavenly things to come. The conclusion drawn in verse 6 shows the ministry of Jesus as a priest is superior to the ministry of the old covenant priests; the covenant of Jesus is superior to the old covenant; and the new covenant is founded on better promises than the old covenant. The better sacrifice that Jesus offered was his blood.

God Found Fault with the Old Covenant

Heb 8:7-9

7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel

and with the house of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

"If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant," shows a condition contrary to fact. The first covenant failed in the ministrations of the priests, failed in its lack of a mediator between God and man, and failed without any promise of eternal life. Therefore, God sought another. God found fault and pronounced His dissatisfaction to the people. This quotation from Jer 31:31ff affirms in prophecy that God would make a new covenant with his people. That the writer of Hebrews quotes the Jeremiah text in full shows that God had made a new covenant with Christ the high priest. The differences between the old and new covenants follow in the rest of the quotation.

God Made a New Covenant

Heb 8:10-12

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The differences in the two laws are great, with the covenant of Christ superior in every point to the covenant of Moses. "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts" was the theme of the Sermon on the Mount. Christ taught that it is written that we are not to kill. He taught do not even be angry. Do not commit adultery said the law, but he taught that we are not to lust after a woman. Paul explained this difference in Rom 8:1-2, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." He further explained in 2 Cor 3:6, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Under the new covenant, we no longer have to teach people to know the Lord, for they will already know him when they become his children by obeying the new covenant. Jesus taught in John 6:43-45, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

In stark contrast, the Jews were Jews by birth and continually needed to be taught about the Lord. Under the new covenant, all Christians know the Lord by definition. It is in this relationship as children of God and disciples of the Lord Jesus, that we receive the better promises unavailable under the old covenant. God forgives our wickedness and remembers our sins no more.

The Old Covenant Disappeared with the Advent of the New

Heb 8:13

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

When in Jeremiah, God called the covenant of Christ new, it was evident the old one had become obsolete and aging and would soon pass away with the coming of Christ. When Christ came, he fulfilled the law and the prophets and nailed the old covenant to the cross.