

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 20 September 9, 2018

The Better Covenant

Hebrews 8 : 1 - 7

Introduction to Chapter 8

Chapter 7 has begun to lead us directly into the truth and understanding of Jesus' role as our High Priest – its basis (of the order of Melchizedek; eternal; His suitability for that role; the results of that role [7:25 – He saves to the uttermost]; and His contrast to the Levitical Priesthood – accentuating His superiority to that OT order of priests; He will never die; He was chosen for that role in that He did not seek it out; and in all this, He has the power of an indestructible life.)

Of course, this idea of leading us up to Jesus' High Priestly ministry is not confined to chapter 7 only. Our first hint is found in 1:3; then 2:17-18; 4:14-5:6; 5:8-10 and 6:19-20. Then chapter 7 supplies us with an incredible expansion of the OT personage of Melchizedek, and how he prefigured (as a type) Christ in His role as a Royal High Priest.

This brings us to Hebrews 8:1-2, and the main point of the author's intent.

Tom Schreiner points out:

“The main point...of the preceding is now set forth for the readers. The main point is: “We have this kind of high priest.” What the author means by this is that Jesus matches the description of the Melchizedekian priest in chapter 7. He is the ever-living one, the one who always did the will of God, and the one whose sacrifice accomplished forgiveness of sins. The oath and promise of Psalm 110:4 find their fulfillment in him. In addition, what is written in Psalm 110:1 points to Jesus. He is David's Lord and sits at God's right hand until his enemies are made a footstool. The author alludes to PS 110:1, affirming that Jesus sat down at God's right hand in the heavens. Jesus is the reigning and ruling priest-king and exercises authority as the messianic king. The words “Majesty in the heavens” point to God's awesomeness and his transcendence. Since Jesus sits at the right hand of one who is so great, he also exercises transcendent power.”¹

Chapter 8 will concentrate our attention not only on the New Covenant and its relationship to believers but will focus its light on the Mediator of that New Covenant – our Lord Jesus Christ!

We Have Such a High Priest

vv. 1 - 2

There is a lot that can be gleaned from Psalm 110 regarding Melchizedek, and we also saw that in chapter 7, but what is left unclear is: by what means the order of Melchizedek was established, and what its purpose is. The Holy Spirit has left that for

¹ Tom Schreiner, Commentary on Hebrews, Holman Reference, 2015; p. 242

us to discover in the inspired writing of the author of Hebrews – especially in chapter 8. Now, the amazing significance of Melchizedek and his priestly order becomes known.

The really astounding point is made in v. 4; that “the ascension was necessary for Christ to assume His priesthood. Hebrews 8:4 reports this clearly, stating that, had Christ remained on earth, he could not be a priest at all.”²

Earthly priests offered sacrifices according to the Sinaitic law- the Mosaic Covenant, which regulated and delineated sacrifices first in the tabernacle, then in the Temple. But based on the statutes of that law and that covenant, Jesus was not qualified to be a priest because He was a descendent of Judah – the Davidic line, not the Levitical (Heb. 7:14-16). His descent from David was necessary so that He could biblically / legally fulfill the promises of the Davidic Covenant, as a king (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 110:1 & cf. Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49:8-10). So Jesus’ priesthood could not be Levitical in origin, because He had to keep the law perfectly or be disqualified as our substitute. Any usurping of the role of a Levitical priest on earth would be a breach of the law since He did not have the family credentials to be that order of priest.

But, as our eternal Mediator, He must take the role of our High Priest – this is emphasized throughout Hebrews, and some of those emphatic verses and passages have been examined by us in this class. But now, this is where the priestly order of Melchizedek comes in. Robert Peterson comments; “God in his providence established a greater priesthood so that Christ could offer a greater sacrifice that brought all other sacrifices to an end, while respecting the Mosaic Law. The Ascension allowed him to do this.”³

When He ascended (*passed through the heavens*’), He was free of any earthly laws which might have bound Him not to be a High Priest, but the earthly priesthood was but a shadow of His ultimate role in our salvation. In the heavens , He can take up His position rightfully, lawfully, as priest and King by means of His perfect sacrifice (propitiation) to the Father. “By his ascension Christ entered into the role of the priest in the order of Melchizedek, prophesied in Ps. 110:4, allowing him to serve a greater salvation than was ever possible through the law of Moses.”⁴

William Perkins points out that, as a result of our sin, we often doubt that God is willing to forgive us. Yet, Christ is the only solution for such despair. It is Jesus’ entrance into God’s presence that guarantees our acceptance with God. Perkins makes his point on Heb. 8:1 this way;

“Christ’s priesthood consists of two parts: oblation and intercession. In simple terms, Christ’s oblation is His sacrifice. It was offered to make atonement by giving God a full and adequate satisfaction for the sins of His people. The second part of Christ’s priesthood is

² Robert W. Peterson, Salvation Accomplished by the Son, Crossway, 2012, p. 175

³ IBID, p. 175

⁴ IBID, p. 175

His intercession. In heaven, Christ presents Himself before God on behalf of His people. In this way, he guarantees the application of all that He procured by His crucifixion and resurrection...His presence in heaven guarantees the application of all He accomplished by His death, burial, and resurrection. In short, it guarantees the forgiveness of our sins.”⁵

Stephen Wellum explains “Why the cross?”

“Why Christ’s cross? Since God is the law, he cannot forgive our sin without satisfying his own holy and righteous demand. God cannot pass on our sin or relax the retributive demands of his justice because he cannot deny himself. Sin is not against an impersonal order outside of God; it is against him. In fact, for then triune God to pardon sinners without the full satisfaction of his own moral character is to question whether he is the ultimate objective moral standard of the universe.”⁶

Then, Wellum further explains why God could not just forgive sins;

“If God chooses to forgive our sin, he must do so only as the holy and righteous God. This entails that if God chooses to save, he must also satisfy his own righteous requirements, which he has gloriously done in the giving of his own Son. The cross then becomes absolutely necessary to redeem us; apart from it there is no holy and just forgiveness of our sin. In union with his people, our Lord, the divine Son willingly becomes our Mediator to stand in our place and meet God’s own demand against us. In his eternal counsel, the triune God planned our redemption and enacted and secured it on the stage of human history. In Christ alone, he, as the divine Son incarnate, perfectly, finally, and completely met our need.”⁷

In verse 2, a curious phrase presents itself: *“a minister in the holy places in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.”* [in KJV / NASB & HCSB – “tabernacle”] Then in Heb. 9:24, we are told; *“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”* The author wants to ensure that we are clear that the ministry of Christ – ongoing and eternal – is situated now in heaven, in the *‘true tabernacle’*. This theme continues on in vv. 4 – 5, which we will look at shortly.

But then the need to interpret comes up. Is the ‘true tabernacle’ a real tabernacle in heaven? Or is it symbolic? This is a similar challenge that comes up throughout the Book of Revelation; what is symbolic and what is literal? Tom Schreiner, who has been a great guide through this book, thinks it is symbolic, but here I am inclined to disagree with him, because of vv. 4-5. Here is how Schreiner envisions this;

“Jesus sits at the right hand of the one who rules in the heavens (v.1), and the true tabernacle is not earthly but heavenly. Here we see an example of the writer’s spatial and eschatological theology. On the one hand the earthly is not ultimate, it points up spatially to what is heavenly. At the same time there is an eschatological dimension to the writer’s thought, for the tabernacle erected in Israel pointed forward to the tabernacle Jesus would enter upon his death and resurrection. Hence the earthly tent is not ‘false’ but rather temporary and points to something greater. When the writer says the Lord ‘pitched’ the

⁵ William Perkins, cited in: Taking Hold of God, Joel R. Beeke & Brian G. Najapfour (eds), Reformation Heritage, 2011, p. 80

⁶ Stephen Wellum, Christ Alone, Zondervan, 2017, P. 214

⁷ IBID, p. 218-219

tabernacle, he is scarcely suggesting that there is a literal tabernacle in the heavens. The language is analogical instead of univocal. The true tabernacle, then, designates the presence of God, the place where God reigns and rules. Jesus is the greatest priest since he dwells in God's presence and ministers in the heavenly realm where God dwells."⁸

Since he is a New Covenant Theologian, I understand why Schreiner says this, but I believe he dismisses the heavenly tabernacle as a real tabernacle too quickly in light of vv. 4-5; plus consider Rev. 8:3-4; 11:19; 14:17 & 15:5-8; plus Exodus 24:9-12. To dismiss the reality of the surroundings of the place where God sits on His throne, Jesus at His right hand, is in my opinion, a bit hasty. There is quite obviously a spiritual aspect to these pictures of the heavenly throne room, but remember, Jesus is there, as a man, resurrected and still holding the scars of His scourging and crucifixion in His body, on that throne at God's right hand. Is a spiritual throne and scene appropriate for that?

As theologian, Greg Gilbert reminds us,

"Jesus is human, and He always will be. Right now, sitting on the throne of the universe, is a human being. When He judges the entire world, He will be human. For all eternity, age after age, God is human and always will be. He didn't just put on human skin like a coat, only to take it off again when He got home to heaven. He became a man – heart, soul, mind and strength – a man!

Just imagine for a minute how much the Son of God must have loved human beings to decide that, yes, He would become a human forever. He had existed for all eternity, the second person of the Trinity, in perfect and harmonious and beautiful relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and yet He decided to become human, and He knew when He did it that He would never be not-human again. There's only one thing that would lead the Son of God to do that: He deeply loves us, and you can see that fact in every detail of His life."⁹

So then, what about those scenes of heaven's throne room in Job 1 and 2; in I Kings 22:19-23; in Isaiah 6, and in Zechariah 3? Symbolic only? Heaven is a place, so, while it may be difficult from our perspective to discern symbolic language from literal language, why immediately choose the symbolic, when the literal is a real possibility?

The 'Gifts' of Priests

v. 3

The very point of a priesthood – of those being appointed as priests is so that they will present gifts and offerings to God on behalf of the people they represent before God – note Heb. 5:1 & Eph. 5:2.

If human priests were to offer gifts and sacrifices, then it follows that Christ, as High Priest, must also have something to offer, or why call Him a priest? And in v. 3, what He has to offer is singular, "*something*". He does not offer a plurality of things, not gifts and sacrifices, but "*something*." One thing. Jesus' current heavenly ministry is

⁸ Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 243

⁹ Greg Gilbert, Who is Jesus?, Crossway, 2015, p. 70-71.

intercession, not offering, in the sense that every time we sin, He has to come up with another offering. So, based on that, this ‘something’ He had to offer took place in the past in relation to this verse. This something is not continuing [although the value of it lasts throughout eternity] and is not ever going to be repeated. This offering was “*once for all*” (Heb. 7:27). It took place on Calvary’s cross!

Philip Hughes, citing Thomas Aquinas, offers this comment:

“What distinguishes Christ’s offering, as compared with the sacrifices of old, is that it was pure, since his flesh had no stain of sin (Ex. 12: 5)...it was appropriate, since it is appropriate that man should make satisfaction for man...and it was suitable for sacrifice, since his flesh was mortal (Rom. 8:3).”¹⁰

What Christ had to offer was so much greater than any priest on earth had ever offered or could ever offer. Christ offered up Himself – cf. John 10:17-18 –
17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

The Pattern on the Mountain

vv. 4 - 5

It has already been explained (cf. Heb. 7:11-14) that since Christ did not belong to the Levites, He could not act as a priest on earth, thus His priesthood belongs not to earth, but to the sphere of heaven. That in no way brings any doubt on His sacrifice as the Incarnate Son – and His priesthood now, as we’ve seen, as a result of His Ascension, is heavenly, eternal; not earthly or temporarily.

One further point of vv. 4-5 – notice that the tense of the verbs regarding the earthly priests is in the present; “*priests who offer gifts*”, and “*they serve*”. This is a strong indicator that Hebrews was written and circulated prior to 70 AD, while the Temple at Jerusalem was still standing and operative, because the priests were still doing their jobs.

These current earthly priests, serving in the Temple and within Jerusalem and its outlying suburbs, were serving in a copy or replica of the heavenly ‘original’. So, the earthly system was a shadow of the true heavenly system. This was no accident or coincidence as verse 5 states. Moses had followed God’s detailed instructions for building the Tabernacle. He was not given free architectural reign to build it any way he pleased. Every detail had a particular purpose. In fact, at least 5 times between Exodus and Numbers, Moses records that he built it according to the plans for it that were shown to him on the mountain. – cf. Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30; 27:8 & Num. 8:4.

Of course, this raises a question, doesn’t it? What was Moses shown on the mountain as the prototype for the tabernacle? Did he see a vision of heaven? Did God lay out

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, cited by Philip E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, Eerdmans, 1987, p. 290

detailed visible plans like a blueprint before Moses? Commentators are divided over how these plans or patterns were given to Moses, in essence, because God's Word does not share that detail with us. The actual heavenly realm cannot be reduced to a scale model can it? It transcends all that we know or can experience – we just cannot comprehend or imagine what the scene in heaven is actually like.

Something we can be certain of is that Moses did oversee and follow the plan of God to the letter, so that the tabernacle turned out exactly as God wanted it to be. We can also be certain that we – on this side of the NT – can decipher more clearly than Moses did the typological significance of the edifice he built (cf. I Pet. 1:10-12). Yet, obviously, mysteries remain, even though we have been born into the privilege of greater light, and until we get to heaven, even we have no possible sense of what wonders and awe await us. Through all of this, we find that Jesus has opened up this heavenly sanctuary, and although we don't see it all, we do revel in our view of the Scripture in which the way to God's throne of grace has been made accessible to us, whereas before His actions as the Second Adam and our forerunner behind the veil, as sacrifice, Mediator and High Priest, we were excluded as sinners.

The author's concern is "to set before us the great realities of the eternal redemption that God has provided for us in His Son."¹¹

What is the New Covenant and Who is Affected By It?

Before we start getting into Hebrew's explanation of the New Covenant and its benefits, I thought it would be prudent to examine exactly what the New Covenant is and who it affects. I suspect that most of us have not given much thought to the New Covenant and aspects of it, as it is espoused in Jeremiah 31 (and elsewhere). We've been generally taught it and heard it being connected to Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, and thus, it is a promise made to both Israel and by transference, in the church age to Christian believers. For Covenant theologians, this is a 'no brainer' – of course that's what it's about! Because to them, the Church has replaced Israel forever.

However, for Dispensational believers (as we at Emmanuel are), it is not as simple as that. We believe that Israel has been set aside only temporarily (cf. Romans 9-11 & especially Romans 11, vv. 25-26) and for a divine purpose. Notice Jeremiah 31:31-37. Based on Paul's points in Romans 9-11, the Church acquires the benefits of the NC to 'make Israel jealous', and so the church gets the enjoyment of the benefits, although they were originally promised quite specifically to Israel, but Israel will also, at a later date receive those benefits in full measure. Some of Israel who are now part of the Church are receiving some of those benefits now. The NC is a major benefit / promise to Israel, but for them, it will not be realized fully until Jesus returns to reign in the Millennial Kingdom after the Tribulation.

¹¹ Hughes, Hebrews, p. 295

So it should not surprise us that there is a Dispensational debate over who benefits from the NC, because it is such an important promise that we need to see who is affected by it.

There are 5 major views of this:

1. The church replaces national Israel and fulfills the NC in the present.
2. There are 2 NC's: one for Israel and one for the church.
3. The NC is exclusively for Israel and will be fulfilled by Israel in the future.
4. The church partially fulfills the NC now; Israel completely fulfills the NC in the future.
5. The church presently participates in the NC; Israel fulfills the NC in the future.¹²

By the way, this is my view.

As in a lot of Biblical Theology, we encounter phrases or concepts that we assume we know well enough, yet when we begin to study them and / or apply them, we start to recognize that there are nuances or even swaths of meaning we had never considered, which now reshape our understanding of Scripture, and of Christ especially. Case in point is our study of the Person of Christ in this class 2 years ago.

In looking at the NC, a very evident focus in the next few chapters of Hebrews, as the 5 points above show, there are factors we must face and decide how to interpret them in light of the NT and especially Hebrews. We must come to grips with this important concept and promise and assess what – if any – impact it has on our own Christian lives.

Traditionally, for me, up until early this year, I recognized Jeremiah 31:31-40 and Ezekiel 36:22-38 as the main NC passages in the OT, supported by the idea that, although these passages were obviously spoken by God through His prophets in an OT context, when Jesus says, in Matthew 26:27-28, “*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it all of you, for **this is my blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’*” And when Paul states in 2 Cor. 3:6, “*...**ministers of the new covenant**...*”, or when the AH in 7:22 says, “This makes Jesus the **guarantor of a better covenant**.”, or in 8:13, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete...”, after having just quoted Jer. 31:31-34; Num. 19:7, and Jer. 31:33 a second time, and then Hebrews 9:15 & 12:24 call Jesus “**the mediator of a new covenant**..”; then my understanding of what this NC was is that it was in force when Jesus came on the scene and died, and was resurrected and serves as our Divine intercessor / High Priest. For me this was settled, although I never pursued it beyond those basics.

However, I attended a lecture series at DBTS this spring with Pastor, Brad, Jeff and Tim, and heard Dr. Roy Beacham share his view of the NC that “The church has no legal relationship or participation in the NC”, I was, to say the least, taken aback. Knowing I was about to teach this fall on Hebrews 8 and following, I had to really

¹² Bruce Compton in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant*, Mike Stallard, editor, Regular Baptist Books, 2012; p.242

scramble to be sure of what I was teaching on this subject of the NC. I had to be able to understand it enough that I could share with this class what I really believe about this incredibly important theme, which, in chapter 8 is about to confront us face to face! Dr. Beacham's argument, unfolded logically over 3 hours of lectures seemed sound, and I could sense the points of my first lessons in chapter 8 beginning to crumble to the floor.

I read the book – “Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant – 3 Views” (Mike Stallard, Editor), which was available at the lecture hall, which explained the 3 views (there are actually 5 main views, as we have already seen), in which Dr. Beacham had written a chapter, and responses to other views. The 3 views examined in this book are:

1. The church has no legal relationship to or participation in the NC” This is Dr. Beacham's view, and incidentally, it is also Dr. Jeff Straub's view – he calls it “the traditional view”.
2. The church has an indirect relationship to the NC – this is Elliott Johnson's view.
3. The church as a direct relationship to the NC. This is Rodney Decker's and Bruce Compton's view.

It is not my intention to examine all 3 of these views, but rather, to explain why I have chosen the view I will use to teach Hebrews 8-10. I will mention, that after much study, I have rejected Dr. Beacham's view, because his belief hinges on how an OT covenant is ratified (put in place), so obviously, if it has not been ratified, then it is not now in force, and must be relegated to an as yet unfulfilled prophecy. In the book I mentioned above, Beacham defends this idea;

“A fourth widespread misconception concerns the chronology of the new covenant. Many seem to believe that the new covenant was ratified at the cross when Jesus Christ shed His blood to atone for the sins of the world. This supposed moment of ratification, however, contradicts the teaching of the NC passages, both Old and New Testament, which speak specifically about the time when the covenant is ratified. Numerous NC passages address temporal details that describe and define the moment of covenant enactment. These passages invariably say that ratification will take place at a particular eschatological time and place, after detailed eschatological events, all of which are future to our day. No text of Scripture says that this covenant was ratified at the cross. Also problematic to this view is the fact that covenants as legal instruments were not enacted by means of sacrifice but by means of oath, and no oath was sworn at the cross. NC ratification is neither chronologically nor formally ambiguous in the Scriptures.”¹³

He never seems to explain what that oath is though, so if the idea of ratification to be so specifically adhered to the effects of the NC cannot be felt until the Eschatological Kingdom, for me, that leaves the Incarnation, the Cross, resurrection, ascension, High Priestly ministry and all the implications of those things relegated to simply space and time fillers until the end times, rather than things bringing us along to the end times.

¹³ Dispensational View, Roy Beacham, p. 109

As I considered the arguments of this book from the 3 different viewpoints, and as I studied Hebrews 8-10, and ran across the implications of the NC in other books, I had to conclude that Dr. Beacham's argument, as well articulated as it was, is simply off the mark. Furthermore, I reject the first 3 views in the series of 5 on page 7 of these notes as well, and settle on either point 4 or 5 – gravitating more to point 5, as a result of the wording of point 4, “the church partially fulfills the NC now”. I find point 5 more accurate, because we are participating, not fulfilling. Since the NC replaces the old Covenant (Mosaic), then a large aspect of the argument (whichever view you settle on) has to do with how the OT Law is replaced.

I was surprisingly helped considerably by points made by Sinclair Ferguson, in his book – “The Whole Christ”. In this book, Ferguson brings up the NC and the verses he cites helped me to better understand when the NC comes into force initially. What follows is rather lengthy, but I believe we will all find it helpful;

“The notion that there was a distinct ceremonial law that has now been fulfilled and abrogated, civil law that governed the people as a nation that had now ceased to function since God's people are an international community, and moral law (the Ten Commandments) is thus viewed as alien to the Scriptures. The beauty of the traditional three-fold division lies only in the eye of the beholder, not in the biblical text. The law of Moses, in its entirety, has ceased to have a binding role in the new covenant. It has no binding authority in the life of the believer. The law of Moses governed its own epoch; it does not govern the new epoch inaugurated by Christ. We are “not under law but under grace” [Rom. 6:14], and live by the Spirit.”(p. 143)

“It should be a working principle of our interpretation of Scripture that it does not set law and grace over against each other in absolute terms.

When John says that: “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” [JN 1:17], the relationship he sees between grace and law is not antithetical but complementary. Christ's ministry (grace and truth/reality) fulfills Moses's ministry (law/shadow/type). This is further elaborated by the verbs John employs: law was *given*, but Jesus *came*.

When (in Romans 6:14) Paul affirms that we are not “under law”, he is not denying that the law continues to be relevant. He had been accused of precisely this. But already (in Romans 3:31) he had stressed that rather than “overthrow” the law, the gospel functions to “uphold” it. After all, we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, since it is “holy and righteous and good,” and “spiritual” [Rom. 7:12,14].

The new covenant in Christ establishes the law not only externally, but also internally. Christ died “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [Rom. 8:4].” (p. 144) “Thus, what the author of Hebrews calls the “becoming obsolete” of the old covenant, is held hand in glove with his affirmation of Jeremiah's vision of the new covenant:

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

people.” [Heb. 8:10]. The citation is repeated in Heb. 10:16. Given the emphasis the author of Hebrews places on these words, we are surely bound to ask: Which laws are written into our minds and on our hearts? The most obvious answer is: What other law would the first readers understand but the Decalogue? Since the author of Hebrews teaches that the ceremonial patterns of the old covenant have been fulfilled in Christ, he could have not meant them. And since Hebrews was written to those who now have “no lasting city” and therefore no longer see themselves as citizens of a state with its capital in Jerusalem, they are no longer a people governed by the civil regulations intended for life in the land.” (p. 144-145)¹⁴

Ferguson is saying that the NC is in effect for God’s people – those who have been redeemed by Christ. Now, in full disclosure – Sinclair Ferguson is a Presbyterian, and a Covenant Theologian, and does not see the Dispensational argument regarding the NC since he believes the church has replaced Israel, but for me, that does not negate his sound biblical argument regarding the NC.

So, what I draw from this is: I agree with what Rodney Decker says in his essay – which is a response to Dr. Beacham; “The set of terms used in the book of Hebrews...describes the time at which the NC is placed into effect...These appear to point to the cross as the time which the NC was ratified by means of Jesus’ sacrifice.”¹⁵

I believe that this is what the AH (hereafter Author of Hebrews) is saying as well. Even though the NC in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 is directed at Israel, in an eschatological sense, the fact that in Hebrews it is spoken of as already in force must be describing a functioning extant covenant or the point of why the AH uses this sort of language construct makes no sense. Those Jewish Christians desiring to go back to Judaism do not have to go back to Judaism to await the NC to kick in thousands of years later, they have its benefits now!

John Piper cautions us as to consider how we teach the New Covenant; “This new covenant was purchased and secured by the blood of Jesus. In Luke 22:20 Jesus said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” ... But the purchase of the new covenant by Jesus also means that it would be contrary to the intention of the Old Testament if we preached the OT as if the new covenant had not been already inaugurated by the blood of Christ. Everything in the OT was in anticipation of this. To preach from the OT as though we were still in a moment of anticipation for what has come would certainly dismay the OT writers, if they were allowed to look down from heaven.”¹⁶

So I am going to proceed with Hebrews 8-10 based on this understanding of the NC.

The Better Covenant

vv. 6-7

“*But as it is...*”. This introductory phrase has the effect of highlighting the contrast between Christ’s ministry and the OT order; once again, magnifying the vast superiority of Christ’s ministry over any other priest. (v. 6)

¹⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, The Whole Christ, Crossway, 2016 – p. 143, p. 144, p. 144-145

¹⁵ Dispensational View...Rodney Decker, p. 159

¹⁶ John Piper, Expository Exultation, Crossway, 2018, p 303

Then, we are pointed to the reason why this is and it goes right back to the old Mosaic Covenant, as compared to the New. Why? See vv. 6-7;

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.

We might well ask, “Why do we need a Mediator in the first place?” Francis Goode answers that question:

“An unholy sinner and a holy God cannot meet. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” (Hab. 1:13). Herein lies the great difficulty to be surmounted in the salvation of a sinner. How shall a polluted creature, unable to cleanse himself from sin, come before a holy God, and continue holy, while he accepts him, and shows him favour? In other words, how shall man, without the possibility of bringing any personal righteousness, be dealt with as righteous by God? This great difficulty is removed by Christ, the sinner’s friend: by his voluntary susception of man’s sin to be his own, and so the entire removal of it from the person of the believer in him: further, by the imputation of the merit of Christ’s work to the believing soul, to be to it in the stead of personal righteousness for acceptance by God.”¹⁷

The better covenant is the New Covenant, and Jesus’ role as Mediator of the New Covenant became reality when He sacrificed Himself. In I Tim. 2:5-6, Christ is said by Paul to be “*the one (sole) Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all...*” In 2 other places, the author of Hebrews refers to Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15; 12:24), and both places are tied directly to His death. In the gospels, when Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant, there too it is tied to His shed blood and sacrifice of His body (cf. MT. 26:28; MK 14:24 & LK 22:20).

Brendan Crowe makes a lengthy but worthwhile argument regarding the Last Supper and the New Covenant;

“At the Last Supper Jesus institutes a (new) covenant, which is built upon the foundation of his own blood and therefore the obedience of his entire life. It is striking that in the new covenant, the blood of the covenant is the blood of the covenant mediator himself. This is expounded in Hebrews, but the principles are also present in the Gospels. In the covenant ceremony of Exodus 24 for example, Moses is the mediator of the Sinaitic covenant but does not pour out his own blood in its ratification. Instead, Moses employs the blood of the sacrificial oxen (Ex. 24:5-8). In contrast, Jesus pours out his own blood for the forgiveness of sins, which indicates that, as the covenant mediator, Jesus himself met the requirements of the covenant.

This interpretation requires further explanation. In Jeremiah 31, we read that a new covenant was necessary because of the people’s persistent covenantal rebellion. This new

¹⁷ Francis Goode, The Better Covenant, Kregel reprint, The Granary – not dated, but this book was written and published prior to 1842. Francis Goode’s life spanned from 1797? To 1842.

covenant recalls Sinai but is better than the Mosaic covenant because God's law will be written on the hearts of his people (Jer. 31:33). Part of the problem with the Mosaic covenant was the dichotomy between heart and ritual, obedience and sacrifice. True forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34), and not simply rituals (Jer. 7:1-34), would come with the new covenant, which was necessary since the old covenant had been broken by God's faithless children who had experienced the covenantal curse of exile. True circumcision of heart was necessary (Jer. 4:4,14;9:25-26; cf. 3:10; 5:23; 7:24; 9:8,14; 11:20; 17:5-10; 18:12; 20:13), which would come through the work of God in the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; 32:39-41). A similar view is found in Isaiah 1:11, where the Lord says, "What is the abundance of your sacrifices to me?...I do not delight in the blood of rams or of lambs or of goats." In other words, the prophets bemoan hollow ritual and anticipate the day when there will be no discrepancy between heart commitment and external actions. While this hope is still not yet a perfect reality in the present age in which sin and death remain, the new covenant has been established on the basis of Jesus' perfect accomplishment in history of all of God's covenantal requirements. By fully loving God and neighbor, Jesus has overcome the dichotomy between sacrifice and obedience, thereby grounding the benefits of the new covenant in his own life's work. And as covenant mediator, Jesus has sealed with his blood the new, better covenant."¹⁸

Job decried the need for a Mediator in Job 9:33 (arbiter), and further expected at some time future, and after his own life had ended to actually see his Redeemer (Job 19:25-27). Romans 8:1-4 celebrates Jesus' redemptive work without using the terms Mediator or Redeemer, describing Jesus' work as *'setting us free'*. Paul again, in Gal.3:15-29 (esp. v. 19 & 23) explains why God had established the law in the first place if it was intended to be superseded by the New Covenant. And based on Paul's comments throughout Galatians 3, God's intention was always to bring Christ in as the Mediator based on (here) God's promise of a Mediator – even referring to Genesis 22:18 (cf. Gal. 3:16) as a prophecy or type of Christ. [1 offering, 1 seed of the woman – Gen. 3:15). Then in Gal. 3:16 again, Paul points out that the seed (singular) of Abraham is Christ! In the first chapter of John's gospel, in 1:14-18, John tells us that while Moses gave the law, *"grace and truth come through Jesus Christ"* and *"he has made God known"* – perhaps pointing to the New Covenant? In Hebrews 1:3, He is the *"radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..."*; and in Col. 1:15-20, He is *"the image of the invisible God..."making peace (Mediating) by the blood of his cross."*

Francis Goode lays out for us the qualifications of a Mediator;

"He must be of a dignity suitable to treat with God on man's behalf. He must have some right to be accepted as the representative of men. He must be sufficient surety for both parties: for men, to satisfy all demands of God's righteousness, which on his part, preclude reconciliation; and for God, to quiet effectually all guilty fears and doubts on man's part, of his perfect willingness to receive, pardon, and bless him. In a word, he must be such as both can fully rest on, for the removal of every bar to peace, and the procuring of perfect good-will between them.

¹⁸ Brendan Crowe, *The Last Adam*, Baker Academic, 2017; pp 189-190

Where shall such a mediator be found? The highest archangel is still a creature: has no dignity but what God has put upon him; moreover, if he were able to satisfy for man, he is not of man's nature, and therefore, cannot represent him; his satisfaction would have no connexion with those for whom he offered it; and being, as a creature, infinitely inferior to him for whom he acted, he could give no pledge for God sufficient to re-assure the conscience of the sinner. Who shall give security for God, but one equal with himself? Clearly, he that is to be a mediator between God and man must have the nature of both.

Blessed be God, such a mediator is found in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word. The double nature of the God-man gives security, to both parties, for the fulfillment of all that is necessary, on either side, for peace. While, as man, he can give security to God on our behalf – as the eternal Word, equal with the Father, he gives security to us for God...

O the wondrous depths of divine love, that are treasured up in the person of Christ!"¹⁹

John Piper presents us with an interesting defense of the Old Covenant:

"There was glory in the old covenant. It was God's glory. It was not nothing. It was not to be despised – then or now. Not to see it and value it for what it was is to miss the meaning of the old covenant – and the surpassing value of the new. But by God's own design, the old-covenant glory was temporary, not permanent. "If what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent [the gospel, the new covenant have glory" (2 Cor. 3:11)."²⁰

The Old Covenant was not faultless – it was designed to appear flawed in part, as Paul explained in Galatians 3. The flaw in it was the fact that it could not declare anyone to be justified and could not renew those who failed to keep the standard, "*This do and you will live*" but what often resulted in Israel's experience was "don't do it and be cursed". It was Israel's failures and outright rejection of God's law that was the problem. As Paul says in Romans 10:3, "[They were] *ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*" The New Covenant (stated in full length in Ezekiel 36; Jeremiah 31) promised man a new and obedient heart and the grace to love God and man – cf. Ezek. 11:19-20.

Hebrews 8:7 is describing this New Covenant and the need for it from a human perspective. God knew from B4TFOTW what He would do in order to redeem His people, but it would take place in "*the fullness of time...*" (Gal. 4:4), and He knew who He would send as the Saviour and Mediator. Francis Goode makes another good point about this Mediator:

"The condition of life under the new covenant, is, precisely, that of the old – perfect obedience. But, under the gospel. This obedience is rendered for the sinner, by his surety: and the life which is its due becomes his, not by working, but by believing. Christ has fulfilled the law for us. Mercy, therefore, to man, is the just reward of merit in Christ. In

¹⁹ Goode, p. 37-38

²⁰ John Piper, Reading the Bible Supernaturally, Crossway, 2017, p. 78-79

Him, God can be a just God, and yet the justifier of the sinner, (apart from all consideration of goodness in him), simply as believing in Jesus."²¹

Philip Hughes' point here will wrap up this lesson for us;

"There is indeed a sanctuary, but it is not on this earth (he is saying to them), and a priesthood, but it is fulfilled in Christ, our glorious High Priest of the order of Melchizedek. They are not to fix their expectations on mundane shadows but on the heavenly reality. Jesus our forerunner has opened for us the way, hitherto barred, into the sanctuary of God's presence and favor. The eternal rest which the Israelites in the wilderness failed to achieve belongs to us who trust in him (4:1ff). For he who is now enthroned above is still ours. His ascension was indeed a return to the glory from which he first descended (cf. JN 7:33; 8:14; 13:3; 17:5) but it was a return with a difference. He left as the Son of God. He returned both as Son of God and also, by reason of the incarnation, as Son of man. He left as Lord. He returned both as Lord and also as minister on our behalf in the presence of the Father. He left as King. He returned both as King and also as High Priest and Intercessor for those who he is not ashamed to call his brethren (Heb. 2:11). He left as Sovereign. He returned also as Savior. He who sustains the whole of creation is now also the pioneer and the guarantor of our redemption (Heb. 1:1-3; 2:10; 12:2)."²²

²¹ Goode, p. 16

²² Hughes, p. 283