

DAY 7: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 8

A NEW AND BETTER COVENANT After Jesus offered His sacrifice, “*He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Hebrews 1:3). The act of sitting signifies that His work—the forgiveness of sin and the reconciliation of people with God—was accomplished. God accepted the self-sacrifice of His Son as a full, total, and complete sacrifice. Nothing more remained to be done.

THINK ABOUT how our author says that Christ “*sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*” (8:1). In this particular passage, we cannot determine if Jesus is actually sitting down on a throne. But we can understand from this description the majesty, honor, and authority that belong to Him. From the mental picture this provides, we can understand spiritual truths: Jesus has finished the work of redemption and continues to represent us before the Father. How marvelous that God, whose mind is infinite, has chosen to reveal Himself through His Son in a way that we can understand!

The consistent pattern of Hebrews is to teach a “greater” truth by comparing it to a “lesser” truth. Jesus serves as “*a minister in the holy places, in the true tent*” (8:2). The heavenly “*holy place*” corresponds to the earthly Most Holy Place, which was only a type of the “greater” heavenly sanctuary. As our High Priest, Jesus entered once for all into this heavenly sanctuary. “*True*” means *genuine*; however, its use does not imply that the earthly tabernacle was counterfeit. It was simply inadequate when compared to the permanent and perfect place of worship God established in heaven.

Hebrews 8:3-5 further explains the point that Jesus is a minister of the heavenly sanctuary. The priesthood’s task was to offer “*gifts and sacrifices.*” If the old tabernacle and priesthood served as a type or representation of Jesus and His work, then it was necessary for Him to make an offering. Jesus offered Himself.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus could not enter the Holy Place of the earthly tabernacle, for He was from the tribe of Judah. Jesus was born under the Law, so it would have been improper for Him to interfere in the service of the Levitical priests while on earth.

Built according to the “*pattern*” God gave Moses, the earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly tabernacle. A *copy* suggests a duplicate, and a *shadow* implies a dim reflection of an object.

Verse 6 states that just as the new covenant is better than the old, so Christ’s ministry is greater than that of Levi. The Sinai covenant was established through the mediator Moses; the new and better covenant has been established through the Mediator Jesus Christ. A mediator stands between two people in a conflict or dispute to bring them together. He represents both parties. The priests mediated between God and people, but they were powerless to forge a lasting union. They were simply shadows and copies of the true Mediator who was to come.

Not only is the mediator better under the new covenant, the promises are better. Both covenants promise the knowledge of God and forgiveness of sin. However, the former *anticipates* completion while the new actually *fulfills*. In the first covenant worship was *external*. Forgiveness sprang from what the rituals and sacrifices *represented*—a contrite heart before a gracious God. The new covenant is greatly superior because its sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, actually has the power to abolish sin.

The first covenant, while not without value, “*is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness*” (7:18); its ceremonial laws could not change the human heart. Because the former covenant was faulty, another covenant was established (8:7). The blood of bulls and goats was efficient only as it pointed to the true, worthy sacrifice to come, Jesus Christ.

THE NEW COVENANT BASED ON SUPERIOR PROMISES Because of the Israelites’ continued failure to keep the covenant, God said, “*I will establish a new covenant.*” However, while the “*new covenant*” was new to God’s people, it was not new to God. He knew from the beginning



that the Law was insufficient and that a Savior was needed. Although the prophecy speaks of the new covenant as applying to Israel and Judah, it holds a universal promise: *“They shall all know Me”* (8:11).

Verse 10 quotes from Jeremiah 31: *“I will put My laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts.”* Here, the New Testament emphasis of personal renewal is first suggested. The will, which directs our actions, is influenced from the inside rather than imposed from an outside force.

The personal ministry of God’s Spirit in an individual’s heart results in greater revelation of God than what was available through the old covenant. God’s Spirit stirs in the heart both a willingness and an ability to obey. A personal knowledge of God apart from the Law had to wait for a new heart, made possible by the coming of the Son. Jesus said, *“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:23). Inward worship now replaces outward ritual.

The most important aspect of the new covenant is God’s total forgiveness of human sins. Under the new covenant our sins are blotted out, and God chooses to remember them no longer. Only the atoning power of Jesus’ blood can bury our sins in the sea of forgetfulness. Divine forgiveness—founded on grace, not works—is the high point of the New Testament.

THINK ABOUT *grace*—the unearned, undeserved gift of love and forgiveness from God to wayward people. Grace is free to all who will receive it, but it was not without cost. God the Father and God the Son paid a terrible price. *“You were ransomed ... not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He ... was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”* (1 Peter 1:18-21).

When we accept the gift freely offered to us, our relationship with God changes. But, we must each choose for ourselves the offered privilege of being God’s child. If you have not made that choice, would you prayerfully consider making that decision today? For more help, read John 3:1-17.

The new covenant is based on better promises: *“I will put my laws into their minds,” “they shall all know Me,” “I will remember their sins no more.”* The words *new covenant* imply that the old covenant has fulfilled its purpose. Obsolete, it will soon disappear. God has done something new in Christ. The temple sacrifices would soon end. It is far more blessed to live in the light of the second and better covenant, with peace in our hearts, renewed minds and desires, and no fear of death.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Chapter 8 centers around the declaration that through Jesus, God has given His people better things. With the privilege of experiencing a better Mediator, better promises, and a better covenant, there are responsibilities. God calls us to leave our spiritual childhood behind as we embrace the new covenant and go on to maturity in Christ. We can know God and know right from wrong. And we can know the joy, not only of being forgiven, but of having the power to live in a way that is pleasing to God. In what way would you like to “grow up” this week? Talk to God about it and ask for His power to change.

REVIEW: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

12. What have you learned from studying this passage that can help you improve your attitudes or actions in life?