

## THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

### HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

### HEBREWS 8:1-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

- Warren Wiersbe, *Jesus Christ is God's superior Priest; but is there anything that can minimize this superiority? Nothing! For He ministers on the basis of a better covenant (Heb. 8), in a better sanctuary (Heb. 9), and because of a better sacrifice (Heb. 10).*
- Ray Stedman, *Moses used the blood of an animal; Jesus used wine as a symbol of his own blood. Moses spoke of the covenant of the law; Jesus alluded to the new covenant of grace. Moses spoke of God's words which provided for the partial covering of sins so God could remain with his people; Jesus promised the actual remission of sins so God could live within his people forever. It is that excellent new covenant which chapters 8-10 of Hebrews now expounds.*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. An outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
  1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
    - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
    - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
    - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
    - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
  2. The superiority of the work of Christ (4:14-10:18)
    - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
    - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
    - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
    - d. The superior priestly order of Christ (7:1-28)
    - e. The superiority of the New Covenant (8:1-10:18)
      - 1) A superior High Priest (8:1-13)
      - 2) A superior sanctuary (9:1-10)
      - 3) A superior Sacrifice (9:11-10:18)
- B. Review of Hebrews 7:11-28
  1. Ray Stedman, *This section asserts unequivocally that the death and resurrection of Jesus has introduced a new and permanent priesthood that brings the Levitical priesthood to an end and, with it, the demise of the law of Moses.*
  2. Thomas Constable, *The person of our high priest is superior. The order of our high priest is superior. Christ is completely adequate in His person and preeminent in His order. We should worship His person and rely on His intercession because of His order. And we should not abandon Him.*
- C. Introductory comments on Hebrews 8
  1. Douglas Mangum, *As the priest like Melchizedek, Jesus is the guarantor of a new and better covenant, which will be the focus of chapter 8.*
  2. Zane Hodges, *In chapter 7, the writer had considered the superiority of the new priesthood. It follows that such a priesthood must have a superior priestly ministry. That it does is unfolded in this section of the epistle. In the process, the letter reveals that the New Covenant underlies this newer priestly service.*
  3. R. Kent Hughes, *Imagine, then, the celestial fireworks at Jesus' homecoming and his installation as our eternal Melchizedek! Can you see him being transfigured from Lamb to priest? His hair becomes white like snow, his eyes like embers, and his face like the sun as he majestically dons a priestly robe that falls to his glowing feet and girds himself with the golden sash of a high priest.*

## HEBREWS 8:1-13, A SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST

- A. Jesus serves from a superior place (1-5)
1. He ministers from heaven (1-2)
    - a. He is at the right hand of God the Father (1), ***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,***
      - 1) *Now the point in what we are saying*
        - a) Thomas Constable, . . . refers to chapter 7. This is a transitional statement. The writer now moved on to explain Jesus Christ's ministry more fully. Chapter 7 was in a sense introductory and foundational to what follows.
        - b) William Barclay, *The writer to the Hebrews has finished describing the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in all its glory. He has described it as the priesthood which is forever, without beginning and without end; the priesthood that God confirmed with an oath; the priesthood that is founded on personal greatness and not on any legal appointment or racial qualification; the priesthood which death cannot touch; the priesthood which is able to offer a sacrifice that never needs to be repeated; the priesthood which is so pure that it has no need to offer sacrifice for any sins of its own. Now he makes and underlines his great claim. 'It is', he says, 'a priest precisely like that that we have in Jesus.'*
      - 2) *The high priest after the order of Melchizedek is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.*
        - a) Mark 16:19, *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.*
        - b) Donald Hagner, *Once again the wording alludes to Psalm 110:1. Jesus is where he is because of who he is—both Son (cf. 4:14) and high priest (cf. Ps. 110:4).*
        - c) R. Kent Hughes, *Apart from its unspeakable glory, the supremacy of his priesthood is seen in that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father (cf. 1:3). His posture points to his completed work. It is the physical expression of his triumphant cry from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30).*
        - d) David Brown, *The Levitical high priests, even when they entered the Holiest Place once a year, only STOOD for a brief space before the symbol of God's throne; but Jesus SITS on the throne of the Divine Majesty in the heaven itself, and this for ever (Heb 10:11, 12).*
    - b. He ministers in the true sanctuary (2), ***a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.***
      - 1) *a minister in the holy places*
        - a) Jesus performs priestly ministry in the *tent* or *tabernacle*.
        - b) William L. Lane, *The "crowning affirmation" is not simply that Christians have a high priest who has taken his seat at God's right hand (v1) but that he is the ministering priest in the heavenly sanctuary (v2).*
      - 2) *in the true tent*
        - a) The tent set up by man was a type but Jesus is in the tent set up by God which is the reality.
        - b) Hebrews 9:24, *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*
        - c) William Barclay, *The earthly Temple is a pale copy of the real Temple of God; earthly worship is a remote reflection of real worship; the earthly priesthood is an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood. All these things point beyond themselves to the reality of which they are the shadows.*
        - d) Ray Stedman, *His priesthood is a royal one which gives him, as Jesus himself declared, "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). Furthermore, it is exercised not in a tabernacle or temple on earth, but in what might well be called the "control room" of the universe, the heavenly sanctuary, the true tabernacle.*
        - e) Donald Hagner, *What took place in that ritual of the historical tabernacle only through pictures and symbols actually takes place in the sacrificial work of Christ. . . The work of our high priest, therefore, concerns not pictures or symbols, but ultimate reality—the reality of God himself.*

c. Comments

- 1) R. Kent Hughes, *The precise point here is that Christ's priestly session in Heaven is transcendentally supreme and superior to the old earthly priesthood of Aaron.*
- 2) Warren Wiersbe identifies four reasons why Jesus is the superior High Priest: *His moral adequacy (v.1)...His finished work (v.1)...His enthronement (v.2)...His supreme exaltation (vv.1-2).*

2. Levitical priests ministered on earth (3-5)

a. They offered sacrifices (3), ***For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.***

- 1) Hebrews 5:1, *For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*
- 2) Hebrews 10:11, *And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.*
- 3) Charles Spurgeon, *If God is to pardon sin, there must be something done by which His law can be honored, His justice can be vindicated, and His truthfulness can be established; in fact, there must be an atonement. That is what it all comes to, or else pardon is impossible, and you and I must be lost forever.*
- 4) David Brown, *But as the high priest did not enter the Holy Place without blood, so Christ has entered the heavenly Holy Place with His own blood.*

b. Jesus could not be a Levitical priest (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.***

- 1) Levitical priests offered *gifts according to the law* but Jesus would be excluded as a Levitical priest because he did come through the lineage of Aaron, Hebrews 7:13-14, *For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.*
- 2) Jesus' gift was according to grace, Ephesians 5:2, *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*
- 3) Note the contrast between the Levitical priest and the priest after order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 9:12-14, *he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

c. They served according to the pattern given by God to Moses (5), ***They 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."***

1) *a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*

- a) Colossians 2:17, *These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*
- b) R. Kent Hughes, *The substance, the ultimate reality, of the Tabernacle is where Jesus is—at the right hand of God.*
- c) Warren Wiersbe, *The earthly priesthood and sanctuary seemed quite real and stable, and yet they were but copies of the true! The Old Testament system was but shadows (see Col. 2:17). The Law was but a "shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1); the true and full light came in Jesus Christ. So why go back into the shadows?*

2) *according to the pattern*

- a) Exodus 25:40, *And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.*
- b) R. Kent Hughes, *The word "pattern" meant something more than verbal instruction. Very likely it denoted a model along with verbal explanation. Moses may have been privileged to view a model on Sinai, then was given personal instruction.*
- c) William L. Lane, *During the former situation, marked by the ministry of the Levitical priests, there was no entrance into the real, heavenly presence of God; full entrance into the eternal presence of God was made possible only with the life and redemptive accomplishment of Jesus.*

B. Jesus serves on the basis of a superior covenant (6-13)

1. Introductory comments

- a. Charles Spurgeon, *The old covenant, the old ceremonial law, the old spirit of bondage, and the whole of the old leaven Jesus has purged out of the house, and He has admitted to a new dispensation wherein grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.*
- b. Thomas Constable, *The writer proceeded to explain the superiority of the New Covenant that Jesus Christ ratified with His blood that is better than the Old Mosaic Covenant that He terminated when He died.*

2. Reasons for a change of covenants.

- a. The new covenant is based on better promises (6), ***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.***

- 1) Galatians 3:19, *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *The superiority of Jesus' ministry as our High Priest rests also on the superiority of the covenant that forms the basis of that ministry.*
- 3) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *the New Covenant was founded on "better promises," both because of their extent and because of the covenant's ability to bring them to fulfillment in the lives of sinful humanity. The New Covenant could deliver!*
- 4) Donald Hagner on *the covenant he mediates is better, . . . the meaning intended is that the sacrifice of Jesus is itself the means or agency by which the new covenant (the word "new" is added in 9:15 and 12:24) becomes a reality . . . His priestly work itself, the new covenant resulting from it, and the promises to which that new covenant points—in all of this the old pales in comparison to the greater excellence of the new.*

- b. The old covenant was replaced because it was faulty (7), ***For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.***

- 1) Zane Hodges, *That there is a promise of a New Covenant the writer will shortly prove by quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34. By doing so, he argued that such a promise demonstrates the inadequacy of the old one.*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *As with the priesthood (7:11–12), so it is with the covenant and its promises. Had the first been adequate God would not have promised a second.*

3. The writer describes the superiority of the new covenant (8-12)

a. Introductory comments

- 1) Ray Stedman, *Those promises are listed by Jeremiah as threefold: an inner understanding of truth, an intimate relationship with God and an absolute forgiveness of all sins.*
- 2) Zane Hodges, *The Old Covenant failed because of the sinfulness of the nation, for which it had no remedy. The New Covenant, however, has such a remedy.*
- 3) This passage is cited from Jeremiah 31:31-34, *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 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, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*
- 4) R. Kent Hughes, *The quotation dates back over 600 years to Josiah's reign, when after the rediscovery of the Law, a national time of repentance, and a public covenant to keep the Law Israel again failed. In the midst of this dark failure, God promised a New Covenant—not conditional like the old, but unconditional—totally dependent upon the work of God.*

- b. Conditions of the new covenant
- 1) The New Covenant is different from the previous covenant made by God to His chosen people (8-9)
    - a) God promises a new covenant (8), ***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,***
      - 1] *For he finds fault with them*
        - a] *Them* refers to the possessors of the first covenant.
        - b] It speaks to the inability of the old covenant to effect a change in the hearts of the people.
        - c] H. D. M. Spence, *The failure of the old covenant is attributed in the first place to the people’s not continuing in it, and then, as a consequence, to the LORD’S withdrawal of his protection.*
        - d] Donald Hagner, *The problem, however, lies not simply in the first covenant (which by its nature was only preparatory), but more fundamentally in the people themselves.*
      - 2] God will establish a new covenant with His chosen people.
        - a] It will draw Judah and Israel back together (separation began during the reign of Rehoboam) as well as draw people back to God.
        - b] David Brown, *As both shared the exile, so both shall share the literal and spiritual restoration.*
        - c] Warren Wiersbe, *The promise was given in a prophecy that assured the Jews of future restoration. Jeremiah ministered during the closing years of the nation’s history, before Judah went into Babylonian Captivity. At a time when the nation’s future seemed completely destroyed, God gave the promise of restoration and blessing.*
        - d] Raymond Brown, *The old covenant was external. It was engraven on stone tablets. The new is within us; it forms part of our very souls. It was not a new covenant in its promise (I will be their God), for the old covenant offered that same intimate relationship. It was new in its ability to enable us not only to learn God’s instructions but to obey them.*
  - b) The new covenant is different (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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.***
    - 1] The old covenant was tied to obedience.
      - a] Donald Hagner, *The old covenant was unable to produce obedience, and hence judgment came upon the nation . . .*
      - b] Ray Stedman, *Two things were found wrong with the covenant of the law. First, the people did not fulfill its conditions, despite their initial avowal to do so (Ex 24:3). Second, it was not sufficiently powerful to motivate them to obedience since it was not written on their minds or hearts . . .*
      - c] Warren Wiersbe, *If Israel had obeyed the terms of the Old Covenant, God would have blessed them and they would have been ready for the coming of their Messiah. Paul pointed out that the Old Covenant had its share of glory (2 Cor. 3:7–11). We must not criticize the Old Covenant or minimize it.*
    - 2] God *showed no concern for them* because of their continual disobedience.
      - a] The people strayed from the covenant.
      - b] God became indifferent (*no concern*) because of their disobedience.
      - c] Ray Stedman, *This new covenant is declared to involve a different relationship between God and his people from that under the old covenant, precisely because the old covenant did not keep the people from failure and God had to turn away from them.*
    - 3] The New Covenant is not limited to the nation of Israel.
      - a] Some believe it is not for the Church while others believe the Church is *spiritual Israel*.
      - b] Warren Wiersbe on the universal nature of the New Covenant, *The church today is made up of regenerated Jews and Gentiles who are one body in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 3:27–29). All who are “in Christ” share in the New Covenant which was purchased on the cross. Today the blessings of the New Covenant are applied to individuals. When Jesus comes in glory to redeem Israel, then the blessings of the New Covenant will be applied to that beleaguered nation.*
      - c] R. Kent Hughes, *And though the New Covenant was made with Israel, it is shared today by the Church (those who share the continuity of faith with believing Israel). So the “better promises” are for Jew and Gentile alike.*

c. Better promises of the new covenant

1) The writer cites Jeremiah 31:31-34, a description of the New Covenant (10a), ***For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:***

- a) The distinctive promises of the New Covenant will disclose the difference between the old and new.
- b) Thomas Constable, *The New Covenant has the power whereby God's people may remain faithful, namely, the presence of God living within the believer.*

2) The list of promises (10b-12)

a) An inner desire to obey God (10b), ***I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts,***

- 1] William L. Lane, *The central affirmation of the new covenant is the pledge of the presence of the law in the hearts of believers as the gift of God (v 10). . . The people of God will be inwardly established in the law and knowledge of the Lord.*
- 2] William Barclay, *The old covenant depended on obedience to an externally imposed law. The new covenant is to be written upon human hearts and minds. People would obey God not because of the terror of punishment, but because they loved him. They would obey him not because the law compelled them unwillingly to do so, but because the desire to obey him was written on their hearts.*
- 3] Warren Wiersbe, *The Law was external; God's demands were written on tablets of stone. But the New Covenant makes it possible for God's Word to be written on human minds and hearts (2 Cor. 3:1-3). . . We do not become holy people by trying to obey God's Law in our own power. It is by yielding to the Holy Spirit within that we fulfill the righteousness of the Law (Rom. 8:1-4); and this is wholly of grace.*
- 4] Ray Stedman, *Every true Christian knows that when he or she was regenerated, a change occurred in their motivation. They found they wanted to do things they formerly did not want to do; for example, reading the Bible, or attending church, or praying and meditating. They found their reaction to evil in their own life was also different. What they once enjoyed without qualm, they began to be disturbed about and even to hate.*
- 5] Charles Spurgeon, *Is it not a wonderful thing that God shall ever make it as natural for us to be holy as once it was natural for us to be unholy, and that then we shall find it as much a joy to serve Him as once we thought it a pleasure not to serve Him, when, indeed, to deny ourselves shall cease to be self-denial?*

b) A personal relationship with God (10c), ***and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.***

- 1] R. Kent Hughes, *This was one of the formula expressions of the goal of the Old Covenant. God's word to Israel through Moses was, "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). . . this is perfectly fulfilled in all who partake of the New Covenant, in which believers actually become God's possession and possess God. . . "I will be their God" means he gives himself to us. And "they will be my people" means he takes us to himself!*
- 2] Donald Hagner, *The law is internalized, and a new intimacy of relationship between God and his people becomes possible.*

c) A personal knowledge of God (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.***

- 1] Donald Hagner, *Knowledge of the Lord becomes the possession of all.*
- 2] Warren Wiersbe, *Hebrews 8:11 quotes Jeremiah 31:34. It refers to that day when Israel shall be reunited with Judah (Heb. 8:8) and shall rejoice in the promised kingdom (Jer. 31:1-14). In that day, there will be no need to share the Gospel with others because everyone will know the Lord personally. However, until that day, it is both our privilege and our responsibility to share the Gospel message with a lost world.*
- 3] Douglas Mangum, *No longer would any of God's people need to seek out an expert or someone from an elite class of society to experience intimate, personal knowledge of God. All from the least to the greatest are able to know him.*
- 4] Ray Stedman, *Every true Christian also knows the inner sense of belonging to God in a new way. God is no longer seen as a stern Judge, but a loving Father. Believers are no longer outside the community of faith as aliens or exiles. They are now members of a family.*

d) Forgiveness of sins (12), ***For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.***

- 1] William Barclay, *The most tremendous thing about the new covenant is that it makes our relationship to God no longer dependent on our obedience but entirely dependent on God's love.*
- 2] Ray Stedman, *Any sin called to our attention by our conscience needs only to be acknowledged to be set aside. Provision for God to do so justly rests on the death of Christ on our behalf, not on our sense of regret or our promise to do better.*
- 3] Warren Wiersbe, *The phrase "remember no more" means "hold against us no more." God recalls what we have done, but He does not hold it against us. He deals with us on the basis of grace and mercy, not law and merit. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally.*

4. The presence of the new covenant shows that the old covenant has disappeared (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.***

a. The New Covenant makes the old covenant obsolete.

- 1) Zane Hodges, *From the Old Testament prophecy he had just quoted, the writer then drew the justifiable conclusion that the Old Covenant was obsolete . . .and aging and would soon disappear.*
- 2) William L. Lane states that *the Mosaic and Levitical institutions as . . . superseded by Christ.*
- 3) The once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes on-going sacrifice of no value.

b. The old *is ready to vanish away*

- 1) Thomas Constable, *The writer contrasted the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, namely, the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is now "obsolete" and even as the writer wrote the Book of Hebrews it was also "growing old." It virtually disappeared in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple, terminated its ritual, and scattered the Jews throughout the world (cf. Matt. 24:1-2).*
- 2) Ray Stedman, . . . *the priesthood of Israel, the temple in which they served, and all the rituals and sacrifices of the law which they performed, were about to be ended by the overthrow of Jerusalem as Jesus had predicted. This seems to be additional evidence that the letter to the Hebrews predates A.D. 70.*
- 3) Donald Hagner, . . . *But the new, in turn, is so much better than the old that the old must give way to it. The purpose of the old has been accomplished, and hence it will soon disappear.*

## CONCLUSION

- R. Kent Hughes, *The Covenant is New and eternally fresh, whereas the Old Covenant's permanently sundered curtain dramatizes its obsolescence.*
- Donald Hagner, *The new, the better, has come, but it was nothing other than this to which the old pointed and for which the old prepared the way.*
- Ray Stedman, *In chapter 9, we will return to the tabernacle and its ritual that we may more clearly grasp the realities of the new covenant and the freedom it gives us to live in a pressure-filled, baffling and bewildered world by the power that flows from our high priest today.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *Yes, our Lord is ministering on the basis of a better covenant, a New Covenant that makes us partakers of the new nature and the wonderful new life that only Christ can give.*