



LET US DRAW NEAR IN *Truth*

SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 8:1-13

To better understand why Jesus is the superior high priest.

Read the Text:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister 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. 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. 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. (Heb. 8:1-13, ESV)

Study the Text:

Summing It Up

Verse 1 begins with an almost jarring statement: "Now the point of what we are saying is this" (Heb. 8:1). Any great communicator knows the importance of making statements like this. Often, while explaining a difficult or complicated concept, the speaker will have to go on several "side quests" to make sure he/she has adequately addressed all of the aspects of whatever it is they are communicating, which can sometimes result in the reader/listener not remembering what the main point was to begin with! So a statement like, "All of that

to say,” or “to sum things up” is helpful in bringing the reader/listener back to the main idea. That is *precisely* what we find in Hebrews 8:1. Beginning in Hebrews 4:14-16, the author explains that, like the old covenant, the new covenant has a high priest, and that this high priest is none other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ. However, this would have shocked readers, as they knew Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi. The author, therefore, explains in Hebrews 5:1-10 that the Son was appointed to a different priesthood by God. Then, in Hebrews 5:11-6:20, he exhorts his readers before returning to the topic of priesthood. First, he explains the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham (and by extension, Levi) in Hebrews 7:1-10, and then in Hebrews 7:11-28, he explains the superiority of Jesus as the final, eternal high priest.

Surveying that stretch of writing, it is not difficult to see how someone might forget what the main point was! So chapter 8 begins by “summing up” all of that: “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest” (Heb. 8:1a). This has not been an exercise in theological navel gazing. The author wants the readers to be aware that we, the church of Jesus Christ, have such a superior, eternal priest, and that he is presently “seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man” (Heb. 8:1b-2). Jesus Christ is not merely a “man,” but the God-man who is eternally *true God of true God*, as the Nicene Creed states. And this God-man is not only a superior priest, but he serves in a superior sanctuary as well.

THE COPY AND SHADOW

The author of Hebrews makes the case that Jesus Christ serves in the heavenly sanctuary, which served as the model for the design of the old covenant tabernacle. In Exodus 25:40, after Moses was given extensive directions on how to build the tabernacle, God says to him: “And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.” Moses was given a vision on the mountain of the heavenly reality of God’s sanctuary to ensure that the copy, that is, *the tabernacle*, would resemble it. This verse is actually quoted in Hebrews 8:5 to drive this point home, which verse 2 already established, that Jesus “serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not man.” One way Jesus can be identified as a superior priest in a superior priesthood is his superior sanctuary. Aaron and the subsequent high priests served in a sanctuary that was merely a copy of the real thing. Jesus, on the other hand, serves in the real thing, and he does so still.

PROPHECY OF A BETTER COVENANT

It would have been controversial to suggest that the new covenant is superior to the covenant of Moses. In fact, Jewish people would have likely pushed back against this idea with great angst. The author, therefore, reminds them that this was predicted in the Old Covenant by the prophet Jeremiah. Verses 8 through 12 quote Jeremiah 31:31-34, in which God promises to establish “a new covenant” that is “not like the covenant” he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt during the Exodus. The chief difference is that, unlike the Old Covenant, which was not kept by the Jewish people and therefore resulted in judgment (Heb. 8:10), the New Covenant will be kept because God will put his “laws into their minds” and “write them on their hearts” and “be merciful towards their iniquities” and “remember their sin no more” (Heb. 8:11-12). That God promised his people this new covenant through Jeremiah indicates that this was always his plan. The author is not at odds with Old Testament scripture. On the contrary, he is confirming it.

Obsolete?

In light of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews makes his point: “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” (Heb. 8:13). The word “obsolete” is the Greek term *παλαιῶ* (*palaiōō*), a word that

means something like “to wear out, or become old.” It conveys the idea that the Old Covenant, like a well-worn piece of clothing, can no longer function as it was intended and should be retired, or “is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). To “vanish” comes from the Greek term ἀφανισμός (aphanismos), meaning “to disappear, be destroyed.” Significant debate has been had over this. How can Hebrews make the claim that the Old Covenant has grown obsolete and is vanishing when Jesus himself said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). The answer lies in understanding what “abolish” and “fulfill” means in light of what Hebrews is arguing.

First, understand that Jesus “fulfills” the law by bringing it to its intended goal. Consider, for a moment, the blueprint of a building. To “abolish” the blueprint would mean to discard it before construction began. That is not what Jesus did, nor is it what Hebrews is arguing. The construction law, metaphorically speaking, not only started, but was completed or “fulfilled.” What need is there for a blueprint after construction is complete? You don’t need to revisit the blueprint; you can simply visit the building! Jesus’s fulfillment of the law marked its completion, negating the need for the blueprint. That is the argument being made by Hebrews: the Old Covenant has reached its terminus in Christ.

What About Now?

The author of Hebrews is not saying the Old Covenant failed or is being “replaced” by a New Covenant, but rather that the New Covenant is the necessary culmination of Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Covenant. Everything in the Old Covenant pointed to Christ, but Christ has come and brought to completion all of those things. Food laws are transformed (Mark 7:19). Temple worship is fulfilled in Himself (John 2:19–21). Passover becomes the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22). Circumcision gives way to the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2; Col. 2). The old laws are obsolete in light of the completed work of Christ. The law was leading somewhere, and that somewhere is Christ, and it arrived. That is not to say that the moral law of God (which predates the Mosaic law) has also become obsolete. It is to say that the old law of Moses has been completed, and a better covenant, mediated by a better high priest in a better sanctuary, has arrived.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 8:1-2. What is “the point” the author has been making? Why is Jesus superior?

2. Read Hebrews 8:3. Why was it necessary for Jesus to make an offering as high priest?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 8:4. Does Jesus serve in a sanctuary on earth? Why not? Where does he serve?

2. Read Hebrews 8:5 and Exodus 25:40. What is verse 5 saying about Jesus's sanctuary?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 8:6. How does Jesus's covenant compare to the Old Covenant?

2. Read Hebrews 8:7. Why was there a need for a New Covenant?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 8:8-12 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. What are the differences between these two passages? What is God promising in these passages?

2. Read Hebrews 8:13. What has become of the Mosaic covenant? Why?

Discuss the Text!

Session 19 Discussion: The Same Faith

It's easy to feel as if Christianity is drastically different from Judaism because of the lack of practices in the church that are described in the Old Testament. However, Hebrews reminds us that the absence of these practices is not evidence of a different faith but of a mature faith. Christianity is the culmination of those things. Talk as a group about how this shapes the way you read the Old Testament.

1. Icebreaker: What's one practice you associate with Judaism that you don't associate with Christianity?
2. Do you ever read the Old Testament and feel like it's describing a totally different religion?
3. Read Exodus 12:1-14 and 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. How does Paul's description of Christ as "our Passover lamb" help explain why Christians no longer celebrate Passover in the same way Israel did under the Old Covenant?
4. Read Genesis 17:9-14 and Colossians 2:11-12. According to Paul, how has Christ fulfilled the covenant reality to which circumcision pointed?
5. Leviticus 11:1-23 and Mark 7:14-23 (or Acts 10:9-16). How do Jesus's words about true defilement explain why Christians are no longer bound by Israel's dietary laws?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus mediates the New Covenant eternally from the heavenly sanctuary.
2. The Old Covenant has been made obsolete because Christ fulfilled it.