

**Hebrews 8****Lesson 8  
A Better Ministry And Covenant****Outline****I. A Better Priesthood [Ministry] (vv. 1-5)**

- A. *We have a High Priest – Christ* (vv. 1-2)
  1. At the right hand of God (v. 1)
  2. A minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle (v. 2)
- B. *He has an offering* (v. 3)
- C. *If he were on earth he couldn't be a priest* (vv. 4-5)
  1. There are priest (Levites) who offer gifts according to the law (v. 4)
  2. These priests are a copy and shadow of Christ's priesthood (v. 5)

**II. A Better Covenant (vv. 6-13)**

- A. *Better promises* (v. 6)
- B. *Fault with the first means there is need for another* (vv. 7-8a)
- C. *God promised through Jeremiah a new covenant* (vv. 8b-13)
  1. Created a different people (vv. 9-11)
    - a. Not like their rebellious fathers (v. 9)
    - b. The law shall be in their hearts and they will know God (vv. 10-11)
  2. Offers complete forgiveness (v. 12)
- D. *This one being new – makes the other old and obsolete* (v. 13)

**Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter****Hebrews 8:6**

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.

The previous chapter had established that the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood. There the author had introduced the idea that a change in priesthood required a change in the law (7:12). In this chapter, we see more about the superiority of his priesthood with an expansion of the idea of a better covenant.

### **A Better Priesthood [Ministry] (vv. 1-5)**

*We have a High Priest – Christ* (vv. 1-2). The author begins with the main point<sup>1</sup> of what he is saying about the priesthood of Christ: We have a High Priest in Jesus Christ (v. 1). The reader has been lead through the evidence that he is qualified for the role (5:1-10), and that his priesthood is superior to the Levitical one (chapter 7). Now his point is that he is a High Priest in heaven and not on earth (vv. 1-5) and is a mediator of a better covenant (vv. 6-13).

Our High Priest is seated at the right hand of God (v. 1), a position of exaltation and power.<sup>2</sup> This was not true of any of the Aaronic priests. Christ is a minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle<sup>3</sup> (v. 2). The term “minister” (a servant) as used here describes one who does the work of the High Priest. He serves in the sanctuary (“holies” NKJV footnote; “holy places” ESV) which is heaven. The tabernacle of this priesthood is the true tabernacle (as opposed to the copy or shadow). It (unlike the tabernacle in the Old Testament) was erected by God and not man (v. 2). Thus, it is superior.

*He has an offering* (v. 3). The function of a High Priest is to offer sacrifices (cf. 5:1). Jesus being our high priest has an offering – the sacrifice of himself (cf. 7:27).

*If he were on earth he could not be a priest* (vv. 4-5). The point in these two verses is that Christ is a priest in heaven and not on earth. He could not be a priest on earth for he was not of the tribe of Levi (cf. 7:11-14). Since Christ is a High Priest and has a sacrifice, it is either earthly or heavenly. There are priests (Levites) who offer gifts (earthly offerings) according to the law (v. 4). Thus, his offering is heavenly.

The Levitical priesthood was a copy and shadow of Christ’s priesthood (v. 5). “Copy” (“representation” ESV; “example” KJV) suggest that the previous priesthood was not the real or true, but merely a type or representation of the real. A “shadow” (like a man’s shadow on the ground) is an image or representation of the real thing.<sup>4</sup>

As proof of his point, the author cites Exodus 25:40 where Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle according to the pattern. If the tabernacle (which was a copy, type or model of the real) was made according to the pattern, it then is a true representation of the real. To illustrate: Suppose you are going to build a new house. You get an architect to draw blueprints (a pattern). But, before you go to the contractor to have the house built, you take the blueprints to a model maker to have him build a to-scale model of the house. Only when the model is according to the pattern is it a true model or type of the real. The tabernacle Moses built was not the real, but a copy (model) of the real.

---

1 The ASV: “chief point”.

2 If he is at the right hand of God in heaven, then he is not a priest on earth (cf. v. 4).

3 This is the first reference to the tabernacle in the book of Hebrews.

4 This would be a hard pill to swallow for the Jew who had thought the Levitical priesthood was to continue.

## A Better Covenant (vv. 6-13)

Now that Christ is a High Priest, he has obtained a more excellent (better, superior) ministry.<sup>5</sup> The ESV renders verse 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."

A change in priesthood required a change in the law (cf. 7:12), which also demands a change in a mediator. A mediator is "a go-between"<sup>6</sup> who officiates between two parties (God and man). Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant (Gal. 3:19-20; Exo. 20:19-21). Christ is the mediator of the new and better covenant.

*Better promises* (v. 6). The New Covenant is established on better promises. The promises are better in content, not that they are more reliable than any promise under the old. The details of those promises will be seen in the following verses.

*Fault with the first means there is need for another* (vv. 7-8a). The fault with the first covenant was that it could not (and was not designed to) bring complete forgiveness (cf. Gal. 3:21). "In one sense, the Old Covenant was just as perfect as the New. Each of them was perfectly adapted to the end for which it was designed. But the former never did and never could justify, sanctify, or save any one. In these respects it was relatively faulty, and the New is faultless."<sup>7</sup> Since the first had fault, there was a need for a new covenant.

Verse 8 says, "finding fault with them"<sup>8</sup> was the basis for the promise he quotes from Jeremiah. The fault was that those under the law failed to keep it (cf. v. 9).

*God promised through Jeremiah a new covenant* (vv. 8b-13). The author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 which promised a new<sup>9</sup> covenant. The fact that God promised a new covenant says that there was fault with the first.

The promise was given to the house of Israel and the house of Jacob (v. 8), a reference to all of God's people. In verse 10 he uses the terms "house of Israel" to describe the same people. This promise was "not with them as separate distinct houses, nor even as tribes; but simply as individuals. All tribal and family distinctions are now lost in Israel; and all who enter into covenant with God become members of the one household of faith..."<sup>10</sup>

Jeremiah's prophecy had two major points:

**1. Created a different people (vv. 9-11).** The point of these three verses is that the New Covenant will create a different people. They will not be like their rebellious fathers (v. 9).

5 Compare verse 2, "Minister of the sanctuary..."

6 W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

7 Robert Milligan, *Vol. IX – Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary, 226.

8 NIV says, "found fault with the people."

9 The word here means not only new in reference to time, but new "as to form or quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old" (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

10 Milligan, *ibid.*, 229.

"This new Israel would be all that the old Israel was not."<sup>11</sup> Israel of old rebelled and did not keep the covenant (v. 9). Thus, God rejected them. "It had now become manifest that by the Old Covenant no flesh could be justified before God: for the people were continually violating its requirements, and consequently God was under the necessity, so to speak, of rejecting them."<sup>12</sup>

Under the new, the law will be in their hearts and they will know God (vv. 10-11). "The Israel of old never really adopted God's ways for themselves. God had given them his instructions for how they were to live, but they did not appropriate them, they did not allow those commandments to mold them into the image God wanted them to have. The law was therefore always something that was external to them. In the new relationship with the new Israel, however, things would be different. The new Israel would internalize God's demands...It is this inward commitment, which makes obedience meaningful, that would be the basis of the new covenant with God."<sup>13</sup>

With such inward commitment, God said, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (v. 10).<sup>14</sup> This describes their loyalty to God through which they become his special treasure. Under the new covenant, they shall know the Lord (v. 11).<sup>15</sup> Under the old, one became a part of Israel by birth (involuntary). Though already a part of Israel, they had to be taught to know the Lord. In contrast, under the new, one has to be taught to be a part of Israel (cf. John 6:45), thus voluntary.

**2. Offers complete forgiveness (v. 12).** Sin under the Old Covenant was remembered again every year (cf. 10:3). Under the new, complete forgiveness is promised where God remembers the sin no more. This is what the old could not do.

*The one being new – makes the other old and obsolete* (v. 13). Since God promised a "new" covenant, this means the previous one is "old" and obsolete (no longer binding). God himself testified (through Jeremiah) that the Old Testament was not intended to be final. The author's use of the Old Testament quotations is most interesting here.<sup>16</sup> He makes similar points from Psalm 95, Psalm 110, and Jeremiah 31. In chapters 3-4 he shows Psalm 95 was written *after* Joshua led the people into Canaan, which shows that the promised rest was not fully obtained. In chapters 5 and 7 he shows that Psalm 110:4 was written *after* the institution of the Levitical priesthood, which shows a change in priesthood was intended. Likewise, Jeremiah 31 was written *after* the establishment of the old covenant, which shows the coming of a new covenant.

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 8	Old Testament Reference
v. 5	Exodus 25:40
vv. 8-12	Jeremiah 31:31-34

11 David McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrews*, 284.

12 Milligan, *ibid.*, 233.

13 McClister, *ibid.*, 289.

14 Compare Exodus 6:7; Hosea 2:23; and Zechariah 8:8.

15 This is more than knowing who God is. It is a close relationship of knowing him very well (cf. Gal. 4:8-9).

16 Credit to McClister for the development of this point (*ibid.*, 284).

## Questions

1. What is the "main point" (v. 1)?
2. What is the sanctuary (v. 2)?
3. What is the true tabernacle?
4. Why could Christ not be a priest on earth (v. 4)?
5. What point is the author making when he quotes Exodus 25:40?
6. What is a mediator (v. 6)?
7. What was the fault of the Old Testament?
8. What does "finding fault with them" (v. 8) mean?
9. Jeremiah's prophecy had two major points. What were they?
10. What is the contrast or difference in forgiveness under the old law and the new?