

The Superiority of the New Covenant

[Hebrews 8](#) Part 1

We are studying the Melchizedekian priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a difficult section in a difficult book. The author told us that this section was difficult:

Hebrews 5:10-11 (NKJV) *called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

This section is technical and complicated, but it is God's Word, and therefore, it is inspired by God and profitable to us.

The practical implications of this section are profound. The theme verse is:

Hebrews 10:23 (NKJV) *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

Our real resource in the midst of trials and persecutions is the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV) *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

We, just like the Hebrews, must be made to realize the greatness of that priesthood, and the perfect access we have to God through it. The spiritual benefits that we will derive from this section are worth our most diligent labors.

As we come to chapter 8, the subject is the New Covenant. This is a subject that many believers are ignorant of. During the question and answer time of a Wednesday night service many years ago I asked these questions: "When does the New Covenant begin? Who are the recipients of the New Covenant?" Nobody could answer these questions. There is a lot of confusion on this subject, but the doctrine of the New Covenant is the most important and far reaching in its implications of any doctrine that is to be found in the Word of God.

In the Old Testament, there are many references to the New Covenant; it is also called the everlasting covenant; the covenant of peace; and my covenant. The New Covenant is a dominant theme in the old and new testaments. In Hebrews 8, we have the most extensive and lengthy quotation of any Old Testament passage to be found. He quotes from Jeremiah 31.

In chapter 7, we saw that the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. In chapter 8, the argument is still the superiority of Christ's priesthood, but the argument is less direct. He appeals to the covenant on which that priesthood is based. The Aaronic priesthood was grounded upon and regulated by the Mosaic covenant. The priesthood of Christ is grounded upon and regulated by the New Covenant, not enacted at Sinai but enacted and established at Calvary.

Our authors argument in the 8th chapter is this: by just so much as the New Covenant is better than the old, the priesthood of Christ is better than that of Aaron:

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV) *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

The NIV puts it this way:

Hebrews 8:6 (NIV) *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.*

This chapter can be outlined this way: Verses 1-5 are an introduction, verse 6 is the thesis or theme of this chapter, verses 7-12 give the evidence to substantiate the theme, and verse 13 is the conclusion.

Hebrews 8:1 (NKJV) *Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,*

In the Greek this sentence starts with the words "*the main point*" which is the Greek word *kephalaion*, which means: "the principle thing, the main point, or to sum up." While the word could have either meaning, here it seems "the chief point" is meant. The author is still arguing for Christ's superior priesthood, but just in case chapter 7 has been a little too heavy (our author was sensitive to that problem), he emphasizes his point.

The point in verse one is: "**we have such a high priest....**" This statement makes this verse pertinent to you and me. The Jewish Christians did not understand this truth as well as they should. They were looking to go back to the earthly system that had a high priest who was physically present. We see the same thing today when people direct their worship through something they can see and touch. Thus, this statement makes this verse very pertinent to you and me.

So, his main or chief point is, "We have a superior High Priest", and he uses two points to emphasize his superiority.

1. "***...a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.***" Think of the significance of this to a Jew. In their temple there was the Holy of Holies which contained the ark, a symbol of the throne of God. Such was its sanctity that for 364 days in the year no one was allowed near that throne, a veil hid the Holy of Holies and its symbolic throne from view. Just one day a year their most holy priest, the High priest, was allowed to enter, and for a few moments glimpse what he could of that throne through the clouds of shrouding incense. But sit down on the throne? Mere symbol though it was, never once in all Israel's history did any high priest ever dream of sitting anywhere near it, let alone on it. But Christ has sat down, not on some earthly symbol of God's throne, but at the right hand of the actual throne of God.

The Levitical priest never sat down:

Hebrews 10:11-12 (NKJV) *And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,*

2. He is a minister, not is some man made tent which was a shadow of the real thing, but in heaven:

Hebrews 8:2 (NKJV) *a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*

Hebrews 9:24 (NKJV) *For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;*

"The true tabernacle" - true is from the Greek *alethinos*, which means true in the sense of reality. This truth of which he speaks is not contrasted with falsehood but only with types.

The whole Levitical system was a shadow of Christ, illustrating His person and work that was to come. This is the reason John the Baptist could introduce Christ as **"...the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). The Jews would have been ready for such an introduction, because they understood the illustration of the lamb taking away sins because of the Levitical system.

Jesus Himself testified to the fact that the Old Testament pointed to Him in:

John 5:39-40 (NKJV) *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

We see that the Old Testament system stands in contrast to Christ, while at the same time, it has many similarities with Christ, because it points toward Christ.

The heavenly Holy of Holies, the reality of which the earthly tabernacle was only a sign and symbol, is nothing less than the presence of God himself, and it is there as an exalted reigning High Priest that our Lord Jesus Christ appears on our behalf. That is the main point that he has been trying to teach us - we have a superior High Priest in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 8:3 (NKJV) *For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer.*

The high priest is appointed to offer sacrifices, and Christ is no exception. That which he offered was the ultimate sacrifice - himself. There are two major differences between the priest of the Old Covenant and our Lord: 1. They offered the blood of bulls and goats, he offered his own precious blood. Chapter 9 stress this contrast. 2. They offered up their sacrifices repeatedly, and he once for all. That Christ's offering is limited to a single sacrifice is indicated by the singular pronoun "something" and also by the word "offer." Notice that the **"to offer"** is used twice in verse 3. The first time it is mentioned it is written in the present tense, meaning it is a continual activity. Every high priest in the Levitical system was to be continually offering sacrifices. But in the last use it is written in the aorist tense, which denotes a completed activity. The stress is that Jesus Christ offered a one time sacrifice, which was able to save the whole world, past, present, and future, from sin.

Hebrews 8:4 (NKJV) *For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law;*

Why can't Jesus Christ be a priest on earth? Why is he excluded?

Hebrews 7:13-14 (NKJV) *For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.*

Our Lord was not of the priestly tribe. Our Lord serves as a priest in Heaven, in the true Holy of Holies.

Verse 4 simply states that Christ was not qualified under Mosaic Law. We need to understand that. There are some Christians today who try to bring bits and pieces of the Mosaic Law into Christianity. They do not understand that if the Mosaic Law is in force today, Jesus Christ is not qualified to be our priest.

Hebrews 8:5 (NKJV) *who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."*

This verse tells us that everything involved in the Levitical order was a shadow of the reality. The word "*copy*" is from the Greek word *hupodeigma*, which refers to a sign suggestive of something, sketch, outline, copy. The whole system of priests in the Old Testament was only a copy of the real.

The word "*shadow*" is *skia*, which means: "a shadow or silhouette". And the word "*pattern*" is the word *tupos*, which means: "a mark or imprint left by an engraving tool." A shadow or type presupposes a body or substance which cast a shadow. It exists only as proof of the fact that there's a reality somewhere. Moses was apparently shown something which was a pattern of the tabernacle.

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV) *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

The New Covenant of which our Lord is mediator is a better covenant, because the promises it brings are better.

Do you understand what a Covenant is? In Moses' time, great emperors would draw up treaties with their vassal kings, which would remind these subject kings just who the great emperor was, what benefits he has conferred on them, what behavior was expected from the vassals. In other words, these treaties spelled out the relationship between the great sovereign and his subjects.

A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life or death, sovereignly administered. The Old Covenant was between God and the Israelites, which defined the relationship between him as their sovereign and them as his subjects.

"Mediator" is a common business term in the sense of arbitrator or go between. The mediation of Christ is superior to that of Moses, because the covenant he brings into operation is enacted upon better promises. Proof of this is found in verses 7 - 12:

Hebrews 8:7 (NKJV) *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

This is the same argument as we saw in 7:11. The very fact that we have Jeremiah 31 demonstrates to us that the Mosaic covenant was temporary.

When one brings up the subject of changing the Law in a conversation with a Jew, it really causes a problem. It causes a problem with many Christians as well. When you tell them that we are no longer operating under the Law, they act as if you are throwing away part of the Bible. They do not understand the point of Hebrews 8, the old covenant has been replaced by a new covenant. In fact, the old covenant itself said that there would be a new covenant:

Hebrews 8:8 (NKJV) *Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;*

The problem wasn't the covenant but the people, they couldn't keep it. Prophet after prophet came to Israel and Judah recalling the people to covenant loyalty, but the scripture says, "They hearkened not."

The writer will contrast the two covenants. The Mosaic covenant is what is called a "*conditional covenant*," whereas the New Covenant is an "*unconditional covenant*." The difference is that the "conditional" covenant depended on the faithfulness of the people, while the "unconditional" covenant does not.

An "unconditional covenant," on the other hand, depends on no one but God upholding His agreement. In effect, God says, "Our agreement is this, and I will do this." This truth is underscored in Hebrews 8:8

Hebrews 8:9 (NKJV) *"not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

This tells us that the New Covenant is unlike the Mosaic covenant, and in those areas where it is unlike it, it is better. How is the New Covenant better? While the New Covenant will be at radical variance with the Old Covenant with respect to its effectiveness in accomplishing its goal, the substance of the two covenants in terms of their redemptive intention is identical.

The Old Covenant was a two party covenant. God had his part to play and his conditions to fulfill, and the Israelites had theirs.

Exodus 19:3-8 (NKJV) *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.' 7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.*

To be an ancient Israelite is to have a promise of great blessing, but it is also to live under conditions - you need to obey.

Leviticus 26:3-9 (NKJV) *'If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, 4 then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. 5 Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. 6 I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. 7 You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. 8 Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you. 9 'For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you.*

The problem with the Mosaic covenant was that it was external. The Mosaic covenant manifest its distinctiveness as an externalized summation of the will of God. A law has been written, a will has been decreed, but the law stands outside man, demanding conformity.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV) *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"*

Let me give you an example of what the Old Covenant was like: Let's say that a boy receives a train set for Christmas. As he begins to unwrap it, he pulls out an engine, box cars, a caboose, tracks, a switching station, and bridges. He puts it all together and sets the train on the tracks, but it doesn't go anywhere, because there is something that is absolutely necessary for the train to run which does not come with the package - batteries.

Then his dad gives him four batteries. This provision, which was not standard in the package, was necessary. The little boy puts the batteries in the engine, and the train begins to run. Now it has power, enablement.

So it was in the Old Covenant, the power source was not provided as standard equipment. There were those in the Old Covenant who had the power, such as David and Joshua, Hannah, and Mary, but that was a provision given by God **above and beyond** the standard provision of the Old Covenant.

All Israel had been given the promise of blessing under the condition of obedience, but only some have been given the heart enablement to obey.

The Old Covenant community was a cross section:

Romans 9:6 (NKJV) *But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,*

"For they are not all Israel who are of Israel". What does that mean? God never promised unconditionally to each offspring of Abraham covenantal blessings. God never intended that all of the nation Israel would be redeemed. Within national Israel is "true Israel," or "spiritual Israel." The nation was chosen to be a vehicle of blessing to the world, but not all within the nation were chosen to salvation. The nation was elected to privilege, but only individuals are elected to salvation. Not all of Old Covenant Israel was true regenerate Israel.

The Old Covenant community was like the cross section of a peach. If you were to split a peach in half, you would see the pit and the meat; the inner part would be the pit, then around it, the outer part would be the meat. This is what the Old Covenant community looked like spiritually. Some of them were the pit; true spiritual Israel who were circumcised in heart, regenerated, saved. But the majority were like the meat of that peach. They were in the covenant, but they were not true Israel.

Romans 11:2-5 (NKJV) *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

Elijah was a member of Israel, of the Old Covenant community. During his day, when Bail worship was great, Elijah felt like he was the only true Israelite. Elijah was saying, "I'm the only one in the

pit." God assures Elijah that the remnant (the pit) was not as small as he thought. There were 7,000 who were true Israel. The remnant was the pit of the peach.

The whole nation was in the Covenant. Any physical offspring of Abraham who had been circumcised was a covenant member. So, spiritual salvation was worked out within a national external framework. When a child was born into the Nation Israel, he wasn't born into the pit; he wasn't born regenerate. But being in the covenant community, he would see the ceremonial law practiced which pictured Christ, and he would see those in the pit who had a true relationship with God, and thus see his need for God to redeem him.

However, most of the Old covenant members were born, circumcised, lived in external religion, and died without regeneration. But there was always a remnant according to grace.

In our text in verses 6 - 9, a New Covenant is promised, and the New Covenant is better. We see in these verses three promises that are better.

1. The first thing which the New Covenant promised, which the Old Covenant couldn't, was the internalization of God's law and the gracious ability to keep it.

Hebrews 8:10 (NKJV) *"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 in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

Each and every member has the promises of enablement. The batteries are standard in the New Covenant.

Ezekiel 36:25-28 (NKJV) *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 "Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God."*

1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us that the natural man's heart is stone to the things of God. God in the new birth gives us the power and inner inclination to obey. Let me give you a personal example of this. Before I was a Christian I would constantly take God's name in vain. But as soon as I was redeemed, it bothered me to use God's name in vain. Why? It was because now I was alive to God and had his word written on my heart.

2. In the New Covenant the knowledge of God is universal in scope:

Hebrews 8:11 (NKJV) *"None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."*

One writer says, "Now obviously, this part of the covenant has not been fulfilled as of today. It is my understanding that verse 10 is literal (has been fulfilled), while verse 11 is spiritual (yet to be fulfilled)."Where are the grounds for such a division?

What does this verse mean? Many in the Old Covenant lived under the blessing and protection of the covenant simply because they were Israelites by virtue of birth, but many of them did not have faith in God and evangelism was necessary. Those in the pit would cry out to those in the meat to "know the Lord." They needed to go to their brethren and say, "Know the Lord."

1 Samuel 2:12 (NKJV) *Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD.*

They were priests and were in the covenant community but they didn't know the Lord.

John 17:3 (NKJV) *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

The New Covenant community is not a cross section. It is not like a peach, it is like a potato - all know the Lord. All who are in the New Covenant are believers.

3. The New Covenant brought - Complete and full forgiveness of sins:

Hebrews 8:12 (NKJV) *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

Acts 13:38-39 (NKJV) *"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; 39 "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

In verse 12, a reason is given why God bestows the wondrous blessings outlined in verses 10 - 11. The word "merciful" is from the Greek word *hileos*, It means: "propitious - God's justice has been satisfied and we receive grace."

The constant renewal of sacrifices for sins under the Old Covenant gave clear indication of the fact that sin actually was not removed, but only passed over.

Hebrews 10:3 (NKJV) *But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.*

Hebrews 10:17-18 (NKJV) *then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.*

By saying that sins would be remembered no more, Jeremiah anticipates the end of the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. All believers will be able to daily have access to the Father Himself through the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Whereas the Old Covenant could only command response, the New Covenant effects it.

Hebrews 8:13 (NKJV) *In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

This is a conclusion. The Old Covenant may be characterized as promise, as shadow, as prophecy. The New Covenant may be characterized as fulfillment, as reality, as realization.

Notice that the text says, "*...is becoming obsolete .. ready to vanish away.*" Is that speaking to us? NO!!!!!!!!!!!! This is written to the first century Hebrew believers. As of 65 AD, the Old Covenant had not yet become obsolete, but it was about to. Is it just a coincidence that the Bible speaks of the passing away of the earth and heavens using the same language?

Hebrews 1:10-11 (NKJV) *And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment;*

The same Greek word *palaios*, which means: "to make worn out, or declare obsolete" is used in Hebrews 1:11 of the heavens and earth and 8:13 of the Old Covenant. The writer here says that the old covenant is **about to** pass away. Not many years later, it did, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and so did the old heaven and earth.

Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we rejoice in our current experience of blessings in the New Covenant, because of our fellowship with God, achieved by Jesus Christ our High Priest.

Main Point: Believers, we have a superior High Priest. The reality is come, the types are gone. Believers, come to Jesus Christ to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on April 22, 2001. [Tape #195](#).

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