

“The Heavenly High Priest”

Heb. 8:1-6

- INTRO. - In going through a book like Hebrews, there are times where it may seem as if this is more fit for a theology classroom than the daily grind of real-world Christian living. In fact, Hebrews 8 may seem *especially* like that.
- Most of *us* are *not* tempted (like the original audience) to return to Judaism and forsake Christianity. This is *not* something that is relevant for us. So why do we take the time to go through a book like this and focus on all these OT concepts and rituals?
- The truth of the matter is, this gives us a much greater appreciation for the gospel, and it allows us the opportunity to reflect on issues of paramount importance to all of us.
- We may *not* always think through these issues carefully, but they are very relevant for contemporary Christian living. You see, we (now) live in a world that is increasingly global and increasingly hostile to the Christian faith.
- That doesn't fit very well with the fact that most of the NT (and especially a book like Hebrews) is (essentially) “polemical” in nature. What I mean by that, is that it calls for a repudiation of the old covenant and an embracing of the new.
- We (as Evangelical Christians) clearly understand that, but what this does, is it opens us up to some dangerous pitfalls we must seek to avoid. One of those pitfalls is to begin to think that the OT is no longer important.
- In other words, we need to be careful that we do *not* become Marcionites. Around 144 A.D. there was a man named Marcion of Sinopes (in Rome) who totally denounced the OT and the God of Israel. This was a heresy that was refuted by Tertullian, but what we have to realize is that there are Evangelical Christians today who are danger of falling into the same heresy.
- We must be careful *not* to reject the revelation of God in the OT (or to downplay its value). We must understand (and embrace) the *continuity* between the old and new covenants, and the fact that Jesus, His Apostles, all the writers of the NT except Luke, and almost all the Christians in the first-century church were Jews.
- We must remember that Christianity was *not* a Gentile religion, but was a Jewish religion with Gentiles grafted into it. We must also remember that the NT clearly declares that (someday) all Israel will be saved. There is coming a day when the original vine will be grafted back in.

- So we need to guard against becoming Marcionites, but there is also another very dangerous pitfall we must avoid. Because this book is so polemical – and because it calls for the total abrogation of the old covenant and the replacement of the new – we must be careful *not* to allow that to lead us to becoming anti-Semitic.
- George Guthrie writes, “We need to remember that the supercessionism described in Hebrews...has been misused at times to justify anti-Semitism, a cancer long-lived in the church and chillingly crystalized in Nazi Germany.”
- Even the great reformer Martin Luther fell into this pitfall. He wrote a book called *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in which he called for their extermination, the looting of their synagogues and schools, the burning of their property, and the confiscation of all their money.
- In fact, this book was later re-published by the Nazis to aid in their cause – which led to the holocaust. Of course, we cannot even put into words, just how great an impact Luther made in the recovery of the biblical gospel – yet this is a reminder that even the greatest theologians have blind spots.
- Anti-Semitism is contrary to the most basic tenets of Christian doctrine, and we must be careful that in our polemics we are *not* falling into this dangerous pitfall.
- Whatever we may say about the abrogation of the old covenant and the superiority of the new, we must do it with a spirit of love and grace. We must do so with genuine love and respect for those who are still in Judaism, and we must pray that the eyes of their hearts will be opened to the truth.
- Guthrie tells about an interview he heard, where there was a prominent Christian leader and an expert on Jewish culture in America. At one point the Jewish specialist noted that it “drives Jewish people crazy” when they hear Evangelical Christians suggest that their religion has displaced Judaism.
- Well, guess what? Some of that is unavoidable. It is simply the reality of the teaching of the NT. It is the message of the gospel, and that will be offensive to some people. But we can still give that message in a loving and respectful way.
- We can’t compromise the truth of the NT – and we can’t neglect the unique claims of a book like Hebrews – but we can proclaim it with a genuine love for *all* those who are lost (including unbelieving Jews).
- But we cannot compromise for fear of hurting someone’s feelings. We must proclaim the truth

that the new covenant is far superior to the old – and (in fact) it has always been God’s sovereign plan for the new covenant to replace the old.

- Someone has said that the old covenant compared to the new covenant is like the difference between the moon and the sun. Yes, the Old Testament was (in fact) God speaking – and in the semi-darkness of the Old Testament era, the moon of the old covenant shone bright enough for people to know the true God of the universe. But in this New Testament era, the brightness of the Son has eclipsed the older light.
- We should never be anti-Semitic – and we should never express any kind of hatred or hostility to the Jews or toward Judaism – but we must faithfully proclaim the message of the superiority of the new covenant.
- In other words, we must be lovingly polemical (as the author of Hebrews was) without being anti-Semitic. Although there have been some contemporary theologians who have said that “traditional Christian orthodoxy” is inherently anti-Semitic, that is *not* really true. The most loving thing we can ever do (for *anyone*) is to proclaim to them God’s truth.
- We must reject the false notion that it implies hatred or disrespect toward Jewish people when we proclaim the truths of a book like Hebrews. It is

possible to love others and to treat them with dignity even when we disagree with them.

- Well, all that was introduction, but I hope I have your attention now. This particular chapter (that we will begin to look at today) is one that has been especially pointed to in this regard.
- But let me give you the over-all picture here. This passage is in the second great section of the book of Hebrews. I like the way Ron Phillips describes it (because I like his alliterations).
- He says, “The first section of Hebrews includes chapters 1:1-4:13 and sets forth the Supreme *Word* of our great High Priest. The second section, chapters 4:14-10:18 sets forth the Supreme *Work* of our Great High Priest.”
- He says, “The second section may be divided into three parts. Hebrews 4:14-6:20 sets forth Jesus’ work as *Forerunner*. Hebrews 7:1-28 sets forth Jesus’ work as *Intercessor*. [But] we now come to our present passage which...sets forth Jesus’ work as *Mediator*.”
- In fact, what we see (here) is that Jesus is the Mediator of a *better* covenant (the New Covenant). Phillips says, “The One who walked the dusty trails of Israel, died on the cross, rose again from the dead, and ascended on high is now our mediator before God.”

- But to look at it from a different perspective, you *could* say that chapter 8 begins the second section, and that while 5:1-7:28 points to the Son's *appointment* as a unique High Priest, 8:1-10:18 points to His effective (and once for all) *sacrifice* as our High Priest.
 - Some have called this “the heart of the Christological exposition of the book of Hebrews.” We see (in vv. 1-2) an important transition, and we see in this first half of the chapter the introduction of several important themes that will be developed more fully.
 - I'm calling this first half of the chapter “The Heavenly High Priest” because the author of Hebrews seems to be especially concerned that we catch a glimpse of Jesus' heavenly work.
 - And it is an exciting thing (and a tremendous comfort) to know that while we are sitting here this morning, our Great High Priest is in heaven (at this very moment) interceding for us at the throne of God!
 - Well, we'll take this in four parts, and the first thing we see in this passage of Scripture is:
- I. THE CONNECTION (vv. 1-2)
- A good preacher knows when to sum up where the sermon he has been and where it is going. That's what the author of this “sermon” does here. Peter O'Brien says, “These verses (vv. 1-2) are an important hinge between the lengthy section dealing with the appointment of the Son as the new high priest and the movement that speaks of his superior offering...”
 - F. F. Bruce puts it this way, “Having established the superiority of the high priesthood of Christ, our author now proceeds to relate his high priesthood to the themes of covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifice, with which the Aaronic priesthood was closely bound up. As the Aaronic priesthood gives place to the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, so the old covenant gives place to the new, the earthly sanctuary gives place to the heavenly, and sacrifices which were but temporary tokens gives place to one which is effective and of eternal validity.”
 - Look with me at v. 1, “Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens...”
 - The phrase “the main point” is one word in the Greek, and it means exactly that. It is *not* a summary (as the KJV suggests). It points back to the theme of the first main section of the sermon.

- What is that “main point?” It is that “we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens...”
- In other words, a lot has been said so far, but all of it has to do with Jesus Christ as High Priest. The phrase “we have such a high priest” ties back to 7:26. We have such a high priest that is completely holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.
- So this point back to what has previously been taught, but it is also a hinge, in that it also points forward to where he is going next. The theme of chapter 8 is the new covenant. So here (in vv. 1-2) we see two important aspects of the new covenant, which is the position of the new high priest at God’s right hand, and the heavenly sanctuary in which He ministers.
- The phrase “who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens...” recalls (of course) what he said all the way back in 1:3.
- Heb. 1:3 is based on Ps. 110:1 and it says, “...when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...” This connects His exalted position with His perfect sacrifice for sin.
- And the fact that Heb. 8:1 says He is now “seated” it significant because it points to the finality of His sacrifice. Under the Levitical priesthood the priests never sat down. In fact, in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) there was no furniture for the priest to sit on because their work was never-ending.
- The sacrifices had to be offered over and over and over again, so the priests could never sit down – but Jesus Christ made a once for all sacrifice for sin and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven.
- When Jesus cried out (from the cross) the word “tetelestai” (it is finished) that signified that with one glorious act He atoned for all sins once and for all. In one offering of Himself he did what no Levitical priest could ever do – He completely dealt with sin once and for all.
- He fully atoned for our sins and effected reconciliation with God. That atoning work is something that is completely sufficient and never needs to be repeated.
- And yet, the amazing thing to me, is that people still want to try to add something to that. It is absurd to think that there is anything else we can ever add to that atoning work, but many religious systems are based on the idea that His work on the cross is *not* enough.

- That is especially true of the Catholic system, but there are many others like it. Any religious system that is based on works that we must do – rather than on grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – is a system that is trying to supplement the atoning work of Christ on the cross.
- But that is something that never needs to be done, because the atoning work of Christ was perfect and complete and once for all – never needing to be added to or repeated.
- But going back to His position at the right hand of God, this is something that Hebrews has repeatedly reminded us of. That (of course) is a position of authority, power, and high exaltation.
- This means that there is no power greater than His. There is no authority greater than His. There is no glory or honor higher than His.
- And (as we have seen) that throne upon which He sits is also a throne of mercy and intercession. It is a throne of grace to which we may turn for help in any time of need. It is a throne upon which He ever lives to make constant intercession for us.
- But go on to 8:2, “a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” This tells us that the sanctuary in which Jesus ministers in is far superior to the earthly

sanctuary. As would be expected, the superior Priest ministers in a superior sanctuary. This one is in heaven.

- This tabernacle is not one that was built by men – it is one that was “pitched” by God Himself. Of course, the idea of the word “pitched” is connected to a tent. We know that the original Tabernacle in the wilderness was a tent that they would move from place to place.
- But this “true tabernacle” is permanently “pitched” in heaven. The aorist tense (used here) means that it was “pitched” once and for all. It is eternal, and can never be moved or destroyed. The word for “true” (there) is *not* in contrast to “false.” It means “real” as opposed to a “copy.”
- The one on earth – the one the Levitical priests ministered in – was just a *copy* of the real one in heaven. And (of course) if you read the commentaries of liberal theologians, they will tell you that this is just the influence of Platonic philosophy – but remember, this is divinely-inspired Scripture.
- This is the Word of God telling us that the earthly sanctuary was a copy of the real one in heaven. MacArthur says, “The Old Covenant and all its rituals and ceremonies and altars and sacrifices and tabernacles and temples, were but shadows and

types, pictures and reflections, of the realities of the New.” (We’ll see more about this in v. 5.)

- The “true tabernacle” in heaven is superior to the one on earth, *not only* because it is in heaven, but also because it is God-made and *not* man –made. It is permanent (and eternal) *not* temporary. But we need to move on (secondly) to:

II. THE CORRESPONDENCE (v. 3)

- I’m using the word “correspondence” in the sense of being a “parallel.” Look with me at v. 3, “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer.”
- We saw this back in 5:1 and he is repeating it here. The high priests were appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people. This was the heart of the priestly system.
- So it is necessary that the new High Priest also have something to offer. So what did He offer? He offered up the sacrifice of Himself. 7:27 says, “[He] does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”
- This will be further developed in chapters 9 and 10, but Jesus’ sacrifice was far superior to that of the

Levitical priests because His was a once for all sacrifice. The best they could ever do was to temporarily cover over sin, but His sacrifice was perfectly sufficient to atone for sin once and for all.

- His offering doesn’t have to be made over and over again because it is absolutely sufficient to atone for all our sin. Thirdly we see:

III. THE COPY (vv. 4-5)

- Look with me at v. 4, “Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law...”
- We’ve already seen this. Jesus did *not* qualify to serve as a Levitical high priest. All the high priests were from one particular family and Jesus was *not* from that family. He was *not* even from the tribe of Levi, from which all the priests were required to be.
- Of course, He is *not* on earth – He is in heaven. The heavenly nature of His priesthood is emphasized here. Jesus is indeed a High Priest, but even though He would not be qualified to be a high priest on earth, He is absolutely qualified to be the High Priest in heaven. You tell me – which is greater?
- Of course, Jesus Christ is far superior to those who ministered in the earthly temple according to the

Mosaic Law. Verse 5 says they “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” Unlike Christ, they do *not* minister in the “true tabernacle” in heaven.

- Look at the entire verse (v. 5), “who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.’”
- Notice the word “pattern” there. This is a quote from Ex. 25:40. Moses was shown a “pattern” when he was about to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness.
- Some scholars have pointed out that this was apparently something *visible* Moses *saw*, and *not* just the verbal directions of Ex. 25-30. Perhaps God enabled Moses to see a model of it, or even to see the heavenly tabernacle itself in a vision.
- But the whole point (here) is that the earthly tabernacle was merely a replica of the real thing. It was a “copy” or a “shadow.” Those two terms are likely intended to convey a single expression, like “a shadowy copy.”
- And the reason why Moses was warned to make sure that he followed every detail of it according to

the pattern he was shown, is because it is a picture of the real tabernacle in heaven.

- It shows our eternal salvation. It shows the eternal work of our eternal High Priest. When the Jews (who were the original audience for this sermon) heard this, they were unaware that within just a few years the earthly Temple would be destroyed by the Romans.
- But the point is, that’s OK, because we have an eternal temple in heaven, and we have an eternal High Priest who is ministering there on our behalf. How foolish then, to cling to the old covenant!
- What the author of Hebrews is saying to his Jewish audience (throughout this chapter and the next two) is that they are losing *nothing* with the loss of the old system. They still have an eternal Temple and an eternal High Priest in heaven.
- In fact, *that* one is the real thing, rather than merely a copy. They are only going to lose the shadow but they can still have the security of the true tabernacle. When we get to the end of this chapter we will see that clearly announced.
- In fact, in v. 13 we will read that (with the bringing in of the new covenant) God has made the old one obsolete, and “whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.” That’s exactly what happened in 70 A.D.

- But the point is, that we don't need the old anymore. We don't need the old covenant in light of the fact that the new one has come. And that leads us to the last point in this section, which is:

IV. THE COMPARISON (v. 6)

- Look at v. 6, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."
- Jesus' superior seat and His superior sanctuary are evidence of His superior ministry. He has obtained a more excellent ministry than that of the Levitical priests.
- And this gives evidence that He is the mediator of a better covenant. This is true because the new covenant is based on "better promises." We have already seen (in 7:22) that "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." Now we see Him referred to as the "mediator" of that better covenant.
- A "mediator" (of course) is one who stands between two people and arbitrates or negotiates on behalf of both. The primary qualification is that he must be able to represent both parties at the same time.

- And the truth of the matter is, only Jesus Christ can be the mediator between God and man because He is the only One who is fully God and became fully man.
- As the infinite God-man, He can be our mediator (as none other can). He alone can reconcile God and man through His new covenant.
- A lot of religions have priests, and these priests are (supposedly) intended to be a go-between, to represent men to God and God to men. But sinful men can never really accomplish that. Only the infinite God-man can accomplish that. He is the only One who can really reconcile men to God.
- The Old Covenant had its mediators. The Levitical priests were intended to be the go-betweens. But they were always inadequate because they were sinners.
- Moses was a mediator, but even he was only a type of the great Mediator to come. The mediators under the Old Covenant could never really reconcile men to God. They too were copies and shadows of the true Mediator to come.
- It was always God's plan to establish a new covenant based on better promises. The New Covenant would have a perfect Mediator and it would be based on eternal promises.

- These are eternal promises because they are promises made by God Himself. Men break promises but God never does. These are “better promises” because they are divine promises that cannot be broken.
- Now, what are those promises? They are the promises of the new covenant as given in Jer. 31:31-34. That is what we see in vv. 8-12 (and we’ll see that next time).
- But these include the promise that God will implant his laws in peoples’ hearts, and in fact give them brand new hearts. It includes the promise of a personal relationship with God and the full forgiveness of sins.
- The new covenant was a covenant of grace instead of law. We should never cling to any aspect of the old covenant of law when we now have the new covenant of grace.
- And the message for us today is, that if we are looking for that which is real – if we are looking for that which lasts forever – if we are looking for that which will completely atone for (and eliminate) the guilt of our sin – we have it in the new covenant established by Jesus Christ.
- He came to turn our hearts away from the earthly shadows to the eternal substance and reality of the salvation of God. As one author wrote, “Only Jesus

Christ can lead us out of a world of shadows into the world of reality.”

- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER