

His Covenant is Superior: Hebrews – Week 10

INTRO

So far: Jesus is superior to the prophets, angels, Moses, & the Levitical priesthood.

Last week: The Mosaic covenant established the law and the sacrifices with the priesthood to officiate them. Its purpose was to make the people holy so God could dwell among them. A superior priesthood officiated by Jesus requires a new and superior covenant. The reason Hebrews unpacks why Jesus is of a superior priesthood (Melchizedek) is to make the crucial point that He has inaugurated this new covenant.

THIS week: Why is that important? The new covenant reveals that the former was merely a picture of what is real, so it's inadequate to save anyone. BUT, the new covenant comes with far better promises. Because we are unable to keep it, He takes it on Himself to keep it for us. The result for us is the everlasting life which comes with His mercy and forgiveness. = Grace.

HOOK

Illustration: The Jacqui “shrine” in my college dorm room. No collection of pictures was her. When she came into town, I no longer needed the collage. It was worthless when I had the real thing.

- The old covenant under Moses was a picture shrine showing the existence, attributes, and beauty of what was real and who was coming. But in-and-of-itself, it couldn't deal with sin or give holiness. It only pointed to what was real. With Jesus' arrival and His finished work on the cross, the picture shrine of God, though good and meaningful, became null and void. He's here.

Context: The Jewish faith was tolerated in Rome but Christianity was not, so Jewish Christians were experiencing increasing pressure by the government and their own unbelieving communities to return to Judaism. Their arguments may sound like this, “Come back to the Law of Moses. Come back to the covenant God made with us at Sinai. We have the physical temple, the visual priesthood, the visceral offerings and ceremonies. Judaism has the beautiful priestly heritage, garments, and decorations. Your old religion has the sacrifices, the holidays, and the laws that make you clean. Come back to something known, concrete, and safe.”

But our author is pulling back the curtain and showing those things are just shadows and symbols of what is truly real, of what truly matters, and what God is really doing. He's saying, **“They have the pictures, but we have the Person.”**

What is a covenant?

A covenant was a treaty/commitment between (usually) a superior and a subordinate. “Covenant” – “to cut” because there would often be a covenant animal killed and cut in two as if to say, “May I be like this animal if I break the covenant.” Half was burned to a god(s) as a covenant sacrifice, and the other half was served as a covenant meal between the two parties.

There are two kinds of covenants in the Bible. Bilateral (Conditional) and Unilateral (Unconditional). A “conditional” covenant details commitments promised on both sides. If it is broken by one of the parties, it becomes null and void. In a “unilateral” covenant, the faithfulness of the covenanter is unconditional and doesn’t depend on the actions of the other.

- **Illustration:** Two people holding a 2x4 from each end vs. one of them holding it in the middle bearing all the weight.

When Hebrews refers to an old/first/former covenant, it’s speaking of the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai under the leadership of Moses. It was a conditional covenant with promises both sides were to uphold. God’s great promise was **to make them His own and to be theirs**. Their promise was **to be holy for Him** by following God’s commandments and holiness practices. That would make it possible for God to dwell with them.

Ex.24:3-4,7-8 - *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” 4 And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. [...] 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” 8 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”*

- **But Israel broke their side of the covenant** again and again devolving into gross wickedness. God spoke hope through the prophet Jeremiah. Although, they had broken God’s covenant and He had every right to drop them, He would remain faithful. He promised a new and final coming covenant between Himself and His people.

BOOK

THE OLD COVENANT: Point 1 - The Picture Is Not The Person

Hebrews 8:1-2 - *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*

- **“the point... is this”** – We now have Jesus as our High Priest! He’s superior to Moses and He’s superior to the Levitical priesthood. Further, He serves in a superior tabernacle/temple... the real one. **Where is he ministering?** Not in a tent or a building made by people, but in a heavenly sanctuary established by God – That’s the real **“tent”** of meeting, the true **“holy places.”**

The Throne of God: *“seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.”*

Sin is ever pervasive, so a priest’s job is never finished. Therefore, there are no chairs in the tabernacle (temple). But there is ONE seat.

The Holy of Holies represented the heavenly throne room of God with the ark of the covenant representing his throne (between the cherubim). It was called the “mercy seat” and represented the point on earth where heaven overlapped the physical realm.

The high priest, on the one day a year could enter it, for the ceremony of atoning for the sin of the nation. He’d bring in smoking incense to obscure his view of God’s presence, and sprinkle blood from the sin sacrifice on the ark of God’s covenant with Israel – the covenant of God’s promise to make them His own and purify them.

Now, that high priest would NEVER have conceived the idea of approaching the ark and sitting on it. BUT, Jesus is the **High Priest** who can both enter the true, heavenly sanctuary of God AND the **King** who is worthy to sit where God sits. And it’s in the true, heavenly throne room that He’s ministering on our behalf.

Hebrews 8:3-4 - *For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.*

- To fulfill His office, Jesus must offer up a sacrifice. **More in Ch.9**
- **“something”** – (singular, not needing to be repeated) and **“to offer”** are used in a way to suggest a once-and-for-all offering.
- **It would be wholly inappropriate** for Jesus to function in the earthly sanctuary. He’s of a superior priesthood AND the priestly rituals and animal sacrifices are now obsolete. Keep reading.

Hebrews 8:5 - *They (the Levitical priests) serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”*

- The spiritual realm is MORE real than the physical (= copy/shadow).

- “**pattern**” – “tupos/typos” = “type.” The patterns are significant because of what they represent. The tabernacle, *gifts*, *sacrifices*, and priesthood are merely “types” ... a picture shrine pointing to Jesus.
- Therefore, Moses needed to be careful and exact in God’s instructions of how the tabernacle and priesthood was to be set up. They were models of the heavenly throne room. (Check out Mike Winger on YouTube.)
- To the readers of Hebrews who were tempted to return to Judaism, this would give them pause. Their temple and sacrifices seemed substantial and effective, but they were just shadows of what was real in heaven... where it counts.

Application: Now, Christians are the pattern of Christ. We are His temple on earth. We also can’t save, but we CAN point to the One who does with the patterns of our words and actions and affections.

THE OLD COVENANT: Point 2 - The Picture Cannot Save

Hebrews 8:6-7 - *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*

- **Main Point:** Jesus has a superior ministry which reflects His superior covenant.
- **The Mosaic covenant wasn’t bad.** It served the purpose of exposing our unholiness and establishing the pattern of sacrifices and the priesthood. But being only a picture, it was **insufficient to remove sin and deal with the human heart**. But, **the “new covenant” comes with better promises**.
 - **What are those promises?** (We’ll look at them all at the end.)

Hebrews 8:7 - *For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

- The critic’s response: “Whoa, we’ve had our Mosaic covenant with its laws and priesthood for over 1,500 years. What gives you the right to suggest we need another one or that this one would be better?”
- **The author of Hebrews turns to scripture to prove his case.** In fact, God had prophesied that a new covenant was coming through **Jeremiah**.
 - The very fact that God expressed their need for a new covenant showed the old wasn’t permanent.

THE NEW COVENANT: Point 1 – We Can’t Uphold The Covenant

Heb 8:8-9 - *For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.*

- To prove the old was temporary, the author quotes **Jeremiah 31**. God had foretold a new, superior covenant which will be wholly different from the old.
- **“New”** doesn’t mean **“new in time,”** (ie. “most recent”). It means **“new in value or condition.”** We are 2,000 years from the cross and Jesus’ covenant is still **“new”** with no signs of aging or fading. It is eternally stable, sufficient, and of perfect quality. We are **“new”** creations with **“new”** natures celebrating our **“new”** life in Christ. And, one hundred million eons from now, we’ll still be celebrating in heaven the everlasting **“new”** covenant of our salvation.

If there’s a need for a new covenant, what was wrong with the old one?

- **Does God find fault with His former covenant?** Did He fail? **No**, it says He finds fault with **“them.”** **Who’s “them”?** **His people.**

Hebrews 8:9b - *For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.*

- **God exposed the real problem to Jeremiah.** It wasn’t God’s covenant. It was sinful us. God’s said, “I treated *them* with the same care, gentleness, and love that a father leads his child by the hand with, but you broke our covenant.”
- This **one verse encapsulates a long period of time.** God’s rejection of Israel was not overnight, but 850ish years. **God had the right** to immediately pour out all the punishments (curses) outlined in the covenant as soon as they broke it. But God was patient and gave mercy to them again and again. And every time they returned to the covenant, He lifted the punishments and gave them the blessings. Finally, God turned them over to their own desires. Like the father in the prodigal son story, God released them to their own sin.
- **Sinful man could not and cannot uphold our end of a covenant with God.**

THE NEW COVENANT: Point 2 – God Will Uphold It

Hebrews 8:10 - *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- Moses’ law was external. God’s demands were written on stone by His own finger. **The new covenant will be written by God on something which transforms the one who receives it.** It is written on our minds and hearts.

- **What are they/we being transformed into?** Being more like Jesus, holy, able for God to dwell with.

KEY POINT of the New Covenant: The Mosaic covenant was bilateral, conditional. **This one will be unilateral, unconditional.**

- There are six “*I will*” statements in God’s promise of the new covenant, and there are no conditions for God’s people. It won’t depend on human strength or faithfulness but divine power and faithfulness. **It will be as secure, sufficient, and lasting as the One who initiated it.**
 - GOD initiated it, ratified it with His own blood through Jesus, and sustains it for eternity. It is indestructible.
- God does what we can’t and gives us what we don’t deserve. **It is a covenant of grace.** The only thing we bring to the table is our trust that God is faithful. **The N.T. calls that faith.**
 - The end goal: “*I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” Loved, cherished, inherited, possession of.
 - The Mosaic covenant sharply warned to stay at a distance from a holy God. The new covenant calls God’s people to draw near to Him.

Jesus inaugurated this “new” covenant through His death. To make sure we didn’t miss it, He gave us the sacrament of communion/Lord’s supper/Eucharist. **Mark 14:22-24** - *And as they were eating... he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many.”* **God established a covenant with His people through Christ.**

Application: We can give up on new year’s resolutions, self-help books, philosophy tiktok videos, and “I’ll be good today” attitudes. Sin obscures all we do, say, and think. Israel followed in Adam’s sinful footsteps, and we follow in theirs. It will take an outside power, an outside holiness to purify us. Thank God He will.

THE NEW COVENANT: Point 3 – It Is Sufficient To Save

Hebrews 8:11 - *And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

- This new covenant has both present and future implications. It is established at the cross of Christ but only fully realized in the new heaven and new earth when all God's people are in perfect relationships with God and one another.

Hebrews 8:12 - *For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*

- **"remember... no more"** = "hold against us no more" – discussing justification.
- **Forgiveness isn't forgetting** (as if we have Alzheimer's toward someone's sin), but we choose to not hold it against them anymore. We treat them as though they hadn't done it.

Application: His forgiveness for us both models (and because of our new hearts and His Spirit in us) empowers us to be able to forgive like the Lord who forgives us.

"I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

The law and its sacrifices couldn't purify us of sin. It could only shock us into realizing we're full of it. But the new covenant comes with **"better promises."** God will be merciful toward us and no longer hold us accountable for our sin. **How could God do that?** Another would stand in our place.

- **Charles Spurgeon** – "You stand before God as if you were Christ because Christ stood before God as if He were you."
- **He was punished as if He had our lust, pride, greed, hate, deception, idolatry, so we could be rewarded as if we had His obedience, holiness, and righteousness.** He earned our salvation, but there's more to the covenant.

Illustration: A judge who lets a dangerous, guilty man go free would be an unjust judge. Imagine the parents of a molested child hearing such a verdict. They would be mortified. Even if someone took the guilty man's sentence, it doesn't excuse the judge of gross injustice. **Why?** Being righteous in the eyes of the law doesn't make the man a righteous man. But God's new covenant deals with both sides.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 - *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and **cause you to walk** in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

- Look at the “***I will***” statements (6x).
- God both purifies them and now prompts them to holiness. **How does He do it?** He places His Holy Spirit in His people.
- **2 Cor. 5:17** - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. We are forgiven, freed, and new.*

Hebrews 8:13 - *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

- “***growing old***” – compared to someone of extreme age who is about to die.
 - **Ex.** Grain of wheat in a husk on a stalk. It’s nurtured and protected by the stalk and husk, but when it’s ripe and the harvested the chaff is considered useless. It was good and necessary, but now is unnecessary.
- “***obsolete***” - This phrase is prophetic and looks toward a literal, undeniable expiration of the old covenant. The temple was the center of Jewish worship and the homebase of its priesthood. As predicted by Jesus, in AD70, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and demolished the temple. With it, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the Passover pilgrimages, and all the purification rituals ceased.
- The author is speaking to the Jewish Christians who are tempted to return to Judaism saying, “There’s no hope, purpose, or reason to go back.”

Application: We are pressured and tempted to return to former things which gave us satisfaction or meaning or pleasure.

TOOK

Ways the new covenant is superior - The better promises:

- Finally purifies us from sin and gives us forgiveness.
- Justifies us with God.
- Transforms the human heart and mind to be different.
- Lasts forever.
- Gives everlasting life.
- Fills us with His Holy Spirit.
- Empowers us to walk in obedience and holiness.
- Brings us near to our loving God. We become His and He becomes ours.
- Promises a time of unhindered relationship with God and perfect unity with one another in heaven.

Illustration: My picture shrine of Jacqui has since been taken down and lost to time, but I don't miss it one bit. I don't need to look at pictures of her to remember her or look forward to seeing her again. We've made a marriage covenant. I have the real thing. I'm hers and she's mine. What a better deal!

Jesus has come. A search for God doesn't need to begin with pictures anymore. It can begin with God, Himself. Want to know Him? Get to know Jesus.

RECAP

- The old covenant under Moses was a picture of how God would save.
- But it couldn't save.
- It was a conditional covenant which Israel broke again and again.
- God promised another superior one with better promises.
- This one was unconditional, upheld by God's faithfulness.
- It was initiated by God, ratified by Jesus' death, and is sustained by His power.
- By it we are forgiven, freed, and made new creations.

Challenge 1: Forgive someone TODAY.

Challenge 2: Isolate that sin you can't shake and surrender it to the Lord's strength.

~ Soli DEO Gloria

eGroup Questions /// His Covenant is Superior

Pray:

Key Verse: Hebrews 8:10 - *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

Questions:

1. Have you ever broken a promise?
2. What's the strongest promise you can think of in our culture today?
 - a. Have you ever seen one broken? For what reasons do you see promises broken?
3. What are the ways we/banks/governments try to guarantee that a promise will be followed through?
4. Why are even the most serious promises broken?
5. What would have to change for promises to be fulfilled 100% of the time?
6. What attributes does God possess which make Him trustworthy?
7. How does knowing salvation is based on God's faithfulness instead of yours change how you view salvation?
 - a. What does it teach you about God?
8. Does the covenant of our salvation being unconditional mean we are free to sin?
9. How does someone join God in the new covenant?
10. Jesus took action to forgive us. What are some action steps of forgiveness we can take?

Ask for prayer requests: Pray