

Hebrews 8:1-13

Christ is the Mediator of a Better Ministry with a Better Covenant

Jesus Christ has a more excellent ministry because He is the Mediator of a better covenant based on better promises.

Our great High Priest is the Son of God perfect forever. He is "holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens." He was tempted, but never yielded to sin.

Jesus Christ is the mediator of a much better priestly ministry because He has a better covenant in a superior sanctuary. He is the one priest who can make us right with God.

The Tabernacle in the wilderness gave a glimpse, a shadow patterned after the glorious reality in heaven. When the real object came the shadows passed away. The fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ put an end to the old covenant and its system. Christ was the reality that replaced all the shadows.

Hebrews chapter eight is the crowning point in the homily. It is the highest and central point to which the author is climbing. We have a High Priest who is seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on High in heaven. He is in the very presence of God.

We are now at the center of the doctrinal section of Hebrews which focuses on Christ as our High Priest. With Hebrews 8 and 9 the author takes us to the central task of interpreting the saving work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection.

If you have read a lot of books on Hebrews you are aware that there are a lot of fanciful interpretations. Wild speculative imaginations turn into religious fads and heresy. There is no compelling reason to insist upon some kind of structure in heaven conforming to the Mosaic tabernacle in the wilderness. Hebrews 9:24 likens the holy of holies with heaven and the presence of God. The writer points to spiritual realities. He moves from the pictures, types, sacrifices to the spiritual reality and the wonder of God is spirit and those who worship Him worship Him in spirit and truth.

The author takes us into the holy of holies, where God abides, and Jesus serves as our High Priest. There are no other priests serving under Christ as High Priest. He is the one and only priest. The high priest on the Day of Atonement could only foreshadow what Christ achieved on the cross. We have a great High Priest, Jesus Christ; the Son of God who lived a sinless life, and offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people and rose from the dead and now it seated in heaven with God the Father making intercession for us.

Jesus Christ has a Better Ministry (8:1-5)

Can you imagine having a king who serves? Jesus Christ is the king who rules and serves his people as a high priest.

Jesus is the seated priest who has finished His work of offering the final sacrifice for sins. There will never be a need for another sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice is once and for all. He is an enthroned priest who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, God the Father. Jesus now ministers in the true heavenly sanctuary, heaven itself. Jesus did not come to work His way into the old sacrificial system of the Old Testament priests, but to fulfill them and thus bring them to an end.

Jesus Christ is the reality of all the shadows we encounter in the Old Testament types and prophecies. The priests were a copy and a shadow of the great High Priest who would enter into heaven and serve. The tabernacle and later the temple were shadows of that reality that was to come. The animal sacrifices and the Day of Atonement were a shadow of the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ is the reality to which all of these shadows and types pointed. He is our great High Priest, Mediator, and Intercessor at the right hand of the

Father in heaven. He is our perfect sacrifice that cleanses us of all sins and paid our sin debt. He is our Passover and our daily spiritual food. It is Christ my righteousness. Christ my sanctification. Christ my propitiation. Christ my only hope. Christ my savior. He fulfills all of the shadows and types. He is their glorious reality.

A. T. Robertson says the writer of Hebrews summarizes with five points of superiority of Jesus as High Priest. Jesus is a better priest than Aaron (Heb. 8:1). The writer is demonstrating this from 4:16 to 7:28). Jesus works in a better sanctuary (8:2, 5). He offers a better sacrifice (8:3ff). Jesus is mediator of a better covenant (8:6). His priestly work rests on better promises (8:6). Jesus has obtained a better ministry as a whole (8:6). The writer of Hebrews will continue with his presentation of the priestly work of Jesus including His better covenant (8:7-13), the better sanctuary (9:1-12), better sacrifice (9:13-10:18) and better promises (10:19-12:3). (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. v, p. 388).

The Heavenly Sanctuary (8:1-2)

"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, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Hebrews 8:1-2). All Scripture references unless otherwise noted are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

"What has been said" takes us back to the summary statement of Christ's high priesthood in 7:26-28. His "main point" is Jesus is our High Priest who sat down at the right hand of God and He serves in the true tabernacle. Jesus is the King-Priest.

The earthly tabernacle was a prototype of the heavenly one (Exod. 25:40). The Levitical temple and priesthood operated in a historical situation in the past and was succeeded in time by Christ. The Levitical priests did not enter into the real, heavenly presence of God. Only Jesus Christ entered into the eternal presence of God. The holy of holies and the Ark of the Covenant only symbolized the presence of God with His people.

Jesus' priesthood operates in the heavenly realm. The "sanctuary" and "the true tabernacle" is heaven (Heb. 9:24; 10:19). Aaron served in the tabernacle in the wilderness, Jesus serves in the true tabernacle. There is no distinction here between the holy place and the holy of holies. The wilderness tabernacle was the symbol, a mere copy of the genuine.

The fact that Christ "has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in the heavens" is evidence that He has fully accomplished His great sacrificial work on the cross. God the Father has accepted it. The sacrificial ministry of our Lord was performed and completed when He died on the cross. It was a once and for all sacrifice. It was finished, completed, done when He cried out "It is finished!"

This King-Priest sits on a throne. He has kingly power and dominion as a High Priest. He sits on a throne even though He ministers in the sanctuary. This was unheard of in the Levitical system. A person could be one or the other, but never a priest and king combination.

Jesus the Mediator (8:3-6)

Since the sacrifice was completed on the cross our great High Priest now intercedes for the believer before the throne of the Father. Our Lord fulfilled the Levitical priesthood by offering up Himself on the cross. Now He fulfills the Melchizedek royal priesthood as our Mediator.

Jesus is the High Priest (v. 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" (Hebrews 8:3).

As a true priest Jesus has something to offer. He is an active priest. That which He offered up was Himself. The author of Hebrews uses the aorist to stress a single finished act of offering. It is not a continuously or repeated offering. Jesus has finished the sacrificial aspect of His ministry. The sacrifice has been offered once

for all. This is a strong contrast with the Levitical priests and their continual offerings. Jesus offered one sacrifice, and by His sacrificial death fulfilled the demands of the old covenant. As a result of that sacrifice He made the old covenant obsolete.

John Calvin said, "He died on earth, but the virtue and efficacy of His death proceeded from heaven."

Service of Jesus as the Priest (8:4-5)

"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 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, 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'" (Hebrews 8:4-5).

Jesus could never serve in the earthly Tabernacle because He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi.

Many scholars think there is evidence that the Temple is still in existence and the Levitical priests are offering up sacrifices, and the letter should be dated before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Or it could be seen as the use of the present tense as timeless and a vivid picture of what had been done in the Temple as though it was still going on. I think the homily was written in the early A.D. 60's.

The author is quoting Exodus 25:40 in verse five. The tabernacle was made according to the pattern after the heavenly model. The idea of the Palestinian Jews that there was in heaven a literal counterpart of the earthly tabernacle is not an accurate interpretation. They had developed some fanciful extremely literal ideas.

The superiority of Jesus' ministry is that He ratified the new covenant with His own blood. The old Mosaic covenant was terminated when Christ died. The veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. A new covenant forms the basis of the superior ministry that Jesus performs in heaven. Had the first covenant been adequate God would not have instituted a new covenant.

The new covenant removed the barrier between a holy God and sinful man. The apostle Peter wrote of this new covenant: "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The apostle Paul said, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. . . . who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:7, 14).

Jesus Ministers with a Better Covenant (8:6-13)

The author now stresses the superiority of Christ's ministry in the sanctuary. Just as the new covenant is better than the old, Christ's ministry is "more excellent" than the Levitical. The new covenant is better because it is established through a better mediator. The new covenant is based on better promises because the Son of God is the security that these promises will be fulfilled.

"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, 'Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'" (Hebrews 8:6-8).

God says, "I will make a new covenant."

As the case now stands, Jesus is the High Priest in heaven. "A more excellent ministry" applies to all five of the points of superiority over the Levitical priesthood. The word "better" is the keynote of Hebrews. In every point Christianity is better than Judaism is the stress of the letter. The installation of the new covenant was proof

that the first could not remove sin. It did not deal with man's most basic problem—sin. It could not justify the sinner.

The "Holy of holies" symbolized the place where God meets man on the Ark of the Covenant. Our great High Priest has passed through the greater and more perfect tabernacle into the very presence of God. It is not just symbolized in His ministry, but the reality.

"Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord" (Hebrews 8:9). The Israelites broke the covenant, and God annulled it.

What will the new covenant effect? Based upon the better promises there will be the forgiveness of sins and the inward power will be overcome. The new covenant with its new principles works in the spiritual life of the believer. He affects the change in the heart.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10).

This new covenant will be spiritual and inward. God changes the heart. *Kardia* is the seat of man's personal life. It involves the whole of man's inward nature. The old covenant could not change the heart. The new covenant does. It is personal because the Holy Spirit who is a person enables the believer to overcome the power of sin (Romans 8:1-3).

When a sinner accepts God's terms of the new covenant he experiences God. This knowledge of God is common to all believers.

"And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:11).

Under the old covenant only the educated scribes could understand the minute details of the law, however under the new covenant everyone will be taught by the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit.

"As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him" (1 John 2:27).

"For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

Forgiveness, reconciliation, peace with God is the foundation of this new covenant. The basis of this forgiveness is the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Luk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). The new covenant is sealed with His blood. God rich in mercy and grace forgives based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This new covenant is the guarantee and assurance that God will remember our sins no more. Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because there is no condemnation there is peace with God through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1-2).

Moreover, when we do sin there is forgiveness. "But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:7-10). This is part of this wonderful new covenant we have with God. When we confess our sins to Him, He forgives, and will never remember our sins again. God has a good forgetter. The whole basis of His forgetfulness is the perfect sacrifice for all our sins.

"When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (Hebrews 8:13).

"The author writes as if the Old Testament legal and ceremonial system were about to vanish before the new covenant of grace. If he wrote after A.D. 70, would he not have written 'has vanished away'?" observes A. T. Robertson.

With this contrast between the old covenant and new covenant the old is now obsolete. It disappeared in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. However, that termination did not eliminate the promises God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

The church enters into the blessings of the new covenant which all believers enjoy because Jesus died and rose from the dead (Isa. 19:24-25; 42:6; Rom. 15:9-12). Moreover when Christ returns the Jewish people will fully experience all the blessings promised in the new covenant (Rom. 11:25-32). Turn on the evening news and the most astonishing fact is that God has preserved the Jewish people to this day. God has a glorious future for these precious people in Christ. He is not through with His people. The people of the old covenant will become the people of the new covenant.

The death of Christ is the foundation for the fulfillment of the promises contained in the new covenant. Everything in the new covenant rests upon the death of Christ.

From Galatians 3:13-29 we understand that Christians are the spiritual seed of Abraham; however that is not the same as saying the church is the spiritual Israel. We must be extremely careful how we take the words "Israel" and "Judah" when we interpret the Scriptures. Each must be considered within its context.

We must reach a balance in our interpretation because Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant with Israel that will find fulfillment when Christ returns. He also speaks of believers receiving their blessings of the new covenant based upon the blood of Jesus. The passage speaks to both Israel and the Christians.

This raises a very important question: what is the relationship of the church to Israel?

There are basically four views regarding the church and the new covenant.

Some Bible believing scholars take the view the church has replaced Israel. Amillennialists and the covenant theologians see the nation of Israel as permanently displaced and the blessings promised in the new covenant are now fulfilled only by the church. They teach basically the church has replaced Israel. The basis of this interpretation is "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" is the Christian church in the present age. However, one must differentiate between the Scripture references to the church and those referring to the promises to Israel.

Other scholars teach the new covenant is only with the national Israel. They interpret the words of Jeremiah literally and do not see any reason to include the New Testament church in the new covenant. J. N. Darby said, "The new covenant will be established formally with Israel in the millennium."

Another group views this "new covenant" as two new covenants, one with Israel and one with the New Testament Church. It tries to balance the passage in Jeremiah with passages in the New Testament that teach the churches participation in the new covenant. There is the future fulfillment with Israel, and the current work in the church. In relationship to the church we enjoy the privileges of a new covenant made in the blood of Christ, while Israel awaits the new covenant in its future application.

I understand the "new covenant" as pointing to a future fulfillment with Israel, and at the same time the foundation for the Christian's salvation today. It involves both Israel in the future and the Church today. It is one "new covenant" with two fulfillments; Israel will experience this new covenant in the future, and the church celebrates it today. But in both cases it is the one new covenant paid for in full by the death of Christ.

The death of Christ provides the only basis of believers receiving forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. At the same time there are clear promises God made with Israel. We enjoy the benefits of the atoning sacrifice of Christ for our sins. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise," wrote the apostle Paul (Gal. 3:29). It is in Christ that Gentiles, non-Jews, have received the

blessings of the promise to Abraham. The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed, but we have also received blessings from that promise.

Jesus celebrated the ordinance connected to the new covenant on the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:26-30). "This is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (v. 28). The writer of Hebrews says in 9:20: "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you" (Hebrews 9:20). Both are referring to one covenant which is the new covenant made by Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared, "In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

I find it hard to see two covenants with the same name "new covenant." Hebrews speaks of "the new covenant" and simply the word "covenant" alone. Let's be careful not to read something into a passage that is not there. The apostle Paul said he and other servants of Christ are "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6).

The book of Hebrews was written to Hebrew Christians. Yes, there are applications to both groups, but the stated purpose is to believers in Christ. He is warning them not to turn coat and go back to the Temple sacrifices. He wants them to remain faithful to Christ. He addresses "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:23-24). Both are related to the new covenant, not two covenants. The contrast in this great chapter is between the old Mosaic covenant and the new covenant God made in Christ.

I think the apostle Paul has the solution in Romans 11:24-25. "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:24-25). I am convinced God's new covenant finds its fulfillment in both the church and Israel. We enjoy the benefits now, and Israel will in the millennium.

Judaism was a show and tell; Christianity is a go and tell.

We can have an intimate personal relationship with God. He brings about an inner transformation by the Holy Spirit. God accomplishes all the transformation in us through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The new covenant was purchased by the blood of Christ. It is effected by the holy Spirit and appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Mediator of this wonderful work of sovereign grace. He will write this new covenant on your heart. Indeed, He will crush the heart of stone and make it soft as flesh and white as snow. The new covenant is personal and intimate.

Believe on Jesus Christ today and be saved for all eternity.

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S., and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and later in Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for more than ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in

world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor, director of missions, and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Ecuador.