

The Better Covenant

Hebrews 8:1-5

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews has been making the case for the supremacy and superiority of Jesus Christ. Jesus is better than angels, Moses, or priests (chapter 1-7:28). Now over the next few chapters the author will show the supremacy and superiority of Christ as the High Priest of a New and better Covenant (8:1-13). Jesus serves in a better tabernacle (heaven) and has offered (past tense) a better sacrifice. The New Covenant is based on better promises (8:6-13). All of this to remind the Hebrews to persevere in faith and discipleship (chapter 10:19-12:29).

How is the New Covenant different from the Old Covenant? In every way! The sanctuary is superior (vv.1-2). The sacrifice is superior (vv.3-4). The security is superior (v.5-13). How is the sanctuary superior? The Hebrew people had a temple here on the earth but Jesus serves in a heavenly sanctuary (v.1). A better place—and a better priest (v.1). The sacrifice is better. The levitical priests offered up animals in an earthly sanctuary (v.4) and the lamb of God offers Himself in the heavenly sanctuary (v.3). Later we read that the Old Covenant was mediated by Moses (v.5;7-8a); but the new agreement is mediated by Christ (v.6; 8b-13).

The Superior High Priest (vv.1-2)

Hebrews 8:1 (NKJV)¹Now 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,

The writer comes to the main point! “We have such a High Priest”.

In Jerusalem they could boast of an impressive Temple. In Jerusalem they could boast of a High Priest. In Jerusalem was the place where gifts, offerings and sacrifices were made!

The Jew could boast in a great Law Giver; Moses; a great Temple; rich, historical and deeply important rituals, feasts and sacrifices.

The Christian could say; “You have the shadow. We have the substance.” You have the copy. We have the real thing.

In Hebrews 7:26; “For such a High Priest was fitting for us” or suitable for us or appropriate for us! In what way adequate or sufficient?

Our High Priest is faultless in His character!

Our High Priest has finished His work.

Our High Priest is seated in the Heavens!

7:26; “. . .who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens”.

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Jesus was faultless in his character, reasonable in his teaching, harmless in his actions. “He knew no sin” (1 Peter 2:22); “In Him was no sin” (1 John 3:5). How is it possible that the greatest character who ever lived could die the most undeserved death? We know the reason! We are the reason!

“. . .who is seated”

Why is Jesus seated? Because His work is finished. The Priests of Israel offered sacrifices; burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings! The offerings represented surrender to God, as well as substitution—for the offerer. Grain offerings and burnt offerings served to communicate thanksgiving and devotion to God; some offerings were required for unintentional sin (Lev.4:2)—and the trespass offering was required for unintentional sin against the Lord, against holy things, and against neighbors (Lev.5:15,17; 6:2-3).

In the Old Testament and the Old Covenant each repeated sacrifice only served as a reminder that none of the sacrifices could provide a *finished salvation!*

The blood of animals did not wash away sin or cleanse the guilty of conscience; it could only cover sin—hide sin—until Jesus comes to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Think for a moment. Warren Wiersbe writes; “Can you conceive of a high priest who is perfect morally, ministering on the basis of a covenant that could not change human hearts? Could a priest who has finished his work minister from a covenant that could finish nothing? Can we conceive of a king-priest in the highest heaven being limited by an Old Covenant that made nothing perfect? (Heb.7:19)(TBEC Vol.2:304).

Faultless; finished, faithful. Jesus is enthroned in heaven. Jesus isn’t simply seated—he is seated in a place on a throne in heaven. The writer introduced this truth earlier (Hebrews 1:3); “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sin, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”. It will be repeated again (Hebrews 10:12;12:2).

Why all this fuss about seated on a throne in heaven? The Father promised His Son A Seat; “Sit thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

The earthly High Priest in the earthly Tabernacle never sat down and never on a throne! Only a priest after the order of Melchizedek could do such a thing (see Wiersbe TBEC Vol. 2; p.304).

This is piling on; moral superiority; finished work; enthroned, exalted, in the heavens!

A superior covenant demands a superior location! Jesus is ascended and exalted. He has passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:4); Jesus is exalted, Jesus is exalted as high as anyone can be exalted (Eph.1:20-23; Phil.2:5-11).

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“But I need Jesus here”. Indeed you do. But you also need Him there!

Ryrie says, “A priest must have something to offer (v.3) and a sanctuary in which to do it. Christ was disqualified from using the earthly sanctuary because of His descent from the tribe of Judah; therefore, His sphere of service must be heaven” (Ryrie Study Bible note; Hebrews 8:1; p.1879).

^{2a} Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

What is “the true tabernacle which the Lord erected,”? This might be a reference to the Church. Clearly Jesus said, “I will build my church.” This is the church of Jesus—where the Spirit of God dwells, and where the glory of God is revealed (see Wilson’s Dictionary of Bible Types; p.449).

But is it possible that Jesus is the true tabernacle?

M.R. DeHaan in his book “Studies in Hebrews” suggests exactly that.

The tabernacle in the wilderness was called “the tent of meeting”. This is the place where God would meet with human beings. Jesus is the God who becomes Man. “Every little detail in the Tabernacle spoke of Jesus. The silver spoke of redemption, gold, His Deity, wood, His humanity; brass His judgment, the altar, His Cross; the shewbread, the Bread of Life. The candlestick spoke of Him as the Light of the World; the golden incense pointed to His high priestly intercession. Every detail had some message in type which was fulfilled in Christ. This is elaborated upon in Hebrews nine” (adapted and quoted see pp.122-123).

Every Jew would have been profoundly aware of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Temple itself was magnificent and the service in that Temple would have been impressive.

Imagine the Jew who says; “I can see my High Priest in Jerusalem. I can’t see Jesus. I can’t see this Temple in Heaven that you speak of”.

How can anyone actually see the Temple in Heaven or see the work that Jesus does in that Temple?

The author will offer a logical answer (v.3); a genealogical answer (v.4); and a typological answer.

The Superior Sanctuary (vv.3-5)

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³For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer.

On the earth and in the earthly Temple the High Priest was appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices.

Jesus must have something to offer or something to give. How does the offering of the Priests correspond to the offering of Jesus?

⁴For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law;

On the earth the priests make offerings according to the Law of Moses. If Jesus were on the earth He would not be a priest (according to the Law of Moses) since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the Law (of Moses). This goes back to the legal requirements that the priest be a son of Aaron (Hebrews 7:1-11). Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. If Jesus were still on the earth, he could not function as priest. But He can serve as the High Priest in Heaven—because in Heaven—the order of Priest is the order of Melchizedek—not the order of Aaron.

Does this mean that Jesus has nothing to offer?

No.

What is the great ministry of Jesus?

Jesus is the Minister of a heavenly, spiritual priesthood (v.1).

Jesus is our exalted High Priest, at the right hand of God's throne (v.1).

Jesus is the exalted Minister in the true tabernacle (v.2).

Jesus is the exalted minister who offers the gifts and sacrifices of men to God (v.3).

Jesus is the exalted minister of the real—the heavenly world (vv.4-5).

⁵who 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."

The writer speaks of "the copy and shadow of heavenly things". These are known as types! Warren Wiersbe: "A type is an Old Testament picture of a New Testament truth. Each type is identified as such in the New Testament., so we must not try to make every Old Testament person or event into a type. The word 'pattern' in this verse is the Greek word *typos*, from which get our English word, "type" (TBEC Vol.2; p.305).

The writer quotes Exodus 25:40; "and see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."

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Paul speaks of his own life as a pattern or a mold into which other lives will be poured so they could live a life like his (see 1 Tim.1:16).

The writer of Hebrews invites us to consider the earthly tabernacle or temple as a type, a picture of the heavenly Sanctuary.

We might think of it as a replica. Not a perfect replica. Not an exact replica.

William MacDonald; “It’s layout depicted the manner in which God’s covenant people could approach Him in worship. There was the door of the outer court, then the altar of burnt offering, then the laver. After that the priests entered the Holy Place and the high priest entered the Most Holy Place where God manifested himself” (*The Believer’s Bible Commentary* p. 2181).

Imagine you could take a picture of what Heaven is like! The idea is the priests on earth were serving in place meant to reflect another place! Was Moses given access to a blue-print or picture of the Sanctuary in Heaven? Can we expect the Temple in Heaven to be made of fabric, animal skins, gold or silver or marble? Probably not. Whatever else it means—the true sanctuary is in Heaven—and here we have only copies—or imitations of what is true!

Why is this important? Again for the Jewish person tempted to return to Judaism. In Jerusalem there was a Temple. In Jerusalem there were priests. In Jerusalem there were sacrifices. It all seemed so real—so important—so stable. But what was really real—was already in Heaven! The things on earth were simply copies of the things in heaven! The Old Testament system was shadows (Col.2:17). The Law was simply a shadow of good things to come (Heb.10:1).

Jesus is the substance—not the shadow—Jesus is the light—why return to the dark shadows?

In the book of Revelation we are given a glimpse—a sneak peak into the temple in heaven (Rev. 11:19). We are given a picture of a brazen altar (Rev.6:9-11); an altar of incense (Rev.8:3-5); a sea of glass and seven lamps of fire (Rev.4:6);

Jesus is ministering in God’s sanctuary in Heaven—the real sanctuary—the original sanctuary—not the copy! Jesus is minister and ministering in the better place! Why chose the copy when you can have the original? Why chose blueprint when you can have the building? Why chose the pattern when you can own the dress?

In Jesus we have a superior covenant. What is the evidence? We have a superior priest—Jesus. Jesus serves in a superior place—heaven. The rest of the chapter he will devote to the third evidence—our covenant the new covenant is based on better promises!

Conclusion

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What is it that you have? What is it that you possess? You have a Savior. You have an exalted High Priest in Heaven.

You have a Savior who can stand before God and represent you! What you have is profoundly and fundamentally different from religion. You need a Savior.

- A perfect Savior completely faithful and true to God.
- He must be merciful and become the sacrifice for man's sin—a sacrificial lamb.
- He has to live as a man, be tempted as a man, and never sin.
- He has to feel, sympathize and comfort, and be able to help.
- He has to be ordained by God.
- He has to be the perfect author of eternal salvation.
- He has to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek and not like earthly priests.
- He has to be eternal and be capable of having an endless life.
- He has to be able to intercede for those who come to God.
- He has to be exalted to the right hand of God and be exalted higher than the heavens.

When someone meets those requirements they are qualified to be Your Priest in Heaven.

Do you know anyone like that?