

Hebrews 8
April 24, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What are the the most amazing inventions that you believe has improved your life?
[Microwaves, internet, email, tv?]

When I pondered this question, I came up with a similar list:

Internet vs USPS

Mobile device that combines a phone, computer, and databases (iPhone) vs Desktop

TVs

Do you ever ask yourself, “How in the world did anyone think up that?!! I’m still trying to understand how I can see a picture in a tube that shows up on a TV screen. Who thought of that?!

There had to be masterminds behind these improvements. Robert Kahn and Vint Cerf invented the internet. Multiple people provided combined patents to invent the iPhone with the touchscreen feature to give us a computer at our fingertips. Philo Farnsworth had the idea for a TV at age 14 and then showcased his idea in 1927 as a young adult in his San Francisco lab.

These inventors made major improvements, which have been superior to what existed before or to what was becoming obsolete and inefficient.

Transition: God is the mastermind of the heavens and the Earth. When He saw that the Old Covenant was not working, He knew that He had to implement a far more superior New Covenant to help His children have an eternal love relationship with Him. He masterminded the New Covenant through His Son, Jesus. As we study today’s chapter, I believe that **All of us CAN flourish under the New Covenant BY understanding the key IMPROVEMENTS God made over the Old Covenant and then choose to live under it!** Let’s explore the improvements God made as we walk through this passage. Let’s begin with just the first two verses.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 8:1-2]

V.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,

V.2:

- and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: The author gives his punchline from the last chapter. If you were with us last week, we put together Jesus’s resume and discovered attributes that no other priest could claim! So how does the writer describe Jesus in v.1? [He’s a high priest who sat down at the right hand of God in heaven.]

Q: Notice the phrase “such a high priest.” The writer used it in Heb 7:26. Let’s read that verse again and then tell me what sets Christ apart from any other priests? [Morally perfect! He was holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens, which makes Him superior to any other priest, past or present. Yet He identified with us in our needs and temptations. Those who wanted to go back into the Old Testament priesthood would have to leave this *suitable* High Priest and rely on priests who were sinners themselves who had to make sacrifices for themselves before they could serve their own people!]

Q: What is the significance of Christ “sitting down?” [Today our Lord is *seated* because His work is completed. There were no chairs in the Old Testament tabernacle because the work of the priests was never finished. Each repeated sacrifice was only a reminder that *none* of the sacrifices ever provided a finished salvation. The blood of animals did not wash away sin or cleanse the guilty conscience; *it only covered sin until that day when Jesus Christ died to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).*]

Q: Did anyone notice where Jesus sits?! [*Where* He is seated is what adds glory to His person and His work. He is seated on the throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father. This great truth was introduced early in this epistle (Heb. 1:3), and it will be mentioned again (Heb. 10:12; 12:2). This enthronement was the fulfillment of the Father’s promise to the Son: “Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps. 110:1). **Not only did the high priest of Israel never sit down in the tabernacle, but he never sat down on a throne.** Only a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” could be enthroned, for Melchizedek was both king and priest (Heb. 7:1). Moreover, we see a reinforcement of Heb 7:26. He is **exalted above the heavens**. In His ascension and exaltation, He “passed through the heavens” (Heb. 4:14, NASB). He is now exalted as high as anyone could be (Eph. 1:20–23; Phil. 2:5–11).]

Q v.2: Where, specifically, does Jesus minister to us as the great High Priest? [He serves in the sanctuary of the “true tabernacle.” The true tabernacle exists in heaven and is not made by human hands.]

Q: So just based on these first two verses, what (or who) is presented as an IMPROVEMENT for the New Covenant? [Jesus as the High Priest!]

Summarize first IMPROVEMENT: If we are to flourish under the New Covenant, we need to recognize that it starts with a superior priest compared to the priests administering the Old Covenant. The author highlighted them for us:

- Christ is morally perfect. All other priests were not and could not change human hearts.
- Christ finished His work by removing our sins. All other priests couldn’t finish the work, which is why they had to do annual sacrifices. The sacrifices only “covered” sins, not remove them.
- Christ is the king-priest, while priests of the old covenant were only priests.
- Christ is a priest in the “true tabernacle,” while priests of old were not.

Transition: The writer amplifies *where* Jesus ministers as priest and here’s why. His readers knew that there was a real temple in Jerusalem, and that in the temple there were priests offering

gifts and sacrifices. How easy it would be to go back into the traditional Mosaic system! After all, how do we *know* that the Lord Jesus is ministering in a sanctuary? Has anyone actually seen Him in His high priestly work? These are questions that the Hebrew Christians may be asking!

[Read Heb 8:3-5]

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.3-4: The author creates a tension that needs to be resolved: If every high priest is required to offer gifts/sacrifices, and Jesus is the High Priest, then therefore, He is required to offer gifts and sacrifices. But if Jesus lived on earth, he would not be a priest. Why? [He was not of the Levi tribe, but rather the tribe of Judah.]

Q: So if Jesus couldn't offer sacrifices “on earth,” then where would He do it? [In heaven, which means Jesus must have a sanctuary in which He ministers, and that it must be in heaven.]

Clarification: Please don't get the impression that Christ is offering sacrifices in heaven like the OT sacrifices! Jesus is a “living sacrifice” in heaven. He is not offering Himself over and over because that is unnecessary. He has already offered Himself “once for all.”

Bottom Line: Jesus can serve as the High Priest in *heaven* because there the order of Melchizedek governs the ministry, not the order of Aaron/Levites. Jesus' earthly birth into the tribe of Judah would not permit Him to be an earthly priest; therefore, He must be a Priest in heaven. He would not be accepted in the earthly sanctuary, so He must be serving in the heavenly sanctuary.

Q v.5: How does the author describe the earthly sanctuary? [“copies and shadows of what is in heaven.”]

Observation: The priests then serving in the temple were actually serving in a sanctuary that was a copy (“example”) of the heavenly sanctuary. The quotation is from Exodus 25:40, where it refers obliquely to a heavenly sanctuary. Moses saw this **pattern** (“type”) on the mount and duplicated its essentials in the earthly tabernacle.

Q: So I want you to be the writer who is standing in front of a bunch of Jewish Christians who want to go back to Judaism. Based on the verses we just read and processed, how would you sell them on remaining faithful to Jesus? [Since Jesus Christ is ministering in the original sanctuary,

and not the copy, He is ministering in a better place. Why fellowship with priests who are serving in a *copied* sanctuary when you can fellowship with Christ in the original heavenly sanctuary?]

Summarize IMPROVEMENT: So the author has given us two evidences of the superiority of the New Covenant: it is ministered by a superior Priest, Jesus Christ; and it is ministered in a superior place, heaven itself. Now we're going to look at more IMPROVEMENTS for the remainder of this chapter.

[Read Heb 8:6-13]

V.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.

V.7:

- For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.

V.12:

- For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

V.13:

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

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.6: What improvement do we already see? [The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant] And on what basis? [Better promises]

To appreciate the "better promises," let's read **Jer 31:31-34** and look for how this New Covenant will be a dramatic improvement from the Old Covenant:

(1) an inner inclination to obey (God will put His **laws in their minds and write them on their hearts**), [Old covenant – Laws were external, written on tablets. God did not find fault with His covenant but with His people. "Wherefore, the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and

just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). The problem is not with the Law, but with our sinful natures, for by ourselves we cannot keep God’s Law, The Law “made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19) because it could not change any human heart. Only God’s grace can do that.]

(2) a firm relationship with God (**I will be their God, and they will be My people**), [God did not find fault with His covenant but with His people. The problem is not with the Law, but with our sinful natures, for by ourselves we cannot keep God’s Law, The Law “made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19) because it could not change any human heart. Only God’s grace can do that.]

(3) the knowledge of God (**they will all know Me**), and

(4) the forgiveness of sins (**I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more**). These are the “better promises” alluded to in verse 6. [Sins were held against the Israelites until they repented and priests presented sacrifices. Think back when God led Israel out of Egypt the way a father would take a child by the hand and lead him. God gave Israel His holy Law for their own good, to separate them from the other nations and to protect them from the sinful practices of the heathen. But the nation failed; “they continued not in My covenant” (Heb. 8:9). God’s responses to Israel’s disobedience were to discipline them repeatedly and finally to send them into captivity.]

The Key Improvement – The promise of God’s grace: The old covenant was based on the faithfulness of man, while the promised New Covenant is based on the faithfulness of God alone.

[Optional]: What is the relationship between this New Covenant *promised* to Israel, but today *experienced* by the church?

It is clear that all these benefits belong, in fact, to all the regenerate of every age since the Cross. Though the New Covenant is specifically focused on Israel (cf. **house of Israel** and “house of Judah” in Jer. 31:31), it is clear that Christians of the present time also stand under its blessings (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6). For a more detailed explanation, here are Wiersbe’s thoughts on this:

Perhaps the solution is found in God’s principle of “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). God did promise a New Covenant for His people, but the blessings of this covenant are wrapped up in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. When Jesus began His ministry on earth, **He went to His own people first (Matt. 15:24)**. When He sent out His disciples, He sent them only to Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). When He commissioned the church to witness, He instructed them to begin in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–48; Acts 1:8). Peter’s message at Pentecost was addressed only to Jews and to Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes (see Acts 2:14, 22, 36). In his second recorded sermon, Peter clearly stated that the Good News of the Gospel would go to the Jews first (Acts 3:25–26).

But the nation rejected the message and the messengers. While it is true that thousands of individuals trusted Christ and were saved, it is also true that **most of the nation rejected the Word, and that the religious leaders opposed the ministry of the church.** One result was the

stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). But what was God's response? The Gospel moved from Jerusalem and Judea into Samaria (Acts 8), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

The church today is made up of regenerated Jews and Gentiles who are one body in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:27–29). All who are “in Christ” share in the New Covenant which was purchased on the cross.

LOOK:

Q: Are you flourishing under the New Covenant?

Older generation wants to stick with what's familiar. They don't want computers. They don't want that kind of change because the old system still works for them – even though they're missing out on the superior benefits of the newer system. The Hebrew Christians were no different. Familiarity is a powerful thing!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 303–308). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE BETTER COVENANT

Hebrews 8

I once spoke at a meeting of religious broadcasters at which a friend of mine was to provide the ministry of music. He is a superb pianist with a gift for interpreting Christian music, and I have always enjoyed listening to him. But that day my heart went out to him in sympathy, because the motel had given the most deteriorated and derelict piano I have ever seen. It must have been donated by a local wrecking company. My friend did his best, but it would have been much better had he been playing a decent instrument.

Jesus Christ is God's superior Priest; but is there anything that can minimize this superiority? Nothing! For He ministers on the basis of a better covenant (Heb. 8), in a better sanctuary (Heb. 9), and because of a better sacrifice (Heb. 10). It is the better covenant that is the theme of this chapter. The writer presented three evidences for the superiority of this covenant.

It Is Ministered by a Superior High Priest (Heb. 8:1–2)

Is the writer arguing in circles? First he shows the superiority of Christ, and then says, "Since He is superior, the covenant He ministers must be a superior covenant." No, this is not reasoning in a circle; for the conclusion is logical. A superior priest could never minister on the basis of an inferior covenant. To change the illustration, the most gifted lawyer can do very little if the will he is probating is inadequate. It is unthinkable that our Lord would minister on the basis of an inferior "last will and testament."

"This is the sum" simply means, "This is the main point and the climax of my discussion." He then presented several "summary arguments" to prove that our Lord is indeed a superior High Priest.

His moral adequacy (v. 1). "We have *such* an High Priest" [italics mine]. This statement refers us back to Hebrews 7:22–28. "For *such an high priest* became us [was suited to us]" (Heb. 7:26). The fact that Jesus Christ is morally perfect and yet identified with us in our needs and temptations makes Him superior to any other priest, past or present. Those of his readers who wanted to go back into the Old Testament priesthood would have to leave this *suitable* High Priest.

His finished work (v. 1). Today our Lord is *seated* because His work is completed. There were no chairs in the Old Testament tabernacle because the work of the priests was never finished. Each repeated sacrifice was only a reminder that *none* of the sacrifices ever provided a finished salvation. The blood of animals did not wash away sin or cleanse the guilty conscience; it only covered sin until that day when Jesus Christ died to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

His enthronement (v. 1). Jesus Christ is not just "seated." It is *where* He is seated that adds glory to His person and His work. He is seated on the throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father. This great truth was introduced early in this epistle (Heb. 1:3), and it will be mentioned again (Heb. 10:12; 12:2). This enthronement was the fulfillment of the Father's promise to the

Son: “Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Ps. 110:1). Not only did the high priest of Israel never sit down in the tabernacle, but he never sat down *on a throne*. Only a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” could be enthroned, for Melchizedek was both king and priest (Heb. 7:1).

His supreme exaltation (vv. 1–2). He is “in the heavens.” Jesus Christ, in His ascension and exaltation, “passed through the heavens” (Heb. 4:14, NASB). He is now exalted as high as anyone could be (Eph. 1:20–23; Phil. 2:5–11). The fact that He ministers in a *heavenly* sanctuary is important to the argument presented in this chapter.

As we review these four “summary arguments,” we can see how logical it is that our Lord ministers on the basis of a superior covenant. 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) The conclusion seems reasonable: the presence of a superior High Priest in heaven demands a superior covenant if He is to minister effectively to God’s people.

It Is Ministered in a Better Place (Heb. 8:3–5)

In this paragraph, the writer expanded on the marvelous truth that Jesus Christ today ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. The reason for this discussion is not difficult to determine. His readers knew that there was a real temple in Jerusalem, and that in the temple there were priests offering gifts and sacrifices. How easy it would be to go back into the traditional Mosaic system! After all, how do we *know* that the Lord Jesus is ministering in a sanctuary? Has anyone actually seen Him in His high priestly work?

Good questions—and there are good answers!

The logical answer (v. 3). It has already been determined that Jesus Christ is a High Priest. But all high priests serve others; the title is not honorary. Each Old Testament high priest was appointed “to offer gifts and sacrifices”; therefore, Jesus Christ must offer gifts and sacrifices (see Heb. 5:1; 7:27). But these sacrifices must not be offered just anywhere; they must be offered in God’s appointed place (Deut. 12:13–14). That appointed place is the sanctuary. The conclusion is logical: if Jesus Christ is a High Priest who offers gifts and sacrifices, then He must have a sanctuary in which He ministers. Since He is in heaven, that sanctuary must be in heaven.

We must not, however, get the impression that our Lord is offering sacrifices in heaven that correspond to the Old Testament sacrifices. The word “somewhat” in Hebrews 8:3 is in the singular, and the phrase “to offer” is in a Greek tense that implies “offer once and for all.” On the cross, He offered Himself as the one sacrifice for sin forever (Heb. 9:24–28). In other words, our Lord is “a living sacrifice” in heaven. He is not offering Himself over and over because that is unnecessary.

The genealogical answer (v. 4). We have met this truth before in Hebrews 7:11–14. As far as His human ancestry is concerned, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah. God had promised that the Messiah would come from the kingly tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8–10). But the priests had to come from the tribe of Levi. Therefore, if Jesus Christ were still on earth, He could not function as a priest. But He can serve as High Priest in *heaven* because there the order of Melchizedek governs the ministry, not the order of Aaron.

Again, the argument is sound. David predicted that Jesus Christ would be a Priest (Ps. 110:4). Jesus’ earthly birth into the tribe of Judah would not permit Him to be an earthly priest;

therefore, He must be a Priest in heaven. He would not be accepted in the earthly sanctuary, so He must be serving in the heavenly sanctuary.

The typological answer (v. 5). 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 *TUPOS*, from which we get our English word “type.”

The priests then serving in the temple were actually serving in a sanctuary that was a copy (“example”) of the heavenly sanctuary. The quotation is from Exodus 25:40, where it refers obliquely to a heavenly sanctuary. Moses saw this pattern on the mount and duplicated its essentials in the earthly tabernacle. This does not mean that the heavenly tabernacle is made up of skins and fabrics. It is the basic pattern and meaning of the sanctuary that is emphasized here. The true sanctuary is in heaven; the tabernacle and temple were but imitations or copies of the true.

This is a telling argument for remaining faithful to Jesus Christ and not going back into Judaism. The earthly priesthood and sanctuary seemed quite real and stable, and yet they were but *copies* of the true! The Old Testament system was but shadows (see Col. 2:17). The Law was but a “shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1); the true and full light came in Jesus Christ. So why go back into the shadows?

In the Book of Revelation, where the heavenly scene is described, we can find parallels to the Old Testament tabernacle. John states that there is a temple of God in heaven (Rev. 11:19). Of course, there will be no temple in the eternal state, because the entire city of God will be a temple (Rev. 21:22). For example, 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.

Since Jesus Christ is ministering in the original sanctuary, and not the copy, He is ministering in a better place. Why fellowship with priests who are serving in a *copied* sanctuary when you can fellowship with Christ in the original heavenly sanctuary? It would be like trying to live on the blueprint instead of in the building itself!

The writer has now given us two evidences of the superiority of the New Covenant: it is ministered by a superior Priest, Jesus Christ; and it is ministered in a superior place, heaven itself. He devoted the remainder of this section to the third evidence.

It Is Founded on Better Promises (Heb. 8:6–13)

Moses was the mediator (go-between) of the Old Covenant in the giving of the Law (Gal. 3:19–20). The people of Israel were so frightened at Mount Sinai that they begged Moses to speak to them so that they would not have to hear God speak (Ex. 20:18–21). Sad to say, this fear of God did not last long; for the people soon disobeyed the very Law they promised to keep. The Mediator of the New Covenant is Jesus Christ, and He is the only Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Christ’s ministry as Mediator is more excellent than that of the Old Testament priests because it is based on a better covenant; *and His covenant is founded on better promises.*

The “better covenant” that is referred to in this paragraph was announced by the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31–34). The promise was given in a prophecy that assured the Jews of future restoration. Jeremiah ministered during the closing years of the nation’s history, before Judah went into Babylonian Captivity. At a time when the nation’s future seemed completely destroyed, God gave the promise of restoration and blessing.

Before our Lord went to Calvary, He celebrated the Passover with His disciples in the Upper Room. At that supper, He instituted what we call “the Lord’s Supper.” He said, taking the cup, “This cup is the new testament [covenant] in My blood, which is shed for you” (Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:20). The Apostle Paul quoted these words and applied them to the church (1 Cor. 11:23–27). The writer of Hebrews states clearly that Jesus Christ *now* “is the Mediator of the New Covenant” (Heb. 9:15) and repeats it (Heb. 12:24).

What, then, is the relationship between this New Covenant *promised* to Israel, but today *experienced* by the church? Or, to state it another way, how can God promise these blessings to the Jews and then turn around and give them to the church?

Some Bible students solve the problem by concluding that the church is “spiritual Israel” and that the New Covenant promises therefore belong to “Abraham’s spiritual seed” today. That believers today are the “spiritual seed” of Abraham is clear from Galatians 3:13–29; but this is not the same as saying that the church is “spiritual Israel.” The promise quoted in Hebrews 8:8 specifically names “the house of Israel and ... the house of Judah.” Once we are permitted to make such plain words as “Israel” and “Judah” mean something else, there is no end to how we might interpret the Bible!

Other students believe that this “New Covenant” has no present fulfillment in the church, but that it will be fulfilled only when the Jews are regathered and the kingdom is established at our Lord’s return to earth in glory. But then we have the problem of explaining Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24, verses that state that Jesus Christ is *today* the Mediator of the New Covenant. To affirm that there are *two* “new covenants,” one for Israel and one for the church, is to create more questions!

Perhaps the solution is found in God’s principle of “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). God did promise a New Covenant for His people, but the blessings of this covenant are wrapped up in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. When Jesus began His ministry on earth, He went to His own people first (Matt. 15:24). When He sent out His disciples, He sent them only to Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). When He commissioned the church to witness, He instructed them to begin in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–48; Acts 1:8). Peter’s message at Pentecost was addressed only to Jews and to Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes (see Acts 2:14, 22, 36). In his second recorded sermon, Peter clearly stated that the Good News of the Gospel would go to the Jews first (Acts 3:25–26).

But the nation rejected the message and the messengers. While it is true that thousands of individuals trusted Christ and were saved, it is also true that most of the nation rejected the Word, and that the religious leaders opposed the ministry of the church. One result was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). But what was God’s response? The Gospel moved from Jerusalem and Judea into Samaria (Acts 8), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

The church today is made up of regenerated Jews and Gentiles who are one body in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:27–29). All who are “in Christ” share in the New Covenant which was purchased on the cross. Today the blessings of the New Covenant are applied to individuals. When Jesus comes in glory to redeem Israel, then the blessings of the New Covenant will be applied to that beleaguered nation. Read all of Jeremiah 31 to see what God has planned for Israel, His people.

Before we examine the “better promises” of the New Covenant, we must settle another matter. We must not conclude that the existence of the New Covenant means that the Old Covenant was wrong or that the Law has no ministry today. Both covenants were given by God. Both covenants were given for people’s good. Both covenants had blessings attached to them. If

Israel had obeyed the terms of the Old Covenant, God would have blessed them and they would have been ready for the coming of their Messiah. Paul pointed out that the Old Covenant had its share of glory (2 Cor. 3:7–11). We must not criticize the Old Covenant or minimize it.

Even though the New Covenant of grace brings with it freedom from the Law of Moses (Gal. 5:1), it does not bring freedom to disobey God and sin. God still desires that the “righteousness of the Law” should be fulfilled in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4). There is a lawful use of the Law (1 Tim. 1:8–11).

Now we are ready to consider the “better promises” that belong to the New Covenant.

The promise of God’s grace (vv. 7–9). The emphasis in the New Covenant is on God’s “I will.” The nation of Israel at Sinai said, “All the words which the Lord hath said will we do” (Ex. 24:3). But they did not obey God’s words. It is one thing to *say*, “We will!” and quite another thing to do it. But the New Covenant does not depend on man’s faithfulness to God but on God’s faithful promise to man. The writer of Hebrews affirms God’s “I will” on behalf of those who trust Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:10). In fact, God’s “I will” is stated three times in that one verse and six times in Hebrews 8:8–12.

God led Israel out of Egypt the way a father would take a child by the hand and lead him. God gave Israel His holy Law for their own good, to separate them from the other nations and to protect them from the sinful practices of the heathen. But the nation failed; “they continued not in My covenant” (Heb. 8:9). God’s responses to Israel’s disobedience were to discipline them repeatedly and finally to send them into captivity.

God did not find fault with His covenant but with His people. “Wherefore, the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). The problem is not with the Law, but with our sinful natures, for by ourselves we cannot keep God’s Law, The Law “made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19) because it could not change any human heart. Only God’s grace can do that.

The New Covenant is *wholly* of God’s grace; no sinner can become a part of this New Covenant without faith in Jesus Christ. Grace and faith go together just as the Law and works go together (Rom. 11:6). The Law says, “The man that doeth them [the things written in the Law] shall live in them” (Gal. 3:12). But grace says, “The work is done—believe and live!”

The promise of internal change (v. 10). The Law of Moses could *declare* God’s holy standard, but it could never *provide* the power needed for obedience. Sinful people need a new heart and a new disposition within; and this is just what the New Covenant provides. (For a parallel passage, see Ezek. 36:26–27.) When a sinner trusts Christ, he receives a divine nature within (2 Peter 1:1–4). This divine nature creates a desire to love and obey God. By nature, sinful people are hateful and disobedient (Titus 3:3–7); but the new nature gives each believer both the desire and the dynamic for a godly life.

The Law was external; God’s demands were written on tablets of stone. But the New Covenant makes it possible for God’s Word to be written on human minds and hearts (2 Cor. 3:1–3). God’s grace makes possible an internal transformation that makes a surrendered believer more and more like Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is unfortunate that many Christians think they are saved by grace but must then fulfill their Christian life according to the Old Testament Law. They want the New Covenant for salvation but the Old Covenant for sanctification. The Apostle Paul had a phrase to describe this condition: “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Not “fallen from salvation,” but fallen from the sphere of God’s blessing through grace. We do not become holy people by trying to obey God’s Law in our own power. It is by yielding to the Holy Spirit within that we fulfill the righteousness of the Law (Rom. 8:1–4); and this is wholly of grace.

The promise of forgiveness for all (vv. 11–12). There is no forgiveness under the Law because the Law was not given for that purpose. “Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the Law is knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). The Law could not promise forgiveness to Israel, let alone to all mankind. It is only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that forgiveness is possible to all who will call on Him. The Old Testament sacrifices brought a *remembrance* of sins, not a *remission* of sins (Heb. 10:1–3, 18).

Hebrews 8:11 quotes Jeremiah 31:34. It refers to that day when Israel shall be reunited with Judah (Heb. 8:8) and shall rejoice in the promised kingdom (Jer. 31:1–14). In that day, there will be no need to share the Gospel with others because everyone will know the Lord personally. However, until that day, it is both our privilege and our responsibility to share the Gospel message with a lost world.

What does it mean that God remembers our sins and iniquities no more? (Heb. 8:12) This important statement is quoted again in Hebrews 10:16–17. Does it mean that our all-knowing God can actually *forget* what we have done? If God forgot anything, He would cease to be God! The phrase “remember no more” means “hold against us no more.” God recalls what we have done, but He does not hold it against us. He deals with us on the basis of grace and mercy, not law and merit. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally.

As a pastor in counseling ministry I have often heard people say, “Well, I can forgive—but I cannot forget!”

“Of course you can’t forget,” I usually reply. “The more you try to put this thing out of your mind, the more you will remember it. But that isn’t what it means to forget.” Then I go on to explain that “to forget” means “not to hold it against the person who has wronged us.” We may remember what others have done, but we treat them *as though they never did it*.

How is this possible? It is possible because of the cross, for there God treated His Son *as though He had done it!* Our experience of forgiveness from God makes it possible for us to forgive others.

The promise of eternal blessing (v. 13). The Old Covenant was still governing the nation of Israel at the time this epistle was written. The temple was standing and the priests were offering their appointed sacrifices. Devout Jews probably thought that their Christian friends were foolish to abandon such a “solid religion” for a faith that was seemingly intangible. What the unbelieving Jews did not realize was that their “solid religion” had grown old and was about to vanish away. In A.D. 70 the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans, and the Jews have not had a temple or a priesthood to serve them ever since (see Hosea 3:4).

However, the New Covenant brings eternal blessing. Jesus Christ is the Author of “eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9) and “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). The New Covenant can never get old and disappear. The Greek word translated “new” means “new in quality,” not “new in time.” This New Covenant is of such quality that it will never need to be replaced!

Yes, our Lord *is* ministering on the basis of a better covenant, a New Covenant that makes us partakers of the new nature and the wonderful new life that only Christ can give.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 799-800). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In chapter 7, the writer had considered the superiority of the new priesthood. It follows that such a priesthood must have a superior priestly ministry. That it does is unfolded in this section of the epistle. In the process, the letter reveals that the New Covenant underlies this newer priestly service.

a. Introduction to the superior service (8:1–6).

8:1–2. The author of Hebrews opened this passage with a clear transitional statement: **the point of what we are saying is this**. He wished to summarize what he had been teaching and go on to new ideas. By referring to the Lord Jesus as **a High Priest who sat down at the right hand ... of the Majesty in heaven**, he picked up the wording of 1:3 (cf. 10:12; 12:2). What he meant by this truth is reasonably clear but will be elaborated further in what follows. In the expression **who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle**, he touched on ideas already implicit in his foregoing instruction, yet used new terms to describe them. The idea of service (*leitourgos*, a “minister” in the priestly sense) is in reality the new theme. The “true tabernacle” is the heavenly sphere where that service takes place.

8:3–6. Here is an initial, preliminary elaboration of the new theme. Since the role of a priest involved **gifts (*dōra*) and sacrifices (*thysias*)** (cf. 5:1; 9:9), it follows that this new High Priest should **have something to offer**. Nevertheless His service cannot be an earthly one since the Levitical ritual of sacrifice continued. (These words imply that the Jewish temple was still standing.) But the **sanctuary** used for that is a mere **copy (*hypodeigmati*)** (cf. 9:23–24) **and shadow (*skia*)** (cf. 10:1) of the heavenly one in which the new Priest ministers. Its status as a “shadow sanctuary” was secured when Moses erected **the tabernacle** (prototype of the temple) under strict divine direction (8:5). But Jesus’ ministry surpasses that of the Levitical priests just as the covenant He mediates supersedes theirs. (The word **Mediator** is used of Jesus by the author three times—8:6; 9:15; 12:24.) The word **ministry (*leitourgia*)** (cf. “serves,” 8:2) again strikes the pivotal note, but it is now added that the superiority of the new priestly service is related to a superior covenant, which in turn **is founded on better promises**. Both the covenant and its promises will now be considered.

b. The superior covenant (8:7–9:15).

8:7. That there is a promise of a New Covenant the writer will shortly prove by quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34. By doing so, he argued that such a promise demonstrates the inadequacy of the old one.

8:8–12. The promise of a New Covenant was made, the writer pointed out, in a passage where God **found fault with the people**. The Old Covenant failed because of the sinfulness of the nation, for which it had no remedy. The **New Covenant**, however, has such a remedy.

In the passage quoted, there is first the prediction that a New Covenant will be made (v. 8) followed by a strong declaration that it will differ from the previous one (v. 9). Then follows (vv. 10–12) a description of the superior accomplishments, or enablements, of the promised **covenant**. These are: (1) an inner inclination to obey (God will put His **laws in their minds and write them on their hearts**), (2) a firm relationship with God (**I will be their God, and they will be My people**), (3) the knowledge of God (**they will all know Me**), and (4) the forgiveness of sins (**I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more**). These are the “better promises” alluded to in verse 6.

It is clear that all these benefits belong, in fact, to all the regenerate of every age since the Cross. Though the New Covenant is specifically focused on Israel (cf. **house of Israel** and “house of Judah” in Jer. 31:31), it is clear that Christians of the present time also stand under its blessings (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6). This perception does not lead to an inappropriate confusion between Israel and the church. The New Covenant is God’s appointed vehicle for fulfilling the Abrahamic blessings to Israel. But the Abrahamic Covenant also promised universal blessing, so the New Covenant becomes as well God’s vehicle of salvation for believers since the Cross. To say this is not to say anything more than Jesus did when He declared that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). In no way should this impede the perception of the Christian church as a unique, interadvent body, closely united to Christ as His bride and significantly distinct from the nation of Israel. But inasmuch as all salvation is through the Cross of Christ, it is also through the blood of the New Covenant.

8:13. From the Old Testament prophecy he had just quoted, the writer then drew the justifiable conclusion that the Old Covenant was **obsolete** (*palaioumenon*) **and aging** and would **soon disappear**. The ceremonies still being conducted under it (cf. vv. 4–5) were spiritually anachronistic and the author’s words suggest that he recalled the prophecy of Jesus that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1–2). Probably this prophecy was fulfilled soon after Hebrews was written. If so, it was a dramatic confirmation of the writer’s thesis about the Old Covenant.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1830). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

8:9 Some skeptics charge that the writer of Hebrews here misquoted Jr 31:32 because Heb 8:9 reads, “I disregarded them” instead of “I had married them” as in the OT. But the NT writer of Hebrews simply cited the Septuagint (Gk translation of the OT) instead of the Hebrew Bible, and when he did, it became part of Scripture.