

Hebrews

Chapter 8

The High Priest of a New Covenant

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. ³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” ⁶ But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. ⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” ¹³ By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Ch 8 “We teach that the sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been enough for the sins of the whole world. There is no need for other sacrifices, as though Christ’s sacrifice were not enough for our sins. So people are justified not because of any other sacrifices, but because of this one sacrifice of Christ, if they believe that they have been redeemed by this sacrifice. So they are called priests, not in order to make any sacrifices for the people as in the Law, that by these they may merit forgiveness of sins for the people. Rather, they are called to teach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to the people. Nor do we have another priesthood like the Levitical, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches well enough” (Ap XIII 8–10). (TLSB)

8:1–10:39 The argument of this section grows out of an exposition of Jer 31:31–34 and demonstrates that Christ is the mediator of a “better covenant” (7:22). (CSB)

8:1 *seated at the right hand.* Christ ascended to reign and exercises full divine power according to His human nature. (TLSB)

the Majesty in heaven. A Jewish expression for God (see 1:3). (CSB)

God the Father. (TLSB)

heaven. The dwelling of God; not the sky or a merely physical location (cf Eph 4:10). (TLSB)

8:2 *minister.* Gk *leitourgos*, an official assistant or minister. Here, one who performs a priestly ministry. (TLSB)

in the holy places. Or, “of the holy things.” (TLSB)

true tabernacle. In contrast to the tabernacle erected by Moses, which was an imperfect and impermanent copy of the heavenly one. (CSB)

Heaven, which Christ entered after He rose from the dead. (TLSB)

set up by the Lord, not by man. The heavenly sanctuary built by God corresponds to the Most Holy Place, the innermost sanctuary in Moses’ tabernacle, into which the high priest briefly entered with the blood of atonement once a year (see Lev 16:13–15, 34). In the heavenly sanctuary, however, our great high priest dwells eternally as our intercessor (7:25). (CSB)

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

Cf Lv 9:6–7, 22. Just as the OT high priests offered animal sacrifices to God, Christ fulfilled His priestly ministry by offering His body on the cross. He then distributes the benefits of His sacrifice and intercedes for us. (TLSB)

8:4 *he would not be a priest.* By his human birth Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, which was not the priestly tribe (see 7:12–14). (CSB)

Because He was not from the priestly tribe of Levi. (TLSB)

men who offer the gifts. Members of the tribe of Levi. The present tense of the verb “offer,” here and elsewhere in the letter, indicates that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. This letter, therefore, must have been written prior to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70 (see Introduction: Date). (CSB)

8:5 *a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.* The heavenly reality is the sanctuary of God’s presence, into which Christ our high priest entered with his own blood (see 9:11–12). (CSB)

OT tabernacle foreshadowed Christ’s person and work. See notes, 10:1; Col 2:17. *heavenly things.* John Chrysostom: “What are the heavenly things he speaks of here? The spiritual things.

For although they are done on earth, yet nevertheless they are worthy of the Heavens. For when our Lord Jesus Christ lies slain [as a sacrifice (cf 10:12)], when the Spirit is with us, when He who sits on the right hand of the Father is here, when sons are made by the Washing ... how can all these be other than ‘heavenly things’?” (NPNF 1 14:434). (TLSB)

make everything according to the pattern. Because both the tabernacle and its ministry were intended to illustrate symbolically the only way sinners may approach a holy God and find forgiveness. (CSB)

8:6 *the covenant of which he is mediator is superior.* See 9:15; 12:24; 1Ti 2:5. The new covenant (see vv. 8–12; Jer 31:31–34) that Jesus mediates is superior to the covenant God made through Moses at Sinai (see Ex 24:7–8). (CSB)

founded on better promises. See vv. 10–12. (CSB)

Forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who repent and believe in Christ (cf vv 8–12). (TLSB)

8:7 *if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant.* The line of argument here is similar to that in 7:11, where the Levitical priestly order is shown to be inferior because it was replaced by the order of Melchizedek. Similarly, if the Mosaic covenant were without defect, there would have been no need to replace it with a new covenant. Concerning the fact that there was nothing essentially “wrong” with the Mosaic covenant see note on 7:18. (CSB)

The old covenant’s limitations anticipated perfection in Christ’s work. (TLSB)

8:8–12 A quotation from Jer 31:31–34 containing a prophetic announcement and definition of the new covenant, which was to be different from the Mosaic covenant (v. 9). Its superior benefits are: (1) God’s laws will become inner principles (v. 10a) that enable his people to delight in doing his will (cf. Eze 36:26–27; Ro 8:2–4); (2) God and his people will have intimate fellowship (v. 10b); (3) sinful ignorance of God will be removed forever (v. 11); and (4) forgiveness of sins will be an everlasting reality (v. 12). (CSB)

8:8 *establish a new covenant.* The promise of the Gospel had been with humanity since Gn 3. At the cross, it would be put into effect. (TLSB)

8:9 The old covenant, despite being given in the miraculous time of the exodus, was not kept by Israel. (TLSB)

8:10 *laws into their minds ... hearts.* Renewal or sanctification. Luth: “To be in the mind means to be understood; to be in the heart means to be loved” (AE 29:198). (TLSB)

I will be their God. The adoption of sinful humans to be God’s people. Luther: “This light of understanding in the mind, I say, and this flame in the heart is the law of faith, the new law, the law of Christ, the law of the Spirit, the law of grace. It justifies, fulfills everything, and crucifies the lusts of the flesh. Thus St. Augustine says beautifully on this passage: ‘In a sense

the man who with a love of righteousness lives righteously lives the Law itself ” (AE 27:234). (TLSB)

8:11 *they shall all know Me.* The saving knowledge of God and the Spirit’s gifts will become much clearer. Many more nations will know God. On the Last Day, all people will see the Lord, some with joy, but others with weeping (1Co 13:12; Mt 13:41–42). (TLSB)

8:12 *For I will be merciful.* People will grow in knowledge of God to receive His mercy for Christ’s sake. (TLSB)

8:13 *obsolete and aging.* The announcement of the new covenant clearly proved the impermanence of the one already in existence. To return to the old system would be to return to what is no longer valid or effective. (CSB)

The first covenant is a shadow of the second and fades in the brightness of Christ’s new work. (TLSB)

Ch 8 The old covenant, because it could not permanently address the problem of sin, would “vanish away.” As Priest, Christ came to establish an everlasting covenant and atonement for our sins. • O merciful God, forgive us our sins for the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice. Amen. (TLSB)