

The Book to the Hebrews

Remember: The writer of the book offers an antidote to spiritual sluggishness; it is that we should think of the provisions of God through the gift of our great High Priest. Down times are experienced by all of us (we doubt the goodness of God in unpleasant, even threatening, times). The antidote of the love of God.

- I. The Argument of the Book: The Pre-eminence of Christ in His Person and Work, 1:1-10:18
 - A. The Superiority of Son to the Angels. 1:1-14, 2:5-18
 - B. The Superiority of Christ to Moses, 3:1-6
 - C. The Superiority of Christ to the Aaronic Priesthood, 4:14-10:18
 1. Superior because of a better position, vv. 14-16
 2. Superior because of better qualifications, 5:1-10
 3. Superior because of a better order, 7:1-28
 - a. Christ is superior to Aaron's priesthood because he comes from a superior order, vv.1-10
 - b. Christ is superior because Aaron's priesthood was set aside, vv. 11-19
 - 1) A rhetorical question: why was there a need for a new priesthood, v. 11
What the Aaronic priesthood foreshadowed, it could never accomplish. Perfection or completeness could never come through the law, the basis of the priesthood, because it only condemns.
 - 2) A new priesthood must be based on a new covenant, v. 12
The weakness of the law-covenant produced a weak priesthood; therefore, there was a need for a new covenant to establish a superior priesthood.
 - 3) Jesus came from Judah, not Levi, so the old priesthood has been superseded, vv. 13-14
The evidence that something new is here in Jesus is that he is from the tribe of Judah, a tribe never associated with the priesthood. However, in Jesus royalty and priesthood are combined. This suggests that a serious change has occurred; a new era has begun.

- 4) Jesus' priesthood is of Melchizedek; it is without end, vv. 15-17

The new order was not based on the establishment of lineage and ceremonial purity-laws, but upon the power of His unique character. A change in the priesthood will no longer be needed because Jesus is not subject to death (Aaron and Caiaphas were two among eighty-three high priests in Israel's history, according to Josephus).

- 5) The Old Covenant and its priesthood were weak; in contrast, the New Covenant and its priest is effectual, vv. 18-19

- c. Christ is superior to Aaron's priesthood because Christ is a better priest, vv. 20-28

- 1) He was confirmed by an oath (the guarantee of a better covenant), vv. 20-22

God not only made promises to provide a superior priest for us; He sealed it with an oath, testament, or covenant (the first occurrence of this term in the book where it appears 17 times).

- 2) He lives forever (His permanence provides an endless salvation), vv. 23-25

The permanence of this covenant is grounded in the endless life of its testator, Jesus. The priests of the Old Covenant were all subject to death, and so the covenant was temporal. The accomplishments of this priest, mediatorial sacrifice is eternal.

- 3) He is sinless (he can meet our needs), v. 26

- 4) He offered Himself once for all (there was no need to offer daily sacrifices any longer), vv. 27-28

A Contrastive Summary

Aaronic Priests	Christ Our Priest
1. Offered many sacrifices	1. Offered one sacrifice
2. Offered sacrifices day after day	2. Offered a sacrifice once
3. Offered animals	3. Offered Himself

4. Offered sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of others	4. Offered Himself for the sins of others
5. Were law-appointed	5. Was God-appointed
6. Were weak	6. Is perfect forever

3. Christ is superior because of a better covenant, 8:1-13

The basis of the priesthood, the ministry of representing people before a holy God, was the promises of God (which is based on the character of God). These promises were expressed in a covenant that God declared. There are two priesthoods (Levitical and Melchizedekian) and two covenants (the Old and the New). The writer's point is that Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it is based on superior promises.

a. The superior ministry of Jesus, stated, vv. 1-6

1) His position, vv. 1-2

Three things are stated about Jesus as our superior high priest, First, He is "seated," indicating that His work has been accomplished (there were no chairs in the earthly tabernacle/temple because the work was never done). This priest is a royal, righteous priest! He is enthroned! Second, He is seated at the place of honor before God in heaven, indicating His exalted position (Ps. 110:4, Heb. 1:3, 13). Third, He is ministering for us in the true tabernacle, not in its shadow. His work as our judge-advocate is that of applying the benefits He procured once-for-all time for His people. No Levitical priest possessed the character, accomplishments, or exaltation as Jesus.

2) The reasons, vv. 3-6

Jesus cannot be a Levitical priest for two reasons. First, He would have to be on earth offering bulls, goats, and lambs as offerings to God in conformity to the demands of the law (the Old Covenant) and in the proper Aaronic ancestry. However, He was not from the tribe of Levi.

Second, the tabernacle was a type (Ex. 25:40), a sketch or shadow, of something greater to come; it functioned to anticipate. Within the tabernacle is where priests stood in God's shadowed presence once a year. Jesus stands in heaven, the true presence of God forever for us. When

Jesus shed his blood for us, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), an act of God no man, a response proving the validity by God of what Jesus accomplished in His death, signifying the end of the Old Covenant economy (the way of access to God is now through Jesus, the “veil” of His humanity).

The words “true tabernacle” do not suggest that the Old Testament tabernacle, the place of God’s dwelling, was false or counterfeit; it means that the old one was an anticipatory shadow of a real one in heaven (think of the Bible as linear and progressive, revealing and unfolding God to us culminating in the advent of Jesus, the final revelation of God). The tabernacle was the prototype; heaven is its fulfillment (the place God dwells among His people).

Note also (v. 4) that the Levitical system of sacrifice was still in operation according to the writer so the book must have been written before the destruction of the temple.

Third, the priesthood of Jesus is superior because it is based on a covenant grounded upon better promises (v.6). The promises are “better” because they are unconditional (the point of the next section) and its provisions for our proper response are greater. The quotation here is from Ps. 40:6-8 and applied by the writer as fulfilled in Jesus (David, the original author, being a shadow of a greater one to come).

b. The superior ministry of Jesus, explained, vv. 7-13

The passage before us offers a comparison of the two great covenants that divide our Bible into two, unequal-in-length, parts (“testament” means covenant). Joshua-Malachi is a moral and religious commentary on the willingness of the nation to keep the promises made in Exodus 24, 34. They failed; there was a need for a better arrangement for us, a “New Covenant.”

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Exodus 20–24, 34	Jeremiah 31
At the nation’s beginning	At its demise

Temporal	Permanent
Weak in provision (Rom. 8:3)	Strong in provision (seven “I will’s”; no “if’s”; seven “I’s”)

Both reveal the terms of God’s relationship with His people.
Both are expansions of the central covenant of Scripture, the

Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.12, 15, 17, 22).

Both reveal God’s great mercy.

1) The failure of the Old Covenant stated, v. 7

The “fault” in the Old Covenant was not in the covenant itself, but in our ability to keep it. The law demanded perfection and this could only lead to despair! It was “weak” in this sense (7:18-19, Rom. 8:3). We could not achieve what it demanded! God was not tantalizing us with an impossibility to frustrate us; it was meant to point us forward to Jesus.

The “fault” or limitation in the first covenant was not in its holiness, but its purpose. It was never meant to be God’s final word; its design was to point toward Christ as its fulfillment. Christ gave the Law its intended meaning (Matt. 5: 17) when he came to us.

2) The promise of a New Covenant, stated vv. 8-9

a) The promise given, vv.8-9a

It is interesting that God gave the promise of a great day to come in the doom and gloom of the nation’s inevitable destruction, the impending Babylonian destruction. The fulfillment of the promise came in another era of impending doom and gloom; this time it was the Roman destruction. The ultimate fulfillment will come after a final judgment, and His people will rule and reign with Him forever.

b) The reason given, v. 9b

Again, the Old Covenant was not to be faulted; it had few provisions for its fulfillment. Further, the intent of the Law was to drive us to hope based on the promises God made to Abraham of a land, a seed, and

- a blessing (heaven, Jesus, and eternal life).
- 3) The provisions of a New Covenant, vv. 10-12
The emphasis in the New Covenant is upon its greater provisions. It fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant, the promises made to Abraham.
- a) The indwelling/guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit, v. 10
In the New Covenant, promised the indwelling, guiding mercies of the Holy Spirit. God will not only be *among* His people; in the new era He will be permanently *in* His people. Because of this, we will be able to fulfill the great law to love God with all our hearts and minds (Matt.22: 37, quoting Deut. 6:5).
 - b) An intimacy of relationship with God, v.11
Here the promise is an intimate, personal knowledge of God and a willingness to do His will. The heightened access to God in Christ leads to greater communication and intimacy with Him.
 - c) The forgiveness of sins by God, v. 12
The “for” seems to indicate that the former benefits are predicated on this one.

It is important to grasp the meaning of “remember no more.” It is not that God forgets our sin; it is that, because of Christ, He will never mention them to us!

To repeat something stated above is crucial at this point. The New Covenant is unconditional; it is not bilateral. There are no “if’s” in this covenant. There are seven “I will’s,” seven “I’s,” and several “Me’s” and “My’s.” This is something that God has promised, the one incapable of deception (6:19). He will accomplish it.

- 4) The conclusion, v. 13
The presence of a New Covenant is an indication that the Old has come to its fulfillment. It is now obsolete and was about to pass away (with the impending destruction of the temple [a second “Babylonian” dispersion among the nations]).

Thoughts:

1. In Jesus, Abraham's true seed, the one who would bless the nations, two offices are combined, that of royalty or kingship and priest. As king, He is all-powerful and sovereign; as priest He is all-caring and compassionate. We never need to feel alone and forsaken because we have an invisible friend who is more real than those we see! If you feel abandoned, think about your priest and king!
2. The relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament is important to grasp. The purpose of the Old Covenant was to point to the New Covenant. It seems best not to think of the Old Covenant as an inferior covenant because its purpose was not to accomplish the perfection of status inherent in the New Covenant, but to point to it. In this sense, the Old Covenant accomplished its purpose.
3. There is something particularly touching in our passage. When God led the ancient people out of bondage, it is said that He "took them by the hand (v. 9)." It reminds me of a parent or grandparent walking with a two or three-year old protecting and instructing them as he/she stumbles along. God knows that we are children and He takes us by our hand to walk us through this life.
4. The weakness of the Old Covenant was not in its revelation of God's holiness or His instructions for His people; it was in the provisions available to them to keep it. It lacked those provisions that could bring about a right standing before God because obedience to it was always imperfect. The sacrifices looked forward to a final sacrifice, so the people of faith lived in anticipation and trust that the true redeemer would come as priest and king (though he/she could not put those two things together in one person). It taught the need for sacrifice and substitution. Are you not thankful that we live in this era and not the old one?
5. The provisions of the New Covenant are based upon God's promises to His people. He promises us a profound intimacy with Himself through the Spirit. God's law is now an inward reality written on the flesh of our hearts (an abiding principle within us), not in hard stone. We have God's indwelling presence, providing us with an intuitive knowledge of God by the Spirit's presence. This new and wonderful intimacy with God is the ground of our emotional stability through the storms of life.