

## The Book of Hebrews Study Guide

### Chapter 8

Having demonstrated in chapter 7 that Yeshua qualified for the high priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, beginning in this chapter, the author sets out to describe how the priestly sacrificial ministry of Yeshua is superior to that of the Levitical priests.

#### The better ministry of Yeshua (8:1-6)

- v. 1 – We are given another allusion to Psalm 110. In chapter 7, the author referred a number of times to verse 4 of that Psalm, which affirms the Son being a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Verse 1 of that Psalm depicts Adonai saying to the Son, “sit at My right hand” and verse 2 incorporates the use of a scepter. So that imagery is fully consistent with the description of Hebrews 8:1. With that background in mind, then, what is significant about Yeshua being described as having “taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens?”
- Since kings always sat on thrones, this is an undeniable depiction of Yeshua ruling over the world. Yeshua is both the Son of God and a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, so He alone is qualified to do all of the things cited in Psalm 110—rule alongside the Father, judge the nations, exercise wrath.
  - Since the act of taking of His seat is in the past tense (aorist indicative), it indicates a completed work. This is consistent with the recurring theme of His sacrifice and atonement being done once for all.
- v. 2 – Yeshua is called “a minister in the sanctuary.” The word translated as sanctuary is *hagiōn*. The author’s usage of the term is unique among biblical writers. He is the only one to use it in the context of the temple or the holy of holies. Paul, for example, consistently uses the word in reference to believers, in the sense of saints, not buildings (i.e. Rom 8:27; 12:13). But here in Hebrews it is clearly about the place where the high priest carried out his responsibilities in the holy of holies. That is where Yeshua is said to serve as a minister. But He never did that on earth. Instead, it was in what is called here “the true tabernacle,” which will be developed in greater detail in verse 5.
- v. 3 – We are given a logical argument. Every priest is “appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices.” Yeshua is a priest. Therefore, it is necessary for Yeshua to do the same thing—offering both gifts and sacrifices. But if He never did those things, He wouldn’t be a true high priest. That is why it is essential that He had such an opportunity.
- v. 4 – The logical argument continues. It was impossible for Yeshua to serve as a high priest on earth because He was ineligible according to the Torah, which stipulated that only the descendants of Aaron could serve as priests, and Yeshua was a descendant of the tribe of Judah. Moreover, there was no other place on earth where He could serve because God had declared that His divine presence would dwell only in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the two temples (cf. 1 Chr 17:4-5, 11-12). So that means there had to be another holy place beyond the earth for Him to carry out His ministry.

- v. 5 – The author calls the places where the priests served on earth a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” The Greek word (*hupodeigma*) translated as “copy” (KJV, example), literally means “something shown under something else.” It is a picture of an original that is out of view because all you can see is the copy on top of it. The word translated as shadow is *skia*. When used figuratively, it has the sense of a similarity in form, but not identical in substance. It is analogous to the Hebrew word *tselem*, which is typically translated as “image,” but has a root meaning of shadow. That term is used to describe the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26, where God declared His intent to make man in His “image and likeness.” Once again, it is about superficial similarity, but not identical substance.

The point is that the tabernacle and the two temples were not originals. They were copies, and, like shadows, they only had a similar form to the original, which is identified here as being in heaven. This wasn’t a radical revelation of something entirely new. The Torah had already established this reality in Exodus 25. And verse 40 of that chapter is quoted here in Hebrews. The Greek word translated as “pattern” is *tupos*, from which we get the English word, “type.” It has the sense of something being stamped with an outline or a shape, which also conveys repetition and similarity. It is the meaning behind typology in the Bible, in which people and objects serve as types for greater biblical concepts. In chapter 7 the author used Melchizedek as a type for a divine priest. And now he is demonstrating how the holy place of the tabernacle and temple was a type for the heavenly holy place. Adonai is giving in this chapter very specific instructions regarding the place where His divine presence would dwell.

In Exodus 25:8-9 God called upon the Israelites to “construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.” That was followed by a description of each of the elements that needed to be constructed. The last verse is the one that is quoted in Hebrews 8:5 about doing the work “after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.”

Some people say that Moses literally saw a heavenly sanctuary that he had to recreate on earth. Others say that there was no actual heavenly sanctuary and that these words are just symbolic, meaning that God downloaded the pattern without Moses ever literally seeing it. The text supports the former. At the beginning of this passage, God said “I am going to show you” (v. 9). Afterward, at the end, He said “was shown to you” (v. 40). The Hebrew verb *ra’ah*, translated as “show” is overwhelmingly used in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) as “see.” In passages where it is used, the common denominator is actual vision involving your eyes. There are a few places where it is used to convey a sense of understanding that is received mentally, and in such cases, the meaning is apparent contextually. Another consideration is that the tense of the verb used in verses 9 and 40 is never used symbolically in the *Tanakh*. In other words, the original language precludes any option that does not entail literal vision. Moses saw with his own eyes an actual structure that he had to recreate on earth following the pattern that he saw and was described by Adonai while Moses observed.

The key to our understanding is that the ultimate holy place was never on earth but in heaven, and that Moses just had to build an earthly copy.

- v. 6 – Based on this reality, the author shifts the focus to the ministry that took place in the copy and original holy place. He calls the ministry of Yeshua as being more excellent [than the

Levitical priests]. And He is “the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” The author is drawing a parallel between the way that the earthly sanctuary was a shadow of the heavenly one and the way that the Mosaic Covenant was a shadow of the New Covenant of Yeshua. We see that same concept expressed in Colossians 2:16-17.

### **The better nature of the New Covenant (8:7-13)**

vv 7-8a – Notice that the author refers to the Torah (Law) as the “first.” The emphasis here is on what came first and what came second. Some translations include the word “covenant” in verse 7, but that word is not in the original text. He doesn’t use the word “old” either in this verse. He will deal with that aspect later in verse 13. So it is more accurate in this context to think about the order of the covenants—first and second, not old and new.

He argues in verse 7 that since another covenant was necessary, the Mosaic covenant was faulty. It is important to recognize that the Torah was given by God, so that gives it the highest level of divine approval. Paul writes: “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). If everyone keeps it perfectly, there are no flaws exposed. But the problem is that the fallen nature of humanity makes that impossible. And that is brought out in verse 8 where fault is placed on the people of Israel in failing to keep the Torah. That is consistent with people being prone to sin, and according to Romans 7:7, a key purpose of the Torah was to reveal what sin is. Unfortunately, however, the Torah does not provide a solution to sin. It only points it out and provides a means of punishment for disobedience.

Another flaw is that the Torah was susceptible to abuse. That is brought out in Paul’s discussion in 2 Corinthians 3:6 in which he contrasts the “letter of the law” approach of the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant being guided by the Spirit. He states that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” In other words, keeping the Law can easily turn into a legalistic approach. The Law can be likened to a computer. Left alone, the machine can function as intended. But it is vulnerable to being hacked. And then all kinds of problems can arise, including the machine no longer being able to function.

So the great faults of the Mosaic Covenant are its lack of a solution to sin and that it was susceptible to abuse. That is more than just putting blame on the people. The covenant itself was faulty.

v. 8b – Beginning in the second part of verse 8, the author puts forth the New Covenant, which does not have those faults. This is largest quotation in the entire New Testament taken from the *Tanakh*. The quotation contains the answers to the questions, why is the New Covenant better? And why does the New Covenant have better promises?

But first, consider what we know about the New Covenant from the gospels. When Yeshua was observing the last Passover with His disciples, He declared; “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk 22:20). This was symbolic of His death less than 24 hours later. In the Ancient Near East, all covenants were ratified by a sacrifice. So more precisely, Yeshua’s death is the ratification of the New Covenant. It sealed the deal. But nowhere in the gospels are the terms of the covenant spelled out. They are only found in Jeremiah’s prophecy and here in Hebrews 8. So if you want to know the full picture about the New Covenant, you have to consider carefully the words of the covenant itself.

In every covenant, there is always a declaration of who the parties are. In this case, the

parties are Adonai and the houses of Israel and Judah. By including references to the northern and southern divided kingdoms, the Lord is showing that this covenant is made with all of Israel.

How, then, do Gentile believers in Yeshua share in the benefits of the New Covenant? Some people claim that the terms “house of Israel” and “house of Judah” should be interpreted as the Church and it has replaced Israel. But there is nothing in the text to suggest that is true. It is not consistent with Jeremiah’s original intent, or the way that the audience of his day would have interpreted it. The very next verse (9) certainly does not sound like the Church. It clearly refers to the people of Israel, whose fathers were led out of Egypt and later didn’t continue obeying His commandments. So you can’t pick and choose what parts of a passage suit your purposes in proving your point, and ignore the rest. You have to read it in context and in this cast the context is undeniable in showing that the New Covenant was made with the Jewish people.

It is only in the greater context of Scripture that we gain some additional details. The inauguration of the New Covenant occurred between Yeshua and His disciples, all of whom were Jews. And as the book of Acts begins, the New Covenant community continued to share that same ethnic character. Then we know that with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the sending of the believers to the nations, God had affirmed the inclusion of non-Jews into the blessings of the New Covenant. He did that by virtue of their adoption as sons through the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal 3:7), being granted fellow citizenship (Eph 2:19) and their grafting in to the olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17-24).

### **The provisions of the New Covenant**

#### **1. It is new, meaning separate and distinct from the Mosaic Covenant (vv. 8-9).**

Some people who are Torah observant like to call it the Renewed Covenant. But linguistically that is not possible. It is true that the Hebrew word *hadash*, as in *Brit Hadasha* (New Covenant), can either mean “new” or “renew.” But the same is not true in Greek. *Kainos*, the Greek word used here and translated as “new” does not allow for that meaning. There are two other words for that (*ananeo ’ō*, *anakaino ’ō*). So calling it the Renewed Covenant sounds good to such proponents, but it is not supported in Scripture. This is an important point especially for Messianic believers who tend to derive meaning from Hebrew alone. The fact of the matter is that God has communicated His message in both languages very intentionally. And since this passage in Hebrews eliminates “renew” as an option, this covenant can only be something that is qualitatively new and did not exist previously. The grammar is reinforced by the statement in v. 9 that it is “not like the covenant I made with their fathers.”

#### **2. God’s laws are internalized (v. 10).**

There is a question whether these laws are a reference to the Torah or a general set of commandments. Grammar is again critical to our understanding. Here, *nomous*—the word translated as laws, is in the plural. But in the other twelve references to the Torah in Hebrews, the word is always in the singular—*nomos*. So that suggests that this is not a specific reference to the Law of Moses. But the main point is that the principles guiding or governing the lives of the people are not just an external set of standards, but they have actually become part of the thinking of the recipient. Your motivation to do what God commands arises from within, rather than being compelled to do so. That is consistent with Yeshua’s teaching that calls for us to take personal responsibility for our thoughts that lead to our actions, including the commandments themselves.

**3. The promise of spiritual regeneration (v. 11).**

People who no longer need teachers have become the kind of person who has the righteousness of God. They are not the person they were before. And that is consistent with the New Testament concept of becoming a new creature in Messiah (2 Cor 5:17).

**4. The promise of a personal relationship (v. 10).**

The historical problem of the Jewish people is that possession of the Torah did not guarantee their devotion to Adonai. They were constantly drawn away to other gods, or in recent times, no god at all. The New Covenant establishes a very different kind of intimacy and relationship.

**5. The promise of the forgiveness of sins (v. 12).**

Forgiveness is part of the Torah. But there are two distinctions with the New Covenant. The Torah bases forgiveness on carrying out acts of atonement, while the emphasis here is on mercy. And nowhere in the Torah does it say that God “will remember their sins no more.” So the New Covenant brings out a permanence that was not manifested previously.

**6. The covenant is everlasting and irrevocable (Jer 31:35-37).**

Another characteristic of Ancient Near East covenants is that they set terms of duration. We don't see that aspect in the book of Hebrews because the author cuts off his quotation before reaching the end of the actual passage in Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 31:35-37, Adonai attaches a permanence to the covenant as long as universe exists.

**7. The promise of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27):**

We further know from a related passage in the book of Ezekiel that when God gives us a new heart and gives us the ability to walk in His statutes, He will also place the Spirit within us.

Altogether, the New Covenant is very different from the Mosaic Covenant. It is based on a spiritual regeneration, a changed heart and a new way of thinking that leads to a personal relationship with the Lord, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness to sins, all of which are everlasting in nature. Clearly it is a very different covenant that God made with Moses.

What, then, are the implications of the New Covenant originally being made with the Jewish people? God will keep His promises fully to the House of Israel and the House of Judah, just as He declared. A day is coming when all of the promises in this prophecy will be fulfilled literally. And that day is the millennial kingdom yet to come. That truth is consistent with many other biblical prophecies. And it is consistent with Paul's proclamation:

“all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins’” (Rom 11:26-27).

So the corporate or national aspect of the New Covenant is still in the future. But in the meantime, it is a reality on a personal level—a remnant of believing Jews joined together with grafted-in believing Gentiles. Thus the nature of the New Covenant is similar to the Kingdom of God in a major way. Like the New Covenant, the substance of the kingdom is already present and we can enjoy the blessings today, but the physical realization of the kingdom will not come about until the return of Yeshua.

- v. 13 – The author concludes this section with a statement regarding the place of the Mosaic Covenant after the inauguration of the New Covenant. He uses three terms: “obsolete, growing old, ready to disappear.” The first Greek word, *palaio 'ō*, does not simply mean “old.” If the author had just wanted to convey a sense of antiquity, he would have used the word *archaios*, from which we get the English word archaic. *Palaio 'ō* literally describes something that is worn out. Yeshua used that word to describe clothes that are worn out and useless and worn-out wineskins that can’t hold wine any longer (Mat 9:16-17). So we are told here that coinciding with the arrival of the New Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant had become worn out or obsolete. There were still sacrifices taking place in the temple, but they were ready to vanish away or come to an end with the destruction of the temple, which was imminent.

That tells us that the Mosaic Covenant is no longer binding. By making it obsolete, God terminated the agreement. He could do that because unlike the Abrahamic Covenant, Adonai had not sworn an oath obligating Himself to the continuation of the Mosaic Covenant, regardless of circumstances. In fact, from the very beginning, Adonai established a means for terminating the agreement. For He declared to the people at the base of Mt Sinai:

“*if* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6).

They failed those terms exceedingly. So it was God’s prerogative to pull the plug, but not before He provided a replacement—the New Covenant.

It is important for us to be clear about what has been replaced. This is not about the individual commandments of God. It is the binding agreement of one covenant being obsolete and vanished, and a new one taking its place. So today, our only option is to agree with the terms of the New Covenant if we desire to be accepted by God. He has set the terms—believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God and the one who gave His life in our place because of our sins. It is His covenant, so He can set the terms however He likes. And He provides no other options. So we are obligated to receive them, otherwise we are not able to participate in the benefits.

At the same time, we are no longer obligated to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. It no longer determines whether you are His possession. So any group that teaches observance of the Law of Moses is mandatory for believers in Yeshua is in error. All we have to do is to read about the ruling of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 to see how that is so.

On the other hand, Yeshua showed that the commandments themselves have not ceased being our guide for godly living. He upheld what Moses recorded, then went even deeper in terms of how our inner thinking is even more important than our actions when it comes to righteousness. He participated in the feasts, worshiped on Shabbat, and loved His neighbor as Himself in practical ways. The same is true for Paul and the early believing community, during the days after the New Covenant had replaced the Old Covenant in terms of what God required.

So this is the key to our understanding—the obligations of the Old Covenant had become obsolete, but not the ways of righteous living that have a foundation in the Torah and a fulfilled application by Yeshua.