

“The New & Better Covenant”

Hebrews 8:1-13

November 18, 2018

INTRO: Let me ask you a few questions to begin...

- How well do you understand Christianity?
- How well do you understand Christ?
- How well do you understand Church?
- How well do you understand God’s Covenants?
- Did you know that all of these are interrelated?

Hence, our devotion to God’s Word, God’s will, & God’s ways!

***** Hebrews 8 is critically connected to correct
covenantal context...**

BIG IDEA: Christianity centers on AND is lived out through Christ... AS WELL AS a clear, full-context understanding of what it means to BE His Church, as redeemed recipients of His new & better covenant.

REVIEW:

- Hebrews is a letter of exhortation
- Hebrews was likely a circular sermon
- Hebrews is going to those who are fading...
- Hebrews is built on 5 warnings...
 - Don’t DRIFT
 - Don’t DISCONNECT
 - Don’t Dilly-dally
 - Don’t Disobey (ch.10)
 - Don’t Defy & Deny Christ (ch.12)

PREVIEW:

- Better PRIEST *Creator / King*
- Better PROMISE *Christ*
- Bigger PROBLEM *Corruption*
- Better PEOPLE *Church*
- Better PEACE *Completion*

T/S: **VIDEO:** *“Old vs. New Testament”*

I. Better PRIEST (vv.1-3) *Creator / King!*

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 (Psalm 110)
of the throne
of the Majesty
in heaven,*

² *a minister (a.k.a. “a missional servant” – JDP)
in the holy places,
in the true tent
that the Lord set up,
not man.*

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.*

For the writer's audience, it would have seemed virtually impossible that a covenant better than the covenant made with the patriarchs could exist. Yet the author shows them the need for a greater covenant by pointing to the need for a greater priest. - Mohler

T/S: [Zechariah 6:11-13](#) speaks of a high priest who "sits" and "rules" on his throne...

II. Better PROMISE (vv.4-6) *Christ!*

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.*

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.”*

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.*

- Better ministry...
- Better covenant...
- Better promises...

**** we need to study **the word diatheke, "covenant,"** as it is used in Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament.*

- *33x in N.T.... 17 in Hebrews (10x = old)*
- *Jesus = Guarantor & Mediator (7:22 & 8:6)*
- **1 Timothy 2:5** *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

VIDEO: *“Understanding biblical Covenants”*

CRITICAL: *From his seat at the right hand, Christ continue his work as Redeemer.*

Too many Christians think Jesus has already done all that he's going to do for us. We look back to the cross and the resurrection and assume this is where his work ends. But two very important aspects of his work aren't finished. For starters, Christ didn't accomplish in his earthly ministry all that the Messiah was foretold to accomplish. This didn't make his mission a failure. Rather, Revelation tells us a spectacular fulfillment is coming. We're still waiting for Christ to vindicate his church and judge the nations, so this aspect of his work is yet to be finished... Additionally, Christ is not done mediating for his people. While Christ's atoning work is finished, his advocating work is not. This mediatory work is the primary occupation of Christ in heaven. As Jesus sits at his Father's right hand, he intercedes for us. What a tremendous encouragement to reflect on Christ's active and ongoing work for his people! - Mohler

III. Bigger PROBLEM (vv.7-9) *Corruption!*

*⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless,
there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 plays a crucial role in the New Testament.

In addition to *Heb 9:15; 10:13; and 12:24*, (*Luke 22:20; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25*). (*Rom 11:27; 2 Cor 3:6*).

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,
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.*

VIDEO: “5 Telescoping Truths...”

IV. Better PEOPLE (v.10) Church!

¹⁰ *For this is the covenant that I will make with the
house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will
put my laws into their minds, and write them on their
hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my
people.*

8:10 *If our heart is not changed, following God's rules
will be unpleasant and difficult. We will rebel against
being told how to live. The Holy Spirit, however, gives
us new desires, helping us want to obey God. With a
new heart, we find that serving God is our greatest
joy.*

8:10, 11 *Under God's new covenant, God's law is inside us. It is no longer an external set of rules and principles. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ's words, activates our conscience, influences our motives and desires, and makes us want to obey. Now doing God's will is something we desire with all our heart and mind*

- Life Application Study Bible.

8:10 *“I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.” This is more than knowing the law—infinitely more. The Holy Spirit makes men love the will of God, makes them delight in all that God delights in and abhor that which the Lord abhors. It is well said in the text that God will do this, for certainly it is not what a man can do for himself. The law is fully written in the heart when a man, approving the law and appropriating it to himself, delights to obey it.*

- CSB Spurgeon Study Bible.

VIDEO: *“Understanding BE-ing the People of God”*

V. Better PEACE (vv.11-13)

Completion!

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.*

¹² *For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”*

This makes Christ's statement on the cross all the more breathtaking. When he cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), he was announcing that the wrath of God toward the sin of his people was finally paid in full. Never again would there be a need for animal sacrifice, for Jesus paid it all.

The extraordinary promise of the new covenant was not that God would dismiss the old covenant but that he would be merciful toward our iniquities and remember our sins no more (Jer 31:34).

Our greatest problem is sin, for it severs us from the presence of God. Our sin and his holiness are incompatible, yet God promised to reconcile sinful people to himself through the mediator who would inaugurate the new covenant. He chose to do this through his Son, Jesus Christ, the mediator who established the new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20).

The Lord is merciful to his people because Christ suffered and died in their place, and they are now hidden in him forever by virtue of their faith and repentance. In Jesus all the new covenant promises belong to God's people. - Christ Centered Exposition

CLOSE:

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.*

Let's Pray!

VIDEO: *"When Death Was Arrested"*

Two sections:

8:1-6

8:7-13

Hebrews 8:1-13 (ESV)

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 (Psalm 110)
of the throne
of the Majesty
in heaven,

² a minister (a.k.a. “a missional servant” – JDP)
in the holy places,
in the true tent
that the Lord set up,
not man.

³ For every high priest is appointed
to offer gifts and sacrifices;
thus
it is necessary
for this priest
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to have something
to offer.

⁴ Now if he were on earth,
he would not be a priest at all,
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there are priests
who offer gifts
according to the law.

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
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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.

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless,
there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

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,

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.

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,
declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

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.

¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

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.

Outline:

- | | | |
|--------|---|---------------|
| 1a | The Point in what we are saying is... | CONTEXT |
| | A. Everything points to Jesus... | |
| | B. He is better than everything else... | |
| | C. Hold on! He’s worth it! | |
| 1b – 4 | We HAVE such a High Priest... | CONCLUSION |
| | A. Seated... right hand of Majesty in heaven | CLARIFICATION |
| | B. A Minister in God’s heaven... | |
| | C. A High Priest who offers a gift & Sacrifice | |
| | D. A unique Servant, unlike ritualistic priests | |
| 5 – 6 | His Substance is better than all shadows... | CONTRAST |

- A. They serve copies & shadows of heavenly things
 - a. Moses & the Tabernacle serve as examples
- B. "BUT" in v.6 marks a CONTRAST
- C. Jesus has "obtained" (blood bought!) a "much more excellent"
 - a. MINISTRY
 - b. COVENANT ("He mediates")
 - c. PROMISES ("enacted upon")

7 – 12 We KNEW this/HE was coming...

CHRIST IS COMING

- A. vv.8-12 quotes Jeremiah 31 (cf. [Jeremiah 32](#) & [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#))
- B. This quote is here to Inform, Inspect, & Inspire!
- C. This reminder says: "There's no excuse..."
 - a. We all knew the old/original Mosaic covenant was temporary
 - b. We were told a new covenant was coming...
 - c. We were told the new covenant would NOT be like the old...
 - d. We were told that we broke the old covenant (hence the new)
 - e. We were told exactly what to expect: (v.10)
 - i. God will write His law on our minds (vs. tablets of stone)
 - ii. God will write His law on our hearts (vs. repeated rituals)
 - iii. God will be their God
 - iv. They will be God's people
 - 1. Great Commandments
 - 2. Great Commission
 - 3. Great Combat
 - 4. Great Christian(s)
 - 5. Great Church
 - v. They shall all know Him
 - 1. He will know & grow them from within (Holy Spirit)
 - 2. External rules & rituals will be replaced with redemption
 - a. God will be merciful with them
 - i. Mercy = withholding what is deserved...
 - ii. Mercy is applied grace... (what is not deserved)
 - b. God will remember their sins no more!
 - i. Justification
 - ii. Sanctification
 - iii. Glorification

13 The new REPLACES the old...

CONCLUSION

- A. I did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it...
- B. As Priest/King Jesus upholds & fulfills...
- C. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
- D. "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but thru Me."
- E. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Savior! Jesus is better than better... Jesus is uniquely BEST!

I. CONTEXT (v.1a)

Hebrews 8 contains two major discourse units: 8:1-6 and 8:7-13, the latter being a lengthy quotation (the longest in the New Testament) of Jer 31:31-34 which ends at v. 12, followed by a short explanatory comment by the author in v. 13.

Heb 8:1-6 is marked by lexical *inclusio* with the repetition of *leitourgos* (one who serves) in v. 2 and *leitourgias* (ministry) in v. 6.

This entire section (8:1-10:18) contains no imperatives

But this author tells his audience that Israel's great covenantal history culminates with Christ, the guarantee of a superior covenant.

For the writer's audience, it would have seemed virtually impossible that a covenant better than the covenant made with the patriarchs could exist. Yet the author shows them the need for a greater covenant by pointing to the need for a greater priest. - Mohler

II. CLARIFICATION (v.1b-4)

From his seat at the right hand, Christ continues his work as Redeemer.

Too many Christians think Jesus has already done all that he's going to do for us. We look back to the cross and the resurrection and assume this is where his work ends. But two very important aspects of his work aren't finished. For starters, Christ didn't accomplish in his earthly ministry all that the Messiah was foretold to accomplish. This didn't make his mission a failure. Rather, Revelation tells us a spectacular fulfillment is coming. We're still waiting for Christ to vindicate his church and judge the nations, so this aspect of his work is yet to be finished... Additionally, Christ is not done mediating for his people. While Christ's atoning work is finished, his advocating work is not. This mediatory work is the primary occupation of Christ in heaven. As Jesus sits at his Father's right hand, he intercedes for us. What a tremendous encouragement to reflect on Christ's active and ongoing work for his people! - Mohler

Here the author is bringing together Psalm 110:1,4 at a critical juncture in his theological development. Similar statements have already been made in Heb 1:3,13. That Christ, as the priest/king, is "seated" further separates the person and work of Christ from

the Levitical priesthood in that no high priest ever performed priestly duties while seated. There was no chair in the holy of holies.

The finality of Jesus' sacrifice is observed in his seated posture at the right hand.

Zechariah 6:11-13 speaks of a high priest who "sits" and "rules" on his throne:

Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two."

III. CONTRAST (v.5-6)

The prominence the author gives to v. 6 and the introduction of the quotation by a subordinating conjunction combine to furnish the theme of Heb 8:1-13 which is the superiority of the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus and the obsolescence of the old covenant as a result.

God initiated the Mosaic covenant knowing full well it would be ineffective in dealing with the sin problem. The Mosaic covenant was "anticipatory" of the new covenant in the sense that God had always planned for the new covenant. The first covenant did not "fail" but was rather insufficient by design. In this sense the old covenant fulfilled its God-given purpose.

This position was also articulated by Harrisville who demonstrated that the new covenant was "qualitatively" different from the old covenant in that "faithfulness to the person of Jesus determines whether or not one shares in the heavenly blessings, whereas under the old covenant the divine blessing was conditional upon faithfulness to the covenant construed as fulfillment of

its demands." Both covenants originated in the will of God and serve to express the single divine will.

According to Harrisville and Joslin, it is this fact which provides

the continuity between the two, as well as the provisional nature of the Mosaic covenant.

At this point, *we need to study the word diatheke, "covenant," as it is used in Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament.*

Of the 33 uses of the term in the New Testament, 17 occur in Hebrews.

Ten of these occurrences refer to the Mosaic covenant. The new covenant is mentioned in Hebrews explicitly three times: [Heb 8:8-9:15](#); [12:24](#).

It is also referred to in [7:22](#); [8:6,10](#); [10:16,29](#); [13:20](#). Implicitly the new covenant is referred to in [8:7](#) and [10:9](#).

Only twice ([Heb 9:16,17](#)) is the word given the translation "will" or "testament."

The first two occurrences of *diathēkē* ([7:22](#) and [8:6](#)) both identify Jesus as the *engu-os* ("guarantee") and the *mesitēs* ("mediator") of a "better covenant."

On "promises," see [4:1](#) and [6:12-20](#).

- i. [4:1](#) promise... *"enter His rest..."*
- ii. [6:12ff](#) promise... *we "inherit His promises thru faith & patience"*

*The better promises of the new covenant
are cited in 8:8-12.*

8:5 **The quote is from Exodus 25:40.** *copy and shadow.*

8:6 *Mediator.* Cf. **9:15**. **The word describes a go-between or an arbitrator, in this case between man and God. See note on 1 Timothy 2:5 (cf. Gal. 3:19, 20).**

iii. **1 Timothy 2:5** (NASB) *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

iv. **Galatians 3:19-22** (NASB)

¹⁹ *Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.*

²⁰ *Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.* ²¹ *Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.*

²² *But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

Repeatedly the author of Hebrews shows us how to read the Old Testament. In this instance, he's showing us how to understand the Old Testament tabernacle. Like the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle of old was inadequate. It displayed dimly the glory of God while pointing to something greater.

The combination of "mediator" with "covenant" harks back to what was said in 7:22

IV. CHRIST-IS-COMING (v.7-12)

Two propositions are stated in v. 7: the first covenant was faulty, and as a result, a new covenant was initiated by God.

However, that God has replaced the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant suggests that the problem with the first covenant was more than just that people did not obey it. The creation of the new covenant shows that God never intended the old covenant to be permanent.

The similarities between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are patent, but there is one crucial difference: the way each covenant deals with the sin problem.

This raises the question of why God would create an ineffective covenant in the first place. This question cannot be satisfactorily answered for the simple reason that **Scripture does not speak to this issue** here or anywhere else.

8:7 Cf. the same argument in 7:11. The older covenant, incomplete and imperfect, was only intended to be temporary.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek shows up abruptly and briefly in the Old Testament, but his special role in Abraham's life makes him a significant figure. He is mentioned again in [Psalm 110:4](#), the passage under consideration in [Hebrews 4:14-7:28](#). As the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God in the time of Abraham, Melchizedek offered a 'historical precedent for the role of king-priest ([Gen. 14:18-20](#)), filled perfectly by Jesus Christ.

By using the two Old Testament references to Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews ([7:1-28](#)) explains the superiority of Christ's priesthood by reviewing Melchizedek's unique role as a type of Christ and his superiority to the Levitical high priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood was hereditary, but Melchizedek's was not. Through Abraham's honor, Melchizedek's rightful role was established.

The major ways in which the Melchizedekan priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood are these:

- 1. The receiving of tithes ([7:2-10](#)), as when Abraham the ancestor of the Levites gave Melchizedek a tithe of the spoils.**
- 2. The giving of the blessing ([7:1](#), [6, 7](#)), as when Abraham accepted Melchizedek's blessing.**

3. The continual replacement of the Levitical priesthood ([7:11-19](#)), which passed down from father to son.
4. The perpetuity of the Melchizedekan priesthood ([7:3](#), [8](#), [16](#), [17](#), [20-28](#)), since the record about his priesthood does not record his death.

The Mosaic covenant was not wrong; rather, it was weak and ineffective (7:18-19) since it could not bring people to perfection.

God's purposes in the old covenant (among others) were to inform his people of the moral law, to convict them of sin ([10:3](#)), and (prominently featured in the book of Hebrews) to establish the pattern of sacrifice, priesthood, and promise of salvation that is fulfilled in Christ. Yet the inability of sinful humanity to achieve perfection under the old covenant required the promise of a second covenant, proving the ineffectiveness (i.e., the shortcomings) of the first.

8:8-12 he finds fault with them. God blames sinful humanity for the failure of the first covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-34, quoted here, supports several arguments in Hebrews:

(1) this "second" covenant ([Heb. 8:7](#)) comes after the Mosaic covenant (**the days are coming, v. 8**);

(2) it is established by the Lord (vv. 8, 13);

(3) it is a **new covenant** (vv. 8, 13);

(4) it is unlike the former covenant of the exodus (vv. 9, 13);

(5) the former covenant failed because of the fault of Israel (**for they did not continue in my covenant, v. 9**; see v. 8);

(6) this new covenant involves a transformation of the inner life of its recipients by writing God's laws into their **minds** and **hearts** so that all **know** him (vv. 10-11; see 10:14-17; cf. 9:9); and

(7) it brings true, final forgiveness of sins (8:12; see 9:15; 10:12-18).

- ESV Study Bible

Jeremiah 31:31-34 plays a crucial role in the New Testament.

In addition to Heb 9:15; 10:13; and 12:24, it is referenced by all three Synoptic Gospel writers as well as Paul concerning the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:20; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor

11:25). Paul makes two additional references to it (Rom 11:27; 2 Cor 3:6).

In v. 8, "the time is coming" is (lit.) "days are coming," a favorite expression of Jeremiah occurring no where else in the prophets. The text indicates God is the initiator of the new covenant. In fact, throughout Scripture, all covenants between God and man are initiated by God and never by any man.

Christ's work allows us to directly and confidently enjoy God's presence. We no longer have to come before God in a tabernacle made by human hands. Because Christ has fulfilled the tabernacle's purpose, we can draw near to the very throne of God. Heaven is God's true tabernacle. This great truth permeates the pages of the Old Testament. The King who ransoms his people from their iniquities and brings them peace with God has ushered in the new covenant by his blood. And that covenant is of far greater excellence than the first. - Mohler

8:10 "I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts." This is more than knowing the law—ininitely more. The Holy Spirit makes men love the will of God, makes them delight in all that God delights in and abhor that which the Lord abhors. It is well said in the text that God will do this, for certainly it is not what a man can do for himself. The law is fully written in the heart when a man, approving the law and appropriating it to himself, delights to obey it. - CSB Spurgeon Study Bible.

8:8-12 This passage is a quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34. . . The new and better way is the covenant of grace—Christ's offer to forgive our sins and bring us to God through his sacrificial death. . . . It is new in application because it is written on our heart and in our mind. It offers a new way to forgiveness. . .

8:10 If our heart is not changed, following God's rules will be unpleasant and difficult. We will rebel against being told how to live. The Holy Spirit, however, gives us new desires, helping us want to obey God (see Philippians 2:12, 13). With a new heart, we find that serving God is our greatest joy.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB)

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

8:10, 11 Under God's new covenant, God's law is inside us. It is no longer an external set of rules and principles. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ's words, activates our conscience, influences our motives and desires, and makes us want to obey. Now doing God's will is something we desire with all our heart and mind

- Life Application Study Bible.

The old covenant was faulty because it was not final. If it were the final covenant, there would have been no need for a better covenant.

Further, the old covenant came up short because it could not provide a priest who would make ultimate and full atonement for the sins of God's people. The old covenant's fault and failure to provide a final sacrifice for sin should have been obvious. **After all, under the old covenant there remained an unrelenting need for constant sacrifices.** This endless repetition of sacrifices demonstrated the covenant's incompleteness and its inability to deal with sin once for all time. **This makes Christ's statement on the cross all the more breathtaking. When he cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), he was announcing that the wrath of God toward the sin of his people was finally paid in full.** Never again would there be a need for animal sacrifice, for Jesus paid it all.

Furthermore, even the high priest of the old covenant had to make unrelenting sacrifices for his own sins before he could make a sacrifice for the sin of his countrymen. In the light of the new covenant, that's no gospel. But the author of **Hebrews is now declaring that the final priest has come**, not to atone for his own sins, but **to save his people**. Indeed, a better priest with a better ministry has come to mediate a better covenant enacted on better promises.

Jesus's ministry of inaugurating the new covenant is "superior" precisely because of these "better promises."

In the new covenant God will write his law on the hearts of his people (rather than on tablets of stone). As a result, all covenant members will know the Lord, and sins will be dealt with completely.

The Better Covenant Fulfilled

The new covenant promise is laid out in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#).

The author of Hebrews leads his readers to this text in [verses 8-12](#).

Jeremiah wrote to show that the Lord had long ago foretold the day when his final priest would come. The covenant community should have inferred from the sacrifices of old that a final sacrifice and a final priest—who would not have to sacrifice repeatedly—were coming.

Thus the author of Hebrews uses Jeremiah 31:31-34 to ask his readers, "Were we not told? **Why did you not see?"**

This is similar to the way he uses Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 to show them they should have been anticipating a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

God spoke through Jeremiah to announce the need for and the coming of a new and better covenant.

The picture Jeremiah paints is one of eschatological (end-times) peace. This peace would come through the mediator of a new and better covenant. The terms of this new and better covenant would bring a peace infinitely greater than what the old covenant could produce. The extraordinary promise of the new covenant was not that God would dismiss the old covenant but that he would be merciful toward our iniquities and remember our sins no more ([Jer 31:34](#)).

Our greatest problem is sin, for it severs us from the presence of God. Our sin and his holiness are incompatible, yet God promised to reconcile sinful people to himself through the mediator who would inaugurate the new covenant. He chose to do this through his Son, Jesus Christ, the mediator who established the new covenant in his blood ([Luke 22:20](#)).

In him, the extraordinary promises and the better covenant were fulfilled.

The Lord is merciful to his people because Christ suffered and died in their place, and they are now hidden in him forever by virtue of their faith and repentance. In Jesus all the new covenant promises belong to God's people.

- C.C.E.

V. CONCLUSION (v.13)

As Jesus is greater than angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system, so the new covenant which he inaugurates supersedes and surpasses the old Mosaic covenant.

But one must ask, what is the relationship of the law to the new covenant?

How can the author of Hebrews conclude that the Mosaic law is incapable of bringing about perfection for the new covenant believer, as he states in [Heb 7:19](#), and yet quote Jeremiah in an affirming fashion concerning the Law being written on the hearts of new covenant believers? This has proven to be a thorny issue for interpreters.

The Old and New Covenants

Like pointing out the similarities and differences between the photograph of a person and the actual person, the writer of Hebrews shows the connection between the old Mosaic covenant and the new Messianic covenant. He proves that the old covenant was a shadow of the real Christ.

<i>Reference</i>	<i>The Old Covenant under Moses</i>	<i>The New Covenant in Christ</i>	<i>Application</i>
8:3-4	Gifts and sacrifices by those guilty of sin	Self-sacrifice by the guiltless Christ	Christ died for you
8:5-6, 10-12	Focused on a physical building where one goes to worship	Focuses on the reign of Christ in believers' hearts	God is directly involved in your life
8:5-6, 10-12	A shadow	A reality	Not temporal, but eternal

8:6	Limited promises	Limitless promises	We can trust God's promises to us
8:8-9	Failed agreement by people	Faithful agreement by Christ	Christ has kept the agreement where people couldn't

Realize that life in Christ is never complete. Heaven promises completeness; until then, growth is the normal pattern... The key to growth includes daily devotion to Christ through Bible study and prayer. Perhaps you need to intensify your study and find helps that provide more substance. Perhaps you need to grow by engaging in new areas of service that express your faith. **Seek God for how he would have you keep growing in your faith.**

- Life Application Study Bible.

[8:13](#) The new covenant makes the first one old (Gk. palaiō, here translated obsolete)—so old that it is becoming like a person of extreme age (Gk. gēraskō, here translated growing old) and thus is near to disappearing (ready to vanish away). - ESV Study Bible

In some sense previous divine covenants find their culmination in this new covenant, for this future covenant encapsulates the key promises made throughout the Old Testament era (e. g., a physical inheritance, a divine-human relationship; an everlasting dynasty; blessing on a national and international scale), while at the same time transcending them. Thus, the new covenant is the

climactic fulfillment of the covenants that God established with the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the dynasty of David.

We are now prepared to consider the theological implications of [Heb 8:1-13](#).

First, one is immediately struck by the use of first person language in [Jer 31:31-34](#). No less than four times God says "I will." By such language, God is establishing that the covenant originates with him alone and he in a sense obligated himself to bring about its fulfillment.

Second, that this covenant is made with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" makes it clear that God intends a reunification of the divided nation. In addition, [Isa 55:3-5](#) is usually interpreted as referring to the new covenant and here Isaiah speaks of the inclusion of Gentiles, although they are not addressed directly as specific recipients of God's covenant. What is referenced by Isaiah concerning the Gentiles becomes specific in the New Testament, especially **in [Hebrews 8](#). Here all Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are part of the new covenant.**

The greatest emphasis of Jeremiah and of the author of Hebrews is on the forgiveness of sins brought about by the new covenant.

When the shorter version of [Jeremiah 31](#) is quoted by the author again in [10:3](#), the same words concerning the forgiveness of sins are used.

The author concludes the extensive doctrinal section of [8:1-10:18](#) with a twofold reference in [10:14](#) and [10:18](#) to the forgiveness of sins having come under the new covenant.

Such a *final forgiveness is based upon the final sacrifice of Christ which inaugurated the new covenant.*

Jesus' statement at the last supper (Luke 22:20) as well as Heb 8:1-10:18 both establish that Jesus' sacrifice for sin accomplished precisely what the new covenant required and that his death on the cross was, in fact, the inauguration of the new covenant.

While it is clear that many of the specific aspects of the new covenant were also a part of the old covenant, it is highly unlikely that Jeremiah was somehow using "new" in an ironic sense for the purpose of shocking his readers out of **complacency**. Fischer argued that what was "new" in the new covenant was its internal nature and that the power of God through Christ enabled believers to obey it. He took "obsolete" to refer to "outdated" rather than to carry the sense of "annulled," and he interpreted the phrase "ready to disappear" as not actually equivalent to having disappeared. In this way Fisher argued that the new covenant was somehow a renewal of the old covenant. He was joined by Kaiser.

We conclude that the new covenant is a continuation of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants with the same single, promise doctrine sustained in them all. No features have been deleted except the ceremonies and ordinances of the "old" Mosaic covenant whose phasing out was planned for long ago.

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Here is the crux of the issue: the author of Hebrews applies Jeremiah's new covenant to the Church and yet the Old Testament connects the new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah in a future fulfillment.

As Ware says, these two seemingly disparate views are reconciled "when we permit the fulfillment of such eschatological promises to take both a preliminary and partial ('already') fulfillment as well as a later full and complete ('not yet') realization."

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8:10 "I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts." This is more than knowing the law—ininitely more. The Holy Spirit makes men love the will of God, makes them delight in all that God delights in and abhor that which the Lord abhors. It is well said in the text that God will do this, for certainly it is not what a man can do for himself. The law is fully written in the heart when a man, approving the law and appropriating it to himself, delights to obey it.

"They will be my people." People have their treasures—their pearls, jewels, rubies, and diamonds. These are their precious stones. But all people in the covenant of grace are the precious stones of God. He values them above everything else, keeps the world spinning for them, and is always tender toward them.

8:12 "I will never again remember their sins." This is a wonder of wonders, that God should say he will do what in some sense he cannot do. God's pardon of sin is so complete that he himself describes it as not remembering our iniquity. The Lord cannot in strict accuracy of speech forget anything. But he wishes us to know that his pardon is so true and deep that it amounts to an absolute oblivion, a total forgetting of all the wrongdoing of the pardoned ones.

8:4 Under the old Jewish system, priests were chosen only from the tribe of Levi, and sacrifices were offered daily on the altar for forgiveness of sins (see 7:12-14). This system would not have allowed Jesus to be a priest, because he was from the tribe of Judah. But his perfect sacrifice ended all need for further priests and sacrifices.

The use of the present tense, "there already are priests who offer the gifts," indicates that this book was written before A.D. 70 when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, ending the sacrifices.

8:5 The pattern for the Tabernacle built by Moses was given by God. It was a pattern of the spiritual reality of Christ's sacrifice, and thus it looked forward to the future reality. There is no Tabernacle in heaven of which the earthly one is a copy, but rather the earthly Tabernacle was an expression of eternal, theological principles. Because the Temple at Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, using the worship system there as an example would have had a great impact on this original audience.

The Old and New Covenants

Like pointing out the similarities and differences between the photograph of a person and the actual person, the writer of Hebrews shows the connection between the old Mosaic covenant and the new Messianic covenant. He proves that the old covenant was a shadow of the real Christ.

<i>Reference</i>	<i>The Old Covenant under Moses</i>	<i>The New Covenant in Christ</i>	<i>Application</i>
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8:6	Limited promises	Limitless promises	We can trust God's promises to us
8:8-9	Failed agreement by people	Faithful agreement by Christ	Christ has kept the agreement where people couldn't
9:1	External standards and rules	Internal standards—a new heart	God sees both actions and motives—we are accountable to God, not rules
9:7	Limited access to God	Unlimited access to God	God is personally available
9:9-10	Legal cleansing	Personal cleansing	God's cleansing is complete
9:11-14, 24-28	Continual sacrifice	Conclusive sacrifice	Christ's sacrifice was perfect and final
9:22	Forgiveness earned	Forgiveness freely given	We have true and complete forgiveness
9:24-28	Repeated yearly	Completed by Christ's death	Christ's death can be applied to our sin
9:26	Available to some	Available to all	Available to you

[8:8-12](#) This passage is a quotation of [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), which compares the new covenant with the old. The old covenant was the covenant of law between God and Israel. **The new and better way is the covenant of grace—Christ's offer to forgive our sins and bring us to God through his sacrificial death.** This covenant is new in extent—it goes beyond Israel and Judah to include all the Gentile nations. **It is new in application because it is written on our heart and in our mind. It offers a new way to forgiveness,** not through animal sacrifice but through faith. Have you entered into this new covenant and begun walking in the better way?

8:10 If our heart is not changed, following God's rules will be unpleasant and difficult. We will rebel against being told how to live. The Holy Spirit, however, gives us new desires, helping us want to obey God (see [Philippians 2:12, 13](#)). With a new heart, we find that serving God is our greatest joy.

8:10, 11 Under God's new covenant, God's law is inside us. It is no longer an external set of rules and principles. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ's words, activates our conscience, influences our motives and desires, and makes us want to obey. Now doing God's will is something we desire with all our heart and mind.

8:13 Some of the Jewish believers were clinging to the obsolete old ways instead of embracing Christ's new covenant. All the joy of newfound faith and all the relief of fresh forgiveness had given way to a kind of boredom that was never supposed to be. Growth had stopped. What should be done if this happens to you?

Realize that life in Christ is never complete. Heaven promises completeness; until then, growth is the normal pattern. Growth often endures seasons of drought and drabness. That's also normal. Think about what you are doing that might be spiritually ineffective or obsolete. The key to growth includes daily devotion to Christ through Bible study and prayer. Perhaps you need to intensify your study and find helps that provide more substance. Perhaps you need to grow by engaging in new areas of service that express your faith. **Seek God for how he would have you keep growing in your faith.**

- Life Application Study Bible.

8:1-13 *Jesus, High Priest of a Better Covenant.* Jesus is shown to be the eternal high priest, ministering from heaven in the true tabernacle and enacting the better promises of the new covenant.

8:1-2 The author reminds readers of the main point of the letter: Christians have a high priest who has brought full forgiveness of sins, and this is evident by his being seated at God's right hand. See 1:3, 13; 10:12; 12:2.

Majesty. **An indirect Semitic term for God himself** (see [1:3](#)). The Greek translated **holy places** will refer later to the "Holy Place" ([9:2](#)) and the "Most Holy Place" (lit., "Holy of Holies," [9:3](#)) in the earthly tabernacle constructed at the time of Moses ([Ex. 26:33-34](#)) as well as in the Jerusalem temple. But **here the author is speaking of something even better, the actual heavenly "holy places," that is, the area before the very throne of God himself.** This is where Christ is now a **minister**.

The true tent (Gk. *skēnē*) refers to heaven, God's very presence; the earthly tabernacle functions as a picture of entering into God's presence in heaven. Human beings made the earthly tabernacle; the heavenly tabernacle ([Heb. 8:5; 9:11, 23-24](#)) was

set up by **the Lord** himself—probably a reference to God the Father (see [8:8-11](#); also [7:14](#); [12:5-6](#)), though possibly to Jesus ([1:10](#); [2:3](#); [7:14](#); [13:20](#)).

8:3 High priests offered **gifts** of thanksgiving and **sacrifices** for sin; Jesus as high priest must **offer** a sacrifice, which he does in the true heavenly tabernacle ([v. 2](#); see [9:11-14](#), [23-28](#); [10:12-14](#)).

8:4 Jesus could not serve in the earthly tabernacle, since the law requires Levitical/Aaronic lineage ([7:11-19](#)).

8:5 The earthly tabernacle (**tent**), in which the Levitical priesthood served, was only a lesser **copy** of the heavenly **pattern** shown to Moses ([Ex. 25:40](#)).

8:6 The words than the old are not in the Greek but are supplied from the context for clarity (see vv. 7-13).

*Evidence for Jesus' superior ministry is found in the new covenant ([vv. 8, 13](#)), of which he is the mediator (see [9:15](#); [12:24](#); cf. [2:2](#)) and which is legally ordained (*enacted*) on **better promises**.*

On “promises,” see [4:1](#) and [6:12-20](#).

*The better promises of the new covenant
are cited in [8:8-12](#).*

8:7 if that first covenant had been faultless. The Mosaic covenant was not wrong; rather, it was weak and ineffective ([7:18-19](#)) since it could not bring people to perfection.

God's purposes in the old covenant (among others) were to inform his people of the moral law, to convict them of sin ([10:3](#)), and (prominently featured in the book of Hebrews) to establish the pattern of sacrifice, priesthood, and promise of

salvation that is fulfilled in Christ. Yet the inability of sinful humanity to achieve perfection under the old covenant required the promise of a second covenant, proving the ineffectiveness (i.e., the shortcomings) of the first.

8:8-12 he finds fault with them. God blames sinful humanity for the failure of the first covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-34, quoted here, supports several arguments in Hebrews: (1) this “second” covenant (Heb. 8:7) comes after the Mosaic covenant (**the days are coming, v. 8**); (2) it is established by the Lord (vv. 8, 13); (3) it is a **new covenant** (vv. 8, 13); (4) it is unlike the former covenant of the exodus (vv. 9, 13); (5) the former covenant failed because of the fault of Israel (**for they did not continue in my covenant, v. 9**; see v. 8); (6) this new covenant involves a transformation of the inner life of its recipients by writing God’s laws into their **minds and hearts** so that all **know** him (vv. 10-11; see 10:14-17; cf. 9:9); and (7) it brings true, final forgiveness of sins (8:12; see 9:15; 10:12-18).

8:13 *The new covenant makes the first one old (Gk. palaiō, here translated obsolete)—so old that it is becoming like a person of extreme age (Gk. gēraskō, here translated growing old) and thus is near to disappearing (ready to vanish away).*

Through a Better Covenant ([8:1-13](#))

[8:1-10:18](#) This entire section is an exposition of the New Covenant promised in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) and its contrast to the Old Covenant of law.

Men Die Once

First, this passage ([Heb. 9:27](#)) offers a direct answer to those tempted to flirt with any form of reincarnation. Second, it states the general rule for all humankind, with very rare and only partial exceptions. Lazarus had to die again (see John 14:43-44). Those, like Lazarus, who were raised from the dead by a miraculous act of our Lord were not resurrected to a glorified body and unending life. They only experienced resuscitation. Another exception will be those who don't die even once, but who will be "caught up... to meet the Lord in the air" ([1 Thess. 4:17](#)). Enoch ([Gen. 5:24](#)) and Elijah ([2 Kin. 2:11](#)) are also part of this last group.

The general rule for all human beings includes another shared event—judgment. The judgment noted here refers to the judgment of all people, believers ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)) and unbelievers alike ([Rev. 20:11-15](#)).

[8:1-5](#) A brief description of Jesus' priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary, which is better than Aaron's because He serves in a better sanctuary ([vv. 1-5](#); cf. [9:1-12](#)).

[8:1](#) main point. Here the writer arrived at his central message. The fact is that "we have" (current possession) a superior high priest, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed in the OT. *seated*. See notes on [1:3](#), [13](#).

[8:2](#) Minister. This is the same word used of the angels in [1:7](#). In [Jeremiah 33:21](#) it was used of the priests. *sanctuary*. Cf. [9:3](#). The holiest place where God dwelt (cf. [Ex. 15:17](#); [25:8](#);

26:23, 24; 1 Chr. 22:17). *true tabernacle*. The definition is given in the phrase, “which the Lord erected, and not man,” as well as in 9:11, 24 (cf. v. 5). It refers to the heavenly dwelling place of God.

8:3 *gifts and sacrifices*. See note on 5:1.

8:4 *not be a priest*. Jesus was not qualified to be a Levitical priest because He was not of the tribe of Levi. See note on 7:12-14. Because of its use of the present tense, this verse indicates that the Levitical system was still in operation at the time of writing, indicating it was before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 (see note on 5:1-4).

8:5 **The quote is from Exodus 25:40**. *copy and shadow*. This does not mean that there are actual buildings in heaven which were copied in the tabernacle, but rather that the heavenly realities were adequately symbolized and represented in the earthly tabernacle model.

8:6 *Mediator*. Cf. 9:15. The word describes a go-between or an arbitrator, in this case between man and God. See note on 1 Timothy 2:5 (cf. Gal. 3:19, 20).

better covenant... better promises.

See notes on 7:19, 22; John 1:17, 18.

This covenant is identified as the New Covenant in verses 8, 13; 9:15.

8:7 **Cf. the same argument in 7:11**. The older covenant, incomplete and imperfect, was only intended to be temporary.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek shows up abruptly and briefly in the Old Testament, but his special role in Abraham's life makes him a significant figure. He is mentioned again in Psalm 110:4, the passage under consideration in Hebrews 4:14-7:28. As the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God in the time of Abraham, Melchizedek offered a 'historical precedent for the role of king-priest (Gen. 14:18-20), filled perfectly by Jesus Christ.

By using the two Old Testament references to Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews (7:1-28) explains the superiority of Christ's priesthood by reviewing Melchizedek's unique role as a type of Christ and his superiority to the Levitical high priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood was hereditary, but Melchizedek's was not. Through Abraham's honor, Melchizedek's rightful role was established.

The major ways in which the Melchizedekan priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood are these:

- 5. The receiving of tithes ([7:2-10](#)), as when Abraham the ancestor of the Levites gave Melchizedek a tithe of the spoils.**
- 6. The giving of the blessing ([7:1](#), [6, 7](#)), as when Abraham accepted Melchizedek's blessing.**
- 7. The continual replacement of the Levitical priesthood ([7:11-19](#)), which passed down from father to son.**
- 8. The perpetuity of the Melchizedekan priesthood ([7:3](#), [8](#), [16, 17](#), [20-28](#)), since the record about his priesthood does not record his death.**

[8:8-12](#) Quoted from [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) (*see notes there*).

[8:9](#) *I disregarded them.* [Jeremiah 31:32](#) says, "though I was a husband to them." The NT writer is quoting from the LXX, which uses a variant reading that does not essentially change the meaning.

8:10 *mind... hearts.* **By its nature, the covenant of law was primarily external, but the New Covenant is internal (cf. Ezek. 36:26, 27).**

8:12 The LXX represents a slight expansion of the last sentence of [Jeremiah 31:34](#).

8:13 *ready to vanish.* **Soon after the Book of Hebrews was written, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and its Levitical worship ended (see note on 5:1-4; see Introduction: Author and Date).**

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

Hebrews 8:1-13

Main Idea: Jesus Christ ushers in a superior priesthood and a superior covenant, which the old covenant and its earthly priests anticipated.

- I. **The Superiority of the Great High Priest (8:1-5)**
 - A. The seat of the high priest
 - B. The sanctuary of the high priest
- II. **The Superiority of the New Covenant (8:6-13)**
 - A. The better covenant mediated
 - B. The better covenant fulfilled

God made a series of covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. For a congregation of Greek-speaking Jews, these covenants were of utmost importance.

But this author tells his audience that Israel's great covenantal history culminates with Christ, the guarantee of a superior covenant.

For the writer's audience, it would have seemed virtually impossible that a covenant better than the covenant made with the patriarchs could exist. Yet the author shows them the need for a greater covenant by pointing to the need for a greater priest.

The Superiority of the Great High Priest

Hebrews 8:1-5

Anyone who has ever translated a document from one language to another knows how difficult translation can be. In some sense, one reason modern day Christians think Hebrews is difficult to understand is because we constantly need to "translate" the author's and the audience's assumptions into our own day so that we can follow the argument better. At the beginning of Hebrews 8 the author greatly serves us by showing us the central thrust of his argument: "Now the main point of what is being said is this." In other words, the arguments and flow of thought in the first seven chapters may have been difficult to follow. But the author simplifies all of it to show us that "we have this kind of high priest." For the last seven chapters, he's told us what we've needed. Now he tells us we have exactly

what we need. We need Jesus as a great high priest who mediates a new and better covenant.

The Seat of the High Priest

In verse 1 the author says Christ is seated “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” This makes his priesthood completely different. The old priesthood was a terrestrial priesthood, which focused on the earthly calling of the priests. They became priests because they were born into the tribe of Levi. Priests from that tribe fulfilled this role over and over and from generation to generation.

But Christ, the great high priest, serves in an exalted status never occupied by those earthly priests. As such, he’s seated at the right hand of God on high. Paul describes Christ’s exalted position in [Philippians 2](#). He writes that Christ humbled himself by taking on human form, even to the point of dying on a cross ([v. 8](#)). Because of this obedience, God has highly exalted Jesus and has given him a name that is above every name ([v. 9](#)).

Christ’s seat at the right hand of the Majesty—a title for God—

demonstrates his exalted status. This imagery of “sitting at the right hand” is from the ancient world when kings would surround themselves with powerful nobles. **The person to the right of the king was the most powerful and the most prestigious noble in the royal court. Thus, Christ’s place at the right hand of God is a supremely exalted position.**

From his seat at the right hand, Christ continues his work as Redeemer.

Too many Christians think Jesus has already done all that he’s going to do for us. We look back to the cross and the resurrection and assume this is where his work ends. But two very important aspects of his work aren’t finished. For starters, Christ didn’t accomplish in his earthly ministry all the Messiah was foretold to accomplish. This didn’t make his mission a failure. Rather, Revelation tells us a spectacular fulfillment is coming. We’re still waiting for Christ to vindicate his church and judge the nations, so this aspect of his work is yet to be finished.... Additionally, Christ is not done mediating for his

people. While Christ's atoning work is finished, his advocating work is not. This mediatory work is the primary occupation of Christ in heaven. As Jesus sits at his Father's right hand, he intercedes for us. What a tremendous encouragement to reflect on Christ's active and ongoing work for his people!

The Sanctuary of the High Priest

In verse 2 the author mentions the "sanctuary" of the high priest. "The true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man" isn't just poetic language; it's very specific and exceedingly important. The word tabernacle is rarely used in modern American vocabulary, and it often sounds like some sort of spiritual buzzword. At its most basic, a tabernacle is the same as a tent. More specifically, tabernacle refers to the tent where God met with his people after the exodus from Egypt. Israel needed a tent as a place of meeting for several reasons. The most important reason was that they were wandering in the wilderness in those days. God had not yet commanded them to build the temple because they weren't in Jerusalem yet. Thus, the tabernacle provided a mobile place to meet with God.

Hebrews tells us Christ fulfills his ministry in a tabernacle that the Lord set up. It's not a tabernacle on earth; it's a superior tabernacle in heaven.

The tabernacle on earth was real, but it wasn't the place where full salvation was won. Full salvation takes place in the true tabernacle in heaven. Man does not make it. Only the Lord does.

Verses 3 to 5 detail the priest's duties in the tabernacle. It's here the author's argument gets really interesting.

When the priest went into the tabernacle, he didn't go empty-handed; he took a sacrifice. He had to "have something to offer." But Christ didn't fit the mold of a typical Levitical priest. The law stipulated that the high priest was to come through the Aaronic line, through the tribe of Levi. But Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, not Levi.

He's not an earthly priest from the line of Levi

that brings his offering to an earthly tabernacle. He ministers in the heavenly tabernacle, so Jesus brings a superior offering.

This is what verses 4 and 5 are saying. The priests on earth, Levitical priests, “serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5).

Since the author wrote to Jewish Christians immersed in Greek culture, it’s important to note the language of *shadow*. His audience probably would have been familiar with Plato’s parable of the cave. Plato (ca. 429–347 BC) argued that our knowledge is like that of a man who is kept in a fire-lit cave and only sees the shadows of real objects when he looks at the cave’s walls. Plato believed we only know things as shadows of the original; the real object cast the shadow in the firelight.

The Old Testament never presents the tabernacle as a shadow of something more real. The New Testament, however, emphasizes its shadowy nature. **Repeatedly the author of Hebrews shows us how to read the Old Testament. In this instance, he’s showing us how to understand the Old Testament tabernacle. Like the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle of old was inadequate. It displayed dimly the glory of God while pointing to something greater.**

Verse 5b notes that a careful reading of Exodus reveals a “pattern” for building the tabernacle. **This pattern helps us see that the earthly tabernacle was modeled after something else—namely, the heavenly tabernacle. God commanded the building of a tabernacle in which he would dwell among his people. Moses was to build the tabernacle in exactly the way God showed him (Exod 25:9,40).**

In Exodus 26 God issues remarkably detailed plans for the tabernacle. By using the language of shadows and copies, the author of Hebrews shows us that these detailed plans and specifications were meant to reflect deeper realities. The plans laid out in Exodus 26 were like plans for a replica of the real thing, which is the heavenly temple. As such, the earthly tabernacle was like a shadow dancing on the wall of a cave. But **we have a great high priest who**

does not offer sacrifices in a shadow. Jesus ministers in the true tent that the Lord set up. The heavenly temple is his sanctuary.

The Superiority of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13

As the writer will soon show us, **Christ's work allows us to directly and confidently enjoy God's presence.** We no longer have to come before God in a tabernacle made by human hands. Because Christ has fulfilled the tabernacle's purpose, we can draw near to the very throne of God. Heaven is God's true tabernacle. This great truth permeates the pages of the Old Testament. The King who ransoms his people from their iniquities and brings them peace with God has ushered in the new covenant by his blood. And that covenant is of far greater excellence than the first.

The Better Covenant Mediated

The old covenant wasn't without fault. Its faultiness wasn't like a machine in need of repair, though. Its faultiness was rooted in its incompleteness. **The old covenant was faulty because it was not final. If it were the final covenant, there would have been no need for a better covenant.**

Further, the old covenant came up short because it could not provide a priest who would make ultimate and full atonement for the sins of God's people. The old covenant's fault and failure to provide a final sacrifice for sin should have been obvious. **After all, under the old covenant there remained an unrelenting need for constant sacrifices.** This endless repetition of sacrifices demonstrated the covenant's incompleteness and its inability to deal with sin once for all time. **This makes Christ's statement on the cross all the more breathtaking. When he cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), he was announcing that the wrath of God toward the sin of his people was finally paid in full.** Never again would there be a need for animal sacrifice, for Jesus paid it all.

Furthermore, even the high priest of the old covenant had to make unrelenting sacrifices for his own sins before he could make a sacrifice for the sin of his countrymen. In the light of the new covenant, that's no gospel. But the author of **Hebrews is now declaring that the final priest has come**, not to atone for his own sins, but **to save his people**. Indeed, a better priest with a better ministry has come to mediate a better covenant enacted on better promises.

Jesus's ministry of inaugurating the new covenant is "superior" precisely because of these "better promises."

In the new covenant God will write his law on the hearts of his people (rather than on tablets of stone). As a result, all covenant members will know the Lord, and sins will be dealt with completely.

The Better Covenant Fulfilled

The new covenant promise is laid out in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#).

The author of Hebrews leads his readers to this text in [verses 8-12](#).

Jeremiah wrote to show that the Lord had long ago foretold the day when his final priest would come. The covenant community should have inferred from the sacrifices of old that a final sacrifice and a final priest—who would not have to sacrifice repeatedly—were coming.

Thus the author of Hebrews uses Jeremiah 31:31-34 to ask his readers, "Were we not told? Why did you not see?"

This is similar to the way he uses Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 to show them they should have been anticipating a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

God spoke through Jeremiah to announce the need for and the coming of a new and better covenant.

The picture Jeremiah paints is one of eschatological peace. This peace would come through the mediator of a new and better covenant. The terms of this new and better covenant would bring a peace infinitely greater than what the old covenant could produce. The extraordinary promise of the new covenant was not that God would dismiss the old covenant but that he would be merciful toward our iniquities and remember our sins no more ([Jer 31:34](#)).

Our greatest problem is sin, for it severs us from the presence of God. Our sin and his holiness are incompatible, yet God promised to reconcile sinful people to himself through the mediator who would inaugurate the new covenant. He chose to do this through his Son, Jesus Christ, the mediator who established the new covenant in his blood ([Luke 22:20](#)).

In him, the extraordinary promises and the better covenant were fulfilled.

The Lord is merciful to his people because Christ suffered and died in their place, and they are now hidden in him forever by virtue of their faith and repentance. In Jesus all the new covenant promises belong to God's people.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What main point has the author been making up until now? How does [Hebrews 8](#), particularly verse 1, connect to the previous chapters and summarize the author's main point?
2. How do the old covenant and the earthly priesthood anticipate the new covenant and a superior priest? Why do we need a superior covenant and priest?
3. Where is our great high priest now located? What makes that seat so significant? How does Christ's position help you persevere in your faith, particularly in times of trial and suffering?
4. Did Christ's work for us end with his death and resurrection? If not, then in what ways is Christ still at work? How is his current work significant for your life?
5. How does the author of Hebrews use the language of "copy and shadow"? Why is that language important? How does it relate to a heavenly tabernacle? What deeper realities do the earthly tabernacle and the contents of [Exodus 26](#) communicate?
6. Explain the differences between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly tabernacle. Why is it significant that one is made by earthly hands and the other is set up by the Lord? Why is the work of Jesus in the heavenly tabernacle superior to the work of priests in the earthly one?
7. What does it mean that the old covenant is not "faultless"? Where else in Hebrews have we seen the author point to the old covenant's faultiness?
8. In what ways is the priesthood of Jesus Christ better than the earthly priesthood? Why is it important that he's better? What makes the new covenant "much more excellent"?
9. Look at the promises of [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#). List ways the new covenant is better than the old. In what ways did Christ fulfill each of these promises? How does the new covenant deal with our greatest problem once and for all?

- Christ-Centered Exposition – Exalting Jesus in Hebrews.

Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant ([8:1-10:18](#))

(1) Jesus' Inauguration of the New Covenant ([8:1-13](#))

[8:1-2](#)

Hebrews 8:1-2 serves as a prominent transition in the overall discourse of Hebrews. There is an immediate connection with the previous paragraph in *7:26-28*, and a thematic connection with what follows through *10:18* Christ's high priestly work is developed.

There is a major shift in *8:1* indicated by the author's mentioning his point in writing and a semantic shift, where Melchizedek drops from the scene and the priesthood of Jesus in relation to the old covenant, sanctuary, cultus and law become the focus of *8:1-10:18*.

Westfall correctly noted that this entire section (*8:1-10:18*) contains no imperatives or hortatory subjunctives and is characterized by third person indicative finite verbs. *8:1-10:18* is the longest section of sustained exposition in the epistle.

Hebrews 8 contains two major discourse units: *8:1-6* and *8:7-13*, the latter being a lengthy quotation (the longest in the New Testament) of *Jer 31:31-34* which ends at v. 12, followed by a short explanatory comment by the author in v. 13.

Heb 8:1-6 is marked by lexical *inclusio* with the repetition of *leitourgos* (one who serves) in v. 2 and *leitourgias* (ministry) in v. 6. The author marks prominence in vv. 1,6 by the use of the first person plural in v. 1 and the use of *nuni de* ("but now") plus the reference to Jesus in v. 6. There is also a concentration of emphatic particles in this short paragraph. Ellingworth outlines the "broad logical structure" of the passage in syllogistic fashion:

The Jeremiah quotation is introduced by the subordinating conjunction *gar*, "for," and provides the grounds for the previous paragraph, especially for the statement in v. 6. The

prominence the author gives to v. 6 and the introduction of the quotation by a subordinating conjunction combine to furnish the theme of Heb 8:1-13 which is the superiority of the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus and the obsolescence of the old covenant as a result.

Lane surveys the three options for the metaphorical use of *kephalaion* ("point) in [v. 1](#). It can denote (1) the "main point" in an argument, the "gist" of something; (2) the summary or "recapitulation" of the main points of a subject; or (3) the "crowning affirmation" in a discussion. Lane rightly rejected the second view, and while aware that most commentators and translators opt for the first view, he argued for the third view. Option one appears to be the better approach contextually. **Koester correctly commented that the "point" here refers to the point of this discourse section, not that of the entire sermon, as the high priesthood of Christ is not the only point in the epistle.**

The posture of sitting at the right hand of the throne of God connotes both royal and priestly aspects. Here the author is bringing together [Psalm 110:1,4](#) at a critical juncture in his theological development. Similar statements have already been made in [Heb 1:3,13](#). That Christ, as the priest/king, is "seated" further separates the person and work of Christ from the Levitical priesthood in that no high priest ever performed priestly duties while seated. **There was no chair in the holy of holies.**

Furthermore, [Heb 10:11-14](#) stresses that every priest "stands" daily making the required sacrifices "which can never take away sins." Jesus, however, "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, *sat down at the right hand of God.*" **The finality of Jesus' sacrifice is observed in his seated posture at the right hand.**

Zechariah 6:11-13 speaks of a high priest who "sits" and "rules" on his throne:

Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two."

The phrase "the right hand of the throne" in [Heb 8:1](#) is left indefinite by most commentators with the implication that Christ is seated on a separate throne to the right of God's throne. Ellingworth argued the throne here is figurative, implying God's presence, but there seems little reason to take it this way. The phrase "in heaven" could be connected with "who sat down" but most likely is connected with "majesty" which is "in heaven." **In [Heb 8:1](#) the author alludes to [Ps 110:1](#) for the purpose of establishing that Christ as the high priest is not on the earth but in heaven. This point is a crucial linchpin for the author's argument in [8:1-10:18](#).**

Leitourgos, "who serves," in the LXX describes one who functions in the office of a priest in the tabernacle/temple. That this meaning is intended by the author is further confirmed by the description of the nature of ministry performed in [vv. 2-3](#). **The phrase "*of the majesty*" refers to God and is functioning as a surrogate for the divine name as was the case in [Heb 1:3](#).** The noun *leitourgos* is translated verbally as "who serves" in [v. 2](#) and refers to a priest who serves in the tabernacle/temple. The term is virtually synonymous with "high priest" with an emphasis on the activity of worship and priestly ministry. The "true tabernacle" is in parallel construction with "sanctuary." Some interpret the "sanctuary" as a reference to the holy of holies, and "the true tabernacle" as a reference to the heavenly temple in its totality. Others take the

phrase *tōn hagiōn*, "the sanctuary," to refer to the sanctuary as a whole. Other uses of the term in Hebrews are in [9:2,3,12,24,25](#); [10:19](#); and [13:11](#). **The comma after "sanctuary" signals an explanatory statement connecting two descriptions of one item.** That only one sanctuary is in view is bolstered by the author's frequent pairing of synonyms (as in [Heb 2:2,9](#); [4:16](#); [5:1,2,7](#); [6:12](#); [8:3,5](#)) and his contrasting the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries, not the different parts of the heavenly sanctuary.

The adjective "true" modifies both "sanctuary" and "tabernacle," and is emphatic by word order,

speaking of reality in contrast to a copy. The "true tabernacle" refers to the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells. There is no textual warrant for allegorizing the "true tabernacle" and making it refer to the church or to the body of Christ as did Aquinas and Calvin. [Verse 2](#) is in apposition with and identifies "high priest" in [v. 1](#), indicating the capacity in which Christ took his seat at God's right hand.

The theme introduced here in [8:1-2](#) awaits development in [Heb 9:11-28](#).

8:3 The author subordinates v. 3 to vv. 1-2 by the use of *gar*, which is untranslated in the NIV. The author is explaining that God appoints high priests to offer (present tense in Greek) gifts and sacrifices. The use of the present tense here and elsewhere in Hebrews to describe the activity of the Levitical priests offering sacrifices has iterative force and is contrasted with the aorist tense when the author is speaking about the final once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. However, although this can be construed as evidence for a pre-A.D. 70 date for the epistle, semantically this should not be pressed too far.

8:4 Since Jesus is also a high priest appointed by God, he too must have a sacrifice to offer.

The author does not develop this thought further, but rather echoes his comment in [vv. 1-2](#) that Jesus is not practicing his priesthood on the earth but in heaven. Semantically, that Jesus is not on the earth is encoded by the author in the contrary to fact conditional phrase **"if he were on earth, he would not be a priest."** **Koester captures the meaning exactly: "if he were on earth (but he is not), he would not be a priest (which he is)."** On earth there are already those who function as priests by offering "gifts" which the law prescribes. Jesus is not on the earth but in heaven, and there his priestly ministry is conducted. The use of the present tense participles expressed in the phrase "there are already men who offer" is "frequentative," expressing repeated action. Joslin correctly pointed out that *kata nomon*, "prescribed by the law," is used here in the sense of "the collection of Mosaic commandments that were to be obeyed by the covenant people. Here

the writer has in view the specific commands that detail the priestly duties. [Verse 4](#) could easily be read as 'according to the *commands* of the Law.'" The author's thought begins with the truth of Christ's heavenly priesthood and proceeds on that basis to the logical consequences that *ipso facto* must be true.

[8:5 Verse 5](#) continues the contrast between the ministry of the earthly high priests and that of Jesus in heaven. **Those earthly priests perform their**

ministries in a sanctuary that is a "*copy and shadow*"

of the heavenly sanctuary. This phrase, "copy and

shadow," would appear to be best taken as a

hendiadys rather than as connoting two separate

meanings. As proof of the claim that the earthly

sanctuary is a "copy," the author quotes God's

warning to Moses in [Exod 25:40](#) to build the

tabernacle according to the "pattern," *tupos*, which

had been shown to him on the mount. Lane pointed out how the

author has revised the meaning of *tupos* "by pairing it with [*antitupos*] 'copy' ([9:24](#)), so that [*tupos*] is to be understood as analogous to the pattern in the seal, and *antitupos* to the impression made by the seal."

The argument in [vv. 3-5](#) proceeds along the line of a comparison between the Levitical priestly

ministry on earth to that of Jesus' priestly ministry in heaven ([v. 3](#)). **Verses 4-5**

contrast the differences between the two ministries by

highlighting the superiority of Jesus' heavenly ministry on

the grounds that the Levitical ministry takes place in an

earthly sanctuary that is a "copy" of the heavenly. Although not

overtly stated by the author, the heavenly sanctuary, unlike the earthly sanctuary, was built by God himself. It is very possible that the author is making an allusion to [Num 24:6](#) in [Heb 8:1-5](#).

If this is the case, Gheorghita observed "this could have happened only as a result of the Author's reading the Greek text and not the Hebrew."

[8:6 Verse 6](#) shifts the topic back to Jesus.

The contrast is continued by the use of *de*, "but," followed

by a direct statement concerning the superiority of Jesus'

priestly ministry. A new topic is introduced with the words "as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one." **This topic will be developed by the quotation of Jer 31:31-34.**

The two concepts of "covenant" and "mediator" play significant roles from this point through [Heb 10:18](#).

The combination of "mediator" with "covenant" harks back to what was said in 7:22 and again comes into play in 9:15 and 12:24.

The author never uses the term "mediator" in Hebrews apart from "covenant."

A "mediator" connotes both one who is an intermediary for the purpose of settling a dispute and/or one who is a guarantor in a commercial sense who stands as surety for a debt or who ensures that a contract would be fulfilled. The use of the perfect tense for the ministry which Jesus "has received" highlights its abiding nature, a point well established in Hebrews 7.

The "covenant" is "better" because it was "founded on better promises." To this point in Hebrews, the author used "promises" to refer to God's promises to Abraham. Koester rightly said **the author does not use the term "covenant" in Hebrews to speak of God's promises to Abraham, but reserves his use of the term for both the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.**

8:7 A new paragraph begins with v. 7, signaled by the use of the subordinate *gar*, "for." The author lexically frames [Heb 8:7-13](#) with the use of *protos*, "first," in [vv. 7,13](#).

Two propositions are stated in v. 7: the first covenant was faulty, and as a result, a new covenant was initiated by God.

This first proposition is encoded by the author in a conditional clause: "if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant." Some take the position that the problem with the Mosaic covenant was not something so much endemic to the covenant itself, but that people failed to obey it. From this perspective, **the problem was more with the people than with the covenant.** One must admit that there is a measure of truth in this approach; people disobeyed the Mosaic covenant. **However, that God has replaced the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant suggests that the problem with the first covenant was more than just that people did not obey it. The creation of the new covenant shows that God never intended the old covenant to be permanent.**

The similarities between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are patent, but there is one crucial difference: the way each covenant deals with the sin problem.

This raises the question of why God would create an ineffective covenant in the first place. This question cannot be satisfactorily answered for the simple reason that Scripture does not speak to this issue here or anywhere else.

Some resolve the problem by suggesting the new covenant is a "renewal" of the Mosaic covenant, as did Calvin and many since his time. This position is attractive because it highlights the many similarities that do exist between the two covenants. Kaiser concluded in favor of this view based on context, content, and Jeremiah's use of the

Hebrew hadas (new) and Greek kainos (new), which frequently carry the meaning of "renewal" or "restoration."

Yet for all this, *kainos* points to the fundamentally new character and nature of the new covenant.

The Mosaic covenant was ineffective in solving the sin problem; the new covenant brought about a permanent solution to the sin problem.

Thus, it would appear one cannot describe the new covenant as merely a "renewal" or "restoration" of the old covenant.

A better interpretation of the dilemma is provided by Joslin who suggested that...

God initiated the Mosaic covenant knowing full well it would be ineffective in dealing with the sin problem. The Mosaic covenant was "anticipatory" of the new covenant in the sense that God had always planned for the new covenant. The first covenant did not "fail" but was rather insufficient by design. In this sense the old covenant fulfilled its God-given purpose.

This position was also articulated by Harrisville who demonstrated that the new covenant was "qualitatively" different from the old covenant in that "faithfulness to the person of Jesus determines whether or not one shares in the heavenly blessings, whereas under the old covenant the divine blessing was conditional upon faithfulness to the covenant construed as fulfillment of

its demands." Both covenants originated in the will of God and serve to express the single divine will.

According to Harrisville and Joslin, it is this fact which provides the continuity between the two, as well as the provisional nature of the Mosaic covenant.

At this point, *we need to study **the word diattheke, "covenant,"** as it is used in Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament.*

Of the **33 uses of the term in the New Testament, 17 occur in Hebrews.**

Ten of these occurrences refer to the Mosaic covenant. The new covenant is mentioned in Hebrews explicitly three times: [Heb 8:8-9:15](#); [12:24](#).

It is also referred to in [7:22](#); [8:6,10](#); [10:16,29](#); [13:20](#). **Implicitly the new covenant is referred to in [8:7](#) and [10:9](#).**

Only **twice ([Heb 9:16,17](#)) is the word given the translation "will" or "testament."**

The first two occurrences of *diathēkē* ([7:22](#) and [8:6](#)) both identify Jesus as the *engu-os* ("guarantee") and the *mesitēs* ("mediator") of a "better covenant." Whatever the new covenant is, it is "better," that is, superior, to the old covenant.

[8:8](#) [Hebrews 8:8-12](#) contains the quotation of [Jer 31:31-34](#) (LXX, Jer 38:31-34).

Jeremiah 31:31-34 plays a crucial role in the New Testament.

In addition to [Heb 9:15](#); [10:13](#); and [12:24](#), it is referenced by all three Synoptic Gospel writers as well as Paul concerning the Lord's Supper ([Luke 22:20](#); [Matt 26:28](#); [Mark 14:24](#); [1 Cor 11:25](#)). Paul makes two additional references to it ([Rom 11:27](#); [2 Cor 3:6](#)).

In [v. 8](#), "the time is coming" is (lit.) "days are coming," a favorite expression of Jeremiah occurring no where else in the prophets. The text indicates God is the initiator of the new covenant. In fact, throughout Scripture, all covenants between God and man are initiated by God and never by any man.

The word "covenant," *diatheke*, is the usual translation of the Hebrew *berith* (270 of 286 occurrences in the Hebrew text). The word never occurs in the LXX with the meaning of "will" or "testament," although this is the predominate meaning of the word in Hellenistic Greek. This covenant is a "new" covenant-the only time in the Old Testament where the new covenant is specifically mentioned. The Synoptic Gospels refer to this new covenant in the last supper narratives, but it is only in Luke's account ([Luke 22:20](#)) that the adjective "new" is used. Jesus' use of this terminology references [Jer 31:31-34](#). Furthermore, Jesus identifies the promised blessings of the new covenant in [Jeremiah 31](#) as being inaugurated by his death on the cross.

[8:9-10](#) In [v. 9](#), the author identifies the Mosaic covenant as being displaced by the new covenant since it was after Israel's exodus from Egypt that the Mosaic covenant was instituted by God ([Exod 20:2](#)). The reference to God's writing his "laws" on the hearts of his people has been taken in one of two ways: (1) internalization, and (2) completeness.

Contextually, both meanings seem to be in play. A problem that plagues interpreters in [v. 10](#) is the LXX's use of the plural *nomous* "laws" where the Masoretic text has the singular. Most likely Malone is correct when he says the plural emphasizes the specific laws of the Mosaic covenant.

Joslin's recent study of the use of *nomos* and its relationship to the new covenant in Hebrews is the best treatment of the subject to date. As he correctly pointed out, "law" and "covenant" should not be equated in [Jeremiah 31](#), and the author of Hebrews did not equate them since he never refers to a "new law," "first law," "second law," or "better law," yet all of these adjectives are used to modify "covenant."

As Joslin correctly argued concerning *nomos* in [v. 10](#), the reference surely must be to the Mosaic law and not some generic sense of God's "will" since the author would need some explanation if a different meaning was intended. Additionally, the law "written on the heart" is a common concept in the Old Testament always connected with the Mosaic law.

[8:11](#)

In Heb 8:11, the new covenant carries with it such knowledge of the Lord that it will no longer be necessary (emphatic negation in the Greek text) for one to teach his fellow citizen of the necessity to "know the Lord" because they will all know him.

Hebrews 8:11 exemplifies the contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.

Under the Mosaic covenant, teaching was a vital part of communicating the conditions and consequences of the covenant. Moses taught the people who in turn taught their children. It is unlikely this verse means there will no longer be any need for teachers, at least not until the eschaton. Certainly this is not the case at the present time, even though the new covenant is already in vogue. Furthermore, the author already stated the necessity for his readers to be taught ([5:11-14](#)).

It may be that this "knowledge of the Lord" refers to God's instruction for entrance into the covenant itself. Dods took it to mean understanding the details of the law. Huey argued that what was rendered "superfluous" by the new covenant was "exhortation rather than instruction." A better option is to recognize that the new covenant has eschatological dimensions to it. Although the new covenant has been inaugurated by Christ, this aspect of universal knowledge of the Lord awaits future fulfillment. From a premillennial perspective, perhaps the reference is to the status of knowledge of the Lord during the millennial reign of Christ. Another option is the reference could be to the eternal heavenly state.

Koester identified the two aspects of the meaning of "know the Lord:" recognition and obedience.

8:12 The quotation concludes in **8:12** with a final sentence introduced by *hoti*, "for," expressing the grounds for the preceding statements concerning universal knowledge of the Lord: God's promise to "forgive their wickedness" and "remember their sins no more." "I will forgive" is the translation of the Greek "I will be merciful." The result of God's mercy is his forgiveness. "Wickedness" is the translation of the plural noun *adikia*, which may in this context refer to individual acts of sin. The final clause is coordinated with the preceding clause by *kai* and contains the emphatic negation *ou me*. It reads according to the Greek word order: "their sins by no means I shall remember yet (or 'still')." The notion of not remembering sins is semantically equivalent to God's forgiveness of their sins.

8:13

The author's first comment in v. 13 following the quotation is vital and foundational to his argument in chapters 9-10.

The quotation began with the statement, **"I will make a new covenant."** **Now in 8:13 the author references that statement and draws a conclusion:**

Since God has called this covenant "new," he has declared the Mosaic covenant to be "obsolete."

The infinitival phrase *en tō legein* is given an instrumental translation: "by calling this covenant 'new,' he has made." It has also been taken temporally, as in the NASB, "when he said." The antecedent of "he" is God. The use of the perfect tense of *palaiōō*, "make

obsolete," highlights the permanent antiquated status of the old covenant. **Both participles in the final clause, literally, "what is growing old" and "what is aging," are governed by a single article, which indicates a single action is in view. The first participle is passive and the second is active: the Mosaic covenant has been declared old by God and is aging in the sense of being outdated.**

These two participles function as the compound subject of an understood equative verb "is" followed by the adverb "soon" and a noun meaning (lit.) "in the condition of being no longer visible." Louw and Nida take the meaning to be "will soon cease to exist." Whether this indicates that the Levitical cultus was still in existence at the time of writing cannot be determined with any certainty, though many have drawn such a conclusion.

The author determined in [7:18](#) that the Mosaic law has been abrogated because of its weakness. He now couples this with the Jeremiah quotation to conclude that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete.

As Jesus is greater than angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system, so the new covenant which he inaugurates supersedes and surpasses the old Mosaic covenant.

But one must ask, what is the relationship of the law to the new covenant?

How can the author of Hebrews conclude that the Mosaic law is incapable of bringing about perfection for the new covenant believer, as he states in [Heb 7:19](#), and yet quote Jeremiah in an affirming fashion concerning the Law being written on the hearts of new covenant believers? This has proven to be a thorny issue for interpreters.

Are we to conclude, as does Lehne, that the author of Hebrews is "perhaps not altogether consistent" in what he says concerning the Law?

Recently, the question has been most ably treated by Joslin, who sought to demonstrate the compatibility of a transformed law with the inward writing of the law on the hearts of new covenant believers. Joslin suggested a connection between the law of [Heb 7:12](#) and the new covenant of [Heb 8:10](#). After noting that many commentators remain silent or ambiguous on the question (such as Ellingworth and Koester), Joslin surveyed the two main views: the No-Correspondence View and the Direct Correspondence View. Those who see no correspondence between the Mosaic law and [Heb 8:10](#) generally interpret "law" in [Heb 8:10](#) to refer generically to "God's will" or "instruction." Regarding this approach, Joslin noted this view is "simply a way of saying that God is going to do an inward work that brings about obedience with no real connection to the laws of the [old covenant]. Thus, the promise is expressed in figurative language." Joslin offered three critiques: (1) How can *nomos* be reinterpreted by the author without giving indication as to the change in meaning? The law was central to the covenant. "To empty it of its meaning without explanation or rationale is problematic." (2) There is a certain inconsistency and ambiguity in the interpretation of *nomos*. (3) Proponents of the view offer no discussion of the use of the plural form *nomous* in [Heb 8:10](#).

By contrast, the Direct Correspondence View suggests that the promises of the new covenant provide for the internalization of the Mosaic Law in the hearts of believers. Joslin modified and expanded "in a more Christological direction" this view by suggesting the transformation of the Law involves "both the fulfillment and internalization of the Law." Laws concerning priesthood and sacrifice have been fulfilled in Christ and are thus non-binding on new covenant believers. At no point in the Old Testament or in Hebrews do we find any suggestion that the law itself must be replaced by a new law.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS. We are now prepared to examine the Old Testament's teaching concerning the new covenant.

Gordon offered the following summary:

1. God will establish in the future a new covenant which will differ from the old covenant in significant ways.
2. The new covenant is necessary because God's people failed to obey the old covenant.
3. All members of the new covenant community will know God personally.
4. The law will be internalized; each member of the new covenant community will receive a "new heart."
5. Sin will be dealt with once and for all.
6. In some way, the new covenant will reunite Israel and Judah.
7. The new covenant will be eternally effective.
8. An individual will be involved with the establishing of this new covenant.

Of these eight, only six are contained in the Jeremiah passage itself. Ware finds four "new" elements in the covenant in [Jer 31:31-34](#):

1. a new mode of implementation-internalization of the Law
2. a new result-a "full and lasting" faithfulness to God
3. a new basis-full and final forgiveness
4. a new scope of inclusion-"from the least to the greatest"

Koester identified four main elements of the new covenant:

1. God will write his laws on the hearts of the people.
2. The promise "I will be their God and they shall be my people" is at the heart of the new covenant.
3. All the people will know God fully to such a degree that further teaching will become unnecessary.
4. God will remember sins no more.

Paul Williamson offered the following summary of the new covenant. (1) It will be both national and international-this is born out in [Isa 42:6](#); [49:6](#); [55:3-5](#); [56:4-8](#); [66:18-24](#). "Thus the new covenant projects the ultimate fulfilment [*sic*] of the divine promises on to an ideal Israel... located in a rejuvenated universe ([Isa 65:17](#); [66:22](#))," Such a notion is not foreign to the intent of God's original promise in that from the very beginning God made it "clear that ethnic descent from Abraham was neither sufficient ([Gen 17:14](#)) nor essential ([Gen 17:12](#)) for inclusion among the people of God." (2) The new covenant will involve both continuity and discontinuity. The discontinuity consists in complete removal of sin, an inner transformation of heart, and an intimate relationship with God. All three underline the new covenant's most important aspect of discontinuity with the old: its indestructibility. (3) The new covenant will be both climactic and eternal.

In some sense previous divine covenants find their culmination in this new covenant, for this future covenant encapsulates the key promises made throughout the Old Testament era (e. g., a physical inheritance, a divine-human relationship; an everlasting dynasty; blessing on a national and international scale), while at the same time transcending them. Thus, the new covenant is the climactic fulfillment of the covenants that God established with the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the dynasty of David.

We are now prepared to consider the theological implications of [Heb 8:1-13](#).

First, one is immediately struck by the use of first person language in [Jer 31:31-34](#). No less than four times God says "I will." By such language, God is establishing that the covenant originates with him alone and he in a sense obligated himself to bring about its fulfillment.

Second, that [this covenant is made with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah"](#) makes it clear that God intends a reunification of the divided nation. In addition, [Isa 55:3-5](#) is usually interpreted as referring to the new covenant and here Isaiah speaks of the inclusion of Gentiles, although they are not addressed directly as specific recipients of God's covenant. What is referenced by Isaiah concerning the Gentiles becomes specific in the New Testament, especially **in [Hebrews 8](#). Here all Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are part of the new covenant.**

The greatest emphasis of Jeremiah and of the author of Hebrews is on the forgiveness of sins brought about by the new covenant.

When the shorter version of [Jeremiah 31](#) is quoted by the author again in [10:3](#), the same words concerning the forgiveness of sins are used.

The author concludes the extensive doctrinal section of [8:1-10:18](#) with a twofold reference in [10:14](#) and [10:18](#) to the forgiveness of sins having come under the new covenant.

Such a *final forgiveness is based upon the final sacrifice of Christ which inaugurated the new covenant.*

Jesus' statement at the last supper ([Luke 22:20](#)) as well as [Heb 8:1-10:18](#) both establish that Jesus' sacrifice for sin accomplished precisely what the new covenant required and that his death on the cross was, in fact, the inauguration of the new covenant.

While it is clear that many of the specific aspects of the new covenant were also a part of the old covenant, it is highly unlikely that Jeremiah was somehow using "new" in an ironic sense for the purpose of shocking his readers out of complacency. Fischer argued that what was "new" in the new covenant was its internal nature and that the power of God through Christ enabled believers to obey it. He took "obsolete" to refer to "outdated" rather than to carry the sense of "annulled," and he interpreted the phrase "ready to disappear" as not actually equivalent to having disappeared. In this way Fisher argued that the new covenant was somehow a renewal of the old covenant. He was joined by Kaiser.

We conclude that the new covenant is a continuation of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants with the same single, promise doctrine sustained in them all. No features have been deleted except the ceremonies and ordinances of the "old" Mosaic covenant whose phasing out was planned for long ago.

Kaiser continued:

The key to understanding the 'better covenant' of [Hebrews 8:6](#) is to observe the equation made between the Abrahamic promise ([Heb. 6:13; 7:19, 22](#)) and the new covenant ([Heb. 8:6-13](#))... The **Mosaic covenant** did have its faults ([Heb. 8:7](#)), not because of a fault in the Covenant-making God, but because many of its provisions were deliberately built with a planned obsolescence.

Against this notion of renewal stands the issue of the ineffectiveness of the old covenant's treatment of sin. F. B. Huey argued against the "renewal" viewpoint as did Keown, Scalise, and Smothers. McComiskey noted that the context of [Hebrews 8](#) mitigates against the "renewal" proposition: in [8:13](#) "the meaning of the word *new* (*kainos*) is determined by the linear relationship with the word *obsolete*. It is 'new' in relationship to an obsolete covenant, not in relationship to the promise." The direct statement in Jer 31:32 that this new covenant will not be "like the covenant I made with their forefathers" is discontinuous with the old covenant in terms of both scope and power.

Perhaps there is a sense in which we can speak of the new covenant as new and yet also in some sense as renewed.

The new covenant is new in terms of the internalization of the law and the ultimate forgiveness of sins which it effects. It is renewed in the sense that the law itself is not abrogated but has continuing validity. But what is indisputable is that, for the author of Hebrews, the new covenant replaces the old.

Ware spoke of the new basis for the new covenant as being that forgiveness reaches a new level. The sacrificial system in the Old Testament was a mechanism to deal with the sinfulness of God's covenant people. The new covenant has no such mechanism. In answer to the question of how this can be, Ware responded, "God will base his new covenant not simply on the forgiveness of past sin and its guilt but rather on the removal of all sin in all its respects, ensuring then, by his Spirit, that there will be no further need for forgiveness once sin is fully and finally abolished." This, of course, awaits future fulfillment in the eschaton.

The author's use of the new covenant theme from [Jeremiah 31](#) in Hebrews further stresses the continuity of salvation

history of the church with Israel. The Abrahamic covenant stresses the future of Israel in a literal fulfillment. The new covenant is now in effect; its blessings are experienced by the Church, but in a future time all of the new covenant promises will be realized by Israel ([Romans 11](#)) together with Gentiles who are also a part of the new covenant through Christ.

Some have taken the position that the new covenant is applicable to Israel, with the Church being only the "beneficiary of the new covenant." Such a view has been effectively refuted by McComiskey in his *The Covenants of Promise*. Others have espoused the view that there are actually two "new covenants," one for Israel and one for the church. McComiskey's critique is again potent on this point:

If something as monumental as a new covenant for the church—distinct from Israel's new covenant—had been instituted in the economy of God, one wonders why there is no record of its initiation, and why it is cited with no clear distinction from the new covenant of [Jeremiah 31](#). When reading a context like [Hebrews 8:6-13](#), one goes immediately from a reference to the better covenant, ascribed to the church in this view, to the covenant of [Jeremiah 31](#), ascribed to Israel. The absence of any definitive contextual delineation of the allegedly different covenants is, to say the least, confusing and suspicious. The most natural reaction of the reader is to identify the two covenants as one.

Here is the crux of the issue: the author of Hebrews applies Jeremiah's new covenant to the Church and yet the Old Testament connects the new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah in a future fulfillment.

As Ware says, **these two seemingly disparate views are reconciled "when we permit the fulfillment of such eschatological promises to take both a preliminary and partial ('already') fulfillment as well as a later full and complete ('not yet') realization."**

Hermeneutically, one cannot spiritualize the many Old Testament promises concerning God's intention to restore Israel to the land by applying those promises somehow to the Church. There is no New Testament warrant for doing so. Only a literal fulfillment of these promises makes hermeneutical sense when comparing the Old Testament to the New Testament on this issue. Spiritual aspects of the new covenant are presently in vogue. However, **geographical and political aspects of the promises made to Israel await fulfillment in the future.**

This "already/not yet" eschatological outlook best describes the author of Hebrews' perspective...

...and as Ware perceptively observed, parallels the same two-stage manner of messianic prophetic fulfillment.

Finally, **Dunnill pointed out** the author of Hebrews' respect and appreciation for the old covenant and that **the new covenant is superior to the old not only in degree but in kind.** However, Dunnill failed to catch the author's clear meaning as to the status of the old covenant once the new covenant is in place. When he said that the author does not promote the new covenant by "setting aside the old" and that the criticism of the old covenant "does not amount to a dismissal," he has missed the point that...

the old covenant is no longer in effect, period.
Following in its train is the entire sacrificial system.

A point often lost on some is that the author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament Scripture to prove that the old covenant with its sacrificial system was never intended to be permanent. The author of Hebrews considers the Old Testament cultus to constitute "the human imitation of a preexistent divine model" according to Vanhoye. In addition, the author's use of *hupodeigma*, which is better translated as "outline" or "model" rather than "copy," **illustrates that for the author, the cultus has a prophetic function because it prefigures the realization of God's plan.**

Thus, the old covenant with its sacrificial system has been superseded by the new covenant, but such is not some clever invention of a New Testament author; rather, it is by the very design of God himself. Furthermore, in spite of this fact, the author never devalues the Old Testament; he rather uses it to prove his point.

