

Better Promise, Better Covenant

In Chapter 7, Paul focused on the fact that Jesus was our High Priest, better than any of the earthly priests who came from the line of Israel's first high priest, Aaron. He will now move on in Chapter 8 to explain how Jesus also made a new covenant which is better than the old one.

Hebrews 8:1-5

Paul starts by reiterating that we have a High Priest - Jesus Christ - who ministers for us from a position of authority in heaven, being seated at the right hand of God. More than just "seated" He is "enthroned" because Jesus' work is complete. His enthronement was the fulfillment of the promise the Father made to Him in Psalm 110:1, *"Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."*

Interestingly, there were seven pieces of furniture or fixtures in the Tabernacle but not one place for the priests to sit down because their work was never finished. Not only did the high priest of Israel never sit down in the tabernacle, he never sat on a throne either. The priests had to offer sacrifices again and again because they did not have the power to completely remove sin or provide salvation. Only when Jesus died as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins was the work finished and He sat down at the right hand.

Jesus is the *"minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected,"* so let's look at the tabernacle. The reason God was so specific in giving directions for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25-31 is that the tabernacle is a model of heaven. Exodus 25:40 tells us that Moses' tabernacle built on earth was made according to a pattern that existed in heaven. There was only one entrance into the tabernacle just as there is only one entrance to heaven - Jesus is the only door. The Holy of Holies is a model of the throne of God in heaven. The cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat are like the angels around the throne of God. In the book of Revelation, where the heavenly scene is described, John points out many parallels. There is a brazen altar (Rev. 6:9-11) as well as an altar of incense (Rev. 8: 3-5). The "sea of glass" (Rev. 4:6) reminds us of the laver, and the seven lamps of fire (Rev. 4:5) suggest the seven-branched lampstand in the tabernacle. So the tabernacle and the temple later were both a copy and shadow of heavenly things. Thus the priests serving in the temple were actually serving in a sanctuary that was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus would never have been considered to minister as a priest in the earthly temple and He wouldn't have wanted to. While on earth, Jesus was often found in the courts of the temple but never in the Holy Place or Holy of Holies. Rather than entering the earthly copy, He entered directly into heaven. The Hebrews took pride in the Jerusalem temple, which was pretty glorious, but it was built by man: in fact, it was mostly built by Herod the Great who was a corrupt and ungodly man. On the other hand, the heavenly temple was the original created by God in glory and perfection. Paul is trying to get the Hebrews to answer these questions: Which would be better? To go back to worship in the temple with an earthly priest which is only a copy, or to worship Jesus the true High Priest who ministers from heaven? Basically, do you want the real deal or just a copy?

Aaron	Jesus
Was a man	Son of God
Tribe of Levi	Tribe of Judah
Of the Law	Of eternal life
Made nothing perfect	Made everything perfect
Had many successors	Christ had none
Aaron died	Jesus lives forever to make intercession for us
Was a sinner	Knew no sin ever
Had to sacrifice daily	Died once and for all - the perfect sacrifice

Hebrews 8:6

If we go back to Exodus 19 we can read the covenant God made with the nation of Israel - giving the Law to Moses and setting up the priesthood. However, this covenant was conditional. God said, *“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.”* This covenant was predicated on man’s doing something so they promised God they would obey Him. As we know, they certainly didn’t! So the covenant was broken - not by God but by man - because it depended on man’s obedience and faithfulness. But man was not obedient or faithful.

Now Christ is the mediator of a better covenant based on better promises. Why better? Because the new covenant isn’t based on our faithfulness - it’s based on God’s faithfulness. It isn’t based on our works - it’s based on God’s works. And because the new covenant is based on the faithfulness and the work of God, it will stand forever. II Timothy 2:13 reminds us, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” The new covenant is superior to the old because it is based on the better promises of the work God did through Jesus Christ, that finished work: once and for all, the only sacrifice needed. And what is required on our part? To believe in Him and accept the salvation he offers. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Romans 2:8-9) The law (old covenant) barred the door to God but Jesus (new covenant) opened it for us.

Hebrews 8:7-12

God spoke of a new covenant since the people were not keeping the old covenant properly. The idea was introduced in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The failure of Israel could not be blamed on any weakness in the old covenant, but rather on the weakness of human nature. That was when grace stepped in: what the law could not do because of man’s weakness, God accomplished through Christ.

The old covenant was written with the finger of God on tablets of stone but the new covenant is written by the Spirit on the human heart and mind. It’s God’s work now. An external law can never change a person; the change must come from the inside. So God is going to put His law in our mind and write it in our heart. As we seek God and submit our life to Him, God puts the desire in our heart to do what He wants done and to be pleasing to Him. The heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh.

The new covenant was truly “new.” So many things today are called “new and improved” without any substantial difference at all. But when God says “new” He means “new.” There are two Greek words that describe the concept of “new.” *Neos* describes newness in regard to time. It can be an exact copy of something but if it is recently made it is *neos*. The word *kainos*, which is the one used here, describes something that is not only new in time, but also truly new in its quality. It isn’t simply a reproduction of something old.

The new Covenant definitely began with Israel but it was never intended to end with them. God promised a new covenant for His people, which would be the Hebrews. When Jesus began His ministry on earth, He would go to the synagogue, to His own people, first. As his disciples were sent out we know they followed that same pattern of going to the Jews first. But the nation rejected the messages and the messengers. While it’s true thousands trusted Christ and were saved, it is also true that most of the nation rejected the Word. The religious leaders opposed Him completely, even to the point of plotting His death. What was God’s response? Thankfully for us, the gospel moved from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and then to the Gentiles. The new covenant became available to us. Romans 1:16 says, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”* And Jesus in the Great Commission sent His disciples out to *“make disciples of all nations.”*

The old covenant was a yoke of bondage, demanding perfect obedience. But the new covenant emphasizes what God will do for His people, not what they must do for Him. Grace stepped in and what the Law could never do because of man’s weakness, God accomplished through the cross. All who are “in Christ” share in the new covenant and God says He will remember our sins and iniquities no more. Does this mean our all-knowing God can actually *forget* what we have done? No, because then He wouldn’t be God. The phrase *“remember no more”* actually means *“hold against us no more.”* Out of his grace and mercy, He chooses to not hold our sin against us. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally.

Hebrews 8:13

The old covenant was governing the nation of Israel when this epistle was written. The temple was still standing and the priests were offering their required sacrifices. Devout Jews probably thought their Christian friends were crazy for leaving such a “solid religion” for a faith that was seemingly intangible. What the unbelieving Jews did not realize is that their “solid religion” was about to vanish away. The same was true for those believers contemplating going back to Mosaic law - it was about to vanish. The new covenant was so much better that it made the old one permanently “worn out,” “useless,” and “obsolete.” Paul was asking: Why stick with a covenant that doesn’t work and is ready to vanish? It would be much better to receive the new and everlasting one. Only six years later, with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the priesthood was over and the old covenant was gone. Just like that, it ended: no temple, no priests, no sacrifices. And it remains so even today. Only in the tribulation will a new temple be built and sacrifices offered once more. But we know it won’t last long; 3 1/2 years later the Antichrist will again bring an end to the sacrifices when he establishes himself in the temple as the focus of worship.

This new covenant is everlasting. It is established upon better promises, upon a High Priest who never dies, who does not change, and who doesn’t have to offer sacrifices for His own sin before He offers for us. He alone was worthy to be the once and for all sacrifice before God, to save us for all eternity.

“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. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” Ezekiel 36: 26-27



A Little Bunny Trail for Today

Leviticus 8:22-23

“And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Also he took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron’s right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.”

For the consecration offering things were a little different than the other offerings. Why did Moses take blood from the sacrifice and put it on the tip of Aaron’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe?

- Blood is always a reminder to us that we have no value apart from the death of Christ on our behalf
- it was applied to the right side as this is a side that shows power and strength (we know Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father)
- the ear is for listening; blood on the ear may have symbolized dedication to the hearing of God’s Word; believers should use their redeemed ears for the Lord; we need to hear the Lord speak through His Word and be sensitive to His leading in our lives; **hear and obey the Word**
- blood on the thumb may have pictured holiness in doing God’s work; believers should use their redeemed thumbs (hands) for the Lord through worship and through serving the Lord - “through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13); **perform sacred duties in holiness**
- blood on the toe may have spoken of walking carefully in the service of God; believers should use their redeemed big toe (feet) for the Lord. They need to walk by means of the Holy Spirit so that they do not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16); **walk righteously as an example**