

The Book Of Hebrews

Part II

Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18)

Lesson 7 (8:1-8:13)

A. Outline thus far.

I. God's Final Word Spoken Through His Son (1:1-2:18).

II. The Need For The Incarnation (2:5-18).

III. First Digression - Exhortation to "Hold Fast" And Warning Against Unbelief (3:1-4:13).

Part II - Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18).

I. Jesus Qualified For Priesthood Hebrews (4:14-5:10)

II. Second Digression - Warning Against Apostasy And Exhortation To Press On To Perfection (5:11-6:20)

III. Jesus A High Priest After The Order Of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

A. The likeness between Christ and Melchizedek demonstrated (7:1-3).

B. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10).

C. Being of the Order of Melchizedek makes Christ's priesthood superior to Levi's (7:11-25).

IV. "A Ministry More Excellent" (8:1-10:18)

A. The Priestly Ministry of Jesus Introduced (1-6).

Connections.

In ch. 7 the writer described the priesthood of Jesus as being according to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was introduced historically in Gen 14 but not mentioned again until Psalm 110:4 when the Lord addressed the Messiah saying "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". In 5:6 and 10 this verse is cited as evidence that Christ became High Priest by Divine appointment. After digressing from the main theme of the priesthood, the author returned to show the greatness of Melchizedek, and therefore the greatness of being a priest after this order.

The inferiority of the Levitical and the superiority of the Melchizedekian Priesthood to the fore, he argued that we have in Jesus such a High Priest, precisely suited to meet man's needs in every way.

His approach was to use OT Scripture to testify to its own incompleteness. He did this in regards to the Levitical priesthood by citing Psalm 110:4 (7:11). If this priesthood were sufficient why call for another according to the order of Melchizedek? The fact that God was looking for another shows that perfection was not attained under the first. Not all that was ever to be needed was satisfied under the Mosaic system. The fact that God has filled this vacuum through the Son "is the main point of the things we are saying" says the writer (1).

The priesthood of Jesus is the foremost theme of the book. As he now elaborates upon its nature three aspects are discussed. These are the sphere of His ministry (considered fully 9:1-10:18), His sacrificial offering and the covenant as related to the priesthood.

The incompleteness in the Levitical High Priest filled by the Son (1a).

His sphere of ministry (1b-2).

In heaven itself, not on earth (1b)

The reason why (2). The sanctuary (holy things ASV Marg.) in heaven, erected by the Lord is the "true (alethinos) tabernacle", that on the earth was the copy. It was a foreshadowing of the real thing to come, alethinos denoting "true" in the sense of real, ideal, genuine. It was called:

1. "The greater and more perfect tabernacle" (9:11).
2. "The true" (9:24). Not true as opposed to false but real in contrast to that which bore a resemblance to it; in so far as this likeness existed it gave some indication of what was to come. The earthly tabernacle was not true as opposed to false but something which is true in contrast to that which is less – this idea is carried by a different Grk. word 'alethes'" (see Vine). It was constructed according to a pattern which God designed.

The need for a sacrifice stated in brief (3).

Explanation concerning His sphere of ministry (4-6).

If Jesus served on earth He could not be a priest (4-5). This statement anticipated the objection worded along the lines of: "If a priest, why is He not offering sacrifices in Jerusalem?" This has already been explained – it would require a change in the law since Jesus being of the tribe of Judah and not descended from Aaron would not be qualified to serve according to the law (4a; 7:12). The writer now adds, this old law already has its priests offering sacrifices in accordance with its requirements (4b-5a).

The earthly tabernacle is a copy/shadow of the heavenly reality (5b). For substantiation the writer cited the instruction given to Moses (Ex 25:40; the initial command being in vs. 8-9). Notice the connection of the OT passage. It is referenced to corroborate the assertion that the Levitical priests served that which was a copy/shadow. The reason for the commandment to Moses is now apparent – the earthly tabernacle was to be modelled or patterned after the heavenly reality (cf. 9:24).

Observation. The error of the comparison sometimes drawn is here exposed. The analogy that the first compartment of the tabernacle (the Holy Place) represents the church, the second the Holy of Holies, and that a person enters into the church to pass through the veil into heaven is not found in the book of Hebrews if at all in the Scriptures. The heavenly reality has no veil – the situation envisaged is that of a rent veil. As long as the earthly tabernacle existed with its two parts it indicated that the way into the Holy Place was not made manifest (9:8).

In this heavenly sanctuary He has obtained "a more excellent (kreitton) ministry" (6). By how much better? inasmuch as He is the mediator (mesites) of a "better (diaphoros)" covenant" established upon "better (diaphoros) promises". Mesites means literally "a go-between" (Vine). It comes from two words, one mesos "meaning middle"; thus a middle man, one who intervenes/stands between two parties (Gal 3:19-20). In each case the required function is determined by the circumstances. In this instance it was to enact a new covenant giving it legal force (cf. 9:15-17) and so the agent by whom it was established. Equally He was the "surety" by whom it was guaranteed (7:22).

B. The character of the New Covenant (8:7-13).

The better promises upon which the NC was enacted (7-12; Jer 31:31-33).

The imperfection of the Old Covenant argued (7-8). If the first covenant had been faultless then there would have been no need for a second (7-8a). The same reasoning is used in relation to the Levitical priesthood (7:11; Psa 110:4). The fact that God was found 600 years or so before seeking a second to be enacted upon better promises proves that the first was inadequate (8b; Jer 31:31). This is the first use made of this quotation from Jeremiah (v. 31). The second will be to draw a conclusion regarding its longevity.

Characteristics of the New Covenant (9-12; Jer 31:32-34).

Different - not according to that made on Mount Sinai (9).

Spiritual (10a-b). It was to be put on their hearts and minds.

Sanctifying (10c). "I will be their God and they shall be My people."

Enlightening (11).

Merciful/forgiving (12).

Additional notes.

Spiritual. The first covenant was with a physical nation. In such circumstances the covenant provided for civil legislation as well as moral and religious regulation. Among that nation there would be many who had no respect for God but also some who were deeply committed to serving Him. Eventually the nation would be destroyed. The situation is well illustrated by the state of Judah at the time of Josiah (Jer 3:6-10). After rigorously enforcing extensive religious reforms to bring the people back to God, they merely returned outwardly; motivated by fear of earthly consequences they complied externally putting on a show of obedience whilst remaining idolaters (2 Chron 34:1-7; 30-33). The distinction made by Jeremiah is that the New would not be a covenant made with a physical nation having in it unbelievers, individuals who were not truly converted. Contrariwise these would be spiritual people whose hearts God would have won and who gave their allegiance willingly because they were constrained from within rather than compelled from without.

Enlightening. This characteristic is partly explained by the earlier statement saying, "I will put my laws in their minds and write them upon their hearts". Because these would be a spiritual people they would have souls well-disposed to accepting God's guidance. Additionally since the New Covenant is made with converted people rather than a nation, individuals are not physically born into a covenant relationship and have no need that another say to him "know the Lord" for all shall already know Him. At many times during their history Israel was an apostate nation and the people had to be taught to know the Lord. Believers under the NC would have to be instructed in many things (Mt 20:19-20) but they won't have to be taught to know the Lord because it is not possible to be a Christian without first knowing Him. Notice that the nature of NC membership rules out the practice of infant baptism.

Merciful/forgiving. Under the former a remembrance of sin was made year by year for it was not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:1-4) but under the New He would remember their sins and iniquities no more (10:17).

Implication for first covenant (13; Jer 31:31).

From one word stated by Jeremiah, the Hebrew writer drew an inference regarding the first covenant – "In that He says, 'a new covenant' He has made the first obsolete."

Then he made a general observation concerning anything that is "becoming obsolete", that it is ready to vanish away. This is true of the universe, a garment (1:10-11) and also of a covenant.

This statement concerning a "new" covenant was made by Jeremiah some six hundred years prior to the Christian era. Therefore the ageing process began at the time of the OT prophet and not when the epistle was penned.