

The High Priest of Our Confession: 3

Jesus' Ministry Is Under A Better Covenant

Hebrews 8.1-13

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” **Hebrews 4.14**

In our last study we saw that the High Priestly ministry of Jesus was of a better order than that of the Levitical priesthood. It was under the order of Melchizadek.

In this study we are going to see that the High Priestly ministry of Jesus is under a better covenant with better promises.

The Levitical priests ministered according to the Old Covenant that God made with Moses on Mt Sinai – the fact alone that it is called an 'old covenant' shows us that it has been superseded by a new covenant. This 'New Covenant' was brought into force by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Because the writer to the Hebrews was writing for Jewish believers, so that they didn't go back to Aaron and get back under the Old Covenant, he sets out to prove conclusively in this chapter that the New Covenant is better.

Better Priest - vs1

In the first verse, the writer sums up and brings together all the previous arguments - “Now *this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*”

Jesus, Our High Priest is seated at the right hand of throne of the Majesty -

- ⤴ He is seated since His work of redemption is finished
- ⤴ No priest under Aaron's order ever sat down – and none ever sat on a throne.

Kings sit on thrones - the role of priest and king was kept separate under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant the priest and king was brought together in Jesus fulfilling the prophetic word of Zechariah 6.13 “*so He shall be a priest on His throne*”

Jesus is sat down 'in the heavens' – He is not a priest on earth, and He would not minister an old covenant from heaven. A new High Priest demands a new and better covenant.

Better Sanctuary - vs2-5

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, so He would not have even been considered to minister as priest. In the Gospels we often find Jesus in the temple courts but never in the Holy Place and certainly not the Holy of Holies

This proves the superiority of the New Covenant – it is ministered from heaven, not earth.

In verse 5 we read another argument – the earthly tabernacle (and temple) were just copies of the heavenly sanctuary.

“who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "SEE THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”

- God gave Moses explicit instructions as to how to construct the tabernacle – this was based on the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle. However beautiful and ornate the earthly tabernacle was, it is just a shadow of the better heavenly sanctuary.
- For his Hebrew readers - to go back to the tabernacle under the Old Covenant was to forsake the reality of heaven for an imitation.

We are going to examine the better sanctuary in a later study (Hebrews 9)

Better Promises – vs6-13

Verse 6 introduces us to the more excellent ministry of Jesus, Our Great High Priest. It starts out stating that Jesus is Mediator of this better New Covenant.

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

In this chapter we read of two titles given to Jesus. In verse 2, He was designated **Minister of the Sanctuary**, and here in this verse He is called **Mediator of the New Covenant**.

- Minister of the Sanctuary has specially to do with bringing us near to God and of the blessedness we find in His presence.
- The Mediator of the New Covenant has to do with preparing us to enter the Sanctuary, and being made fit to meet God.

This new covenant is better because it is established on better promises. There were some exceedingly good promises under the Old Covenant and it is really good to know that the promises of the New Covenant are far better than those of the Old Covenant.

Verses 8-13 are a direct quotation from **Jeremiah 31.31-34** and outline five precious promises that form the New Covenant that God made with man through Christ Jesus.

1. The Promise of Grace (vs6-9)

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (7) For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. (8) Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH— (9) NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS IN THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; BECAUSE THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DISREGARDED THEM, SAYS THE LORD.”

Six times in this quotation from Jeremiah God says, “I will” (I will is always the basis for covenant) - this is Grace.

- The Old Covenant was a yoke of bondage, it demanded total obedience.
- The New Covenant emphasizes what God will do for His people, not what they must do for Him.

Note that there was no fault in the Old Covenant, but with the people themselves. The failure of Israel was not the weakness of the Covenant, but the weakness of the flesh – it is here that grace steps in. What the Law could not do because of man's weakness, God accomplished through the cross.

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,” **Romans 8.3**

2. The Promise of Inner Change (v10)

“FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS IN THEIR MIND AND WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”

- The promise of the New Covenant involves a change of heart. The Old Covenant was written by God on tablets of stone – the New Covenant is written by the Holy Spirit on the fleshly tablets of our hearts (**2 Corinthians 3.2-3**). External law can never change anyone, it has to become part of the person to change their behaviour.
- This is what Moses referred to in **Deuteronomy 6.6-9** when he told them to talk about the commands of God at every moment of their day. It is only when the Word becomes part of a person that he will begin to change.

3. The Promise of Fellowship With God (vs10-11)

“FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS IN THEIR MIND AND WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. NONE OF THEM SHALL TEACH HIS NEIGHBOR, AND NONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST OF THEM TO THE GREATEST OF THEM”

- The promise of the New Covenant is that God will be our God and we will be His people. Man has a heart capable of fellowship with God, a heart so great that nothing else than God can really satisfy it.
- Under the Old Covenant, man did not have that fellowship with God, sin prevented him. Under the New Covenant that fellowship is restored, access to and fellowship with the Father has been made possible through Jesus (**John 14.6**). Under the New Covenant man will know God for himself, rather than have any man teach him, or act as mediator.

4. The Promise of Sins Forgiven (v12)

“FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”

- There was no forgiveness of sins under the Old Covenant – the blood of bulls and goats only made a temporary covering of sin. Sin was brought to remembrance every year and a fresh offering made on behalf of the people.

- It was only the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that could 'take away the sins of the world' – under the New Covenant, our sin is forgiven and not remembered, never to be held against us.

5. The Promise of Eternal Blessing (v13)

“In that He says, "A NEW COVENANT," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

- The fact that God calls it a 'New Covenant' means that the Old Covenant is obsolete and will pass away.
- About the time that this letter was written, the Romans were being prepared and made ready for an invasion of Palestine – this invasion ultimately brought about the end to the priestly activities of the Old Covenant, as they ceased when the Temple was destroyed in AD70.
- The New Covenant endures for ever, as does the High Priestly ministry of Jesus; it is not subject to an earthly tabernacle as it is ministered in a better sanctuary – the heavenlies.