

Hebrews Lesson 10 Article

Having proved that Christ's heavenly priesthood is of a better order, the writer now shows that this priesthood is ministered through a better covenant. The Levitical priests ministered according to the Old Covenant that God had made with Israel at Sinai. The very fact that God calls it an "Old Covenant" by introducing a "New Covenant" proves that the old Levitical priesthood has been done away by the cross. To prevent his readers from going back to Aaron and the Old Covenant, the writer in chapter 8 proves the superiority of the New Covenant. In what ways, then, is the New Covenant better than the Old?

Since Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, He would not have been considered to minister as a priest. We find Christ in the courts of the temple while on earth, but never in the holy place or in the holy of holies. But this only proves the superiority of the New Covenant: it is ministered from heaven and not from earth.

The writer adds another argument: the original; the earthly tabernacle (and temple) were but copies of the heavenly tabernacle. Moses copied the tabernacle from the pattern God revealed to him on the mount (Ex. 25:9, 40). The Jews revered their temple and its furnishings and ceremonies; yet these things were merely shadows of the reality in heaven. To go back to the Old Covenant meant forsaking the realities of heaven for earthly imitations. How much greater it is to have a heavenly high priest ministering in a heavenly sanctuary.

This passage contains the key argument of this chapter: the promises of the New Covenant are far better than those of the Old Covenant. Consequently, the priesthood of Christ, which is based on better promises, must be itself a better priesthood—and it is. First, read Jer. 31:31–34 and then note what these better promises are:

The very fact that God calls it a "New Covenant" means that the Old Covenant is obsolete and will pass away. About the time Hebrews was being written, the Roman legions were being readied for their invasion of Palestine, which occurred in A.D. 70. The phrase "ready to vanish away" indicates that but a brief time would elapse before the temple would be leveled and the priestly activities cease. But the New Covenant, like the priesthood of Christ, would endure forever.

When did this New Covenant come into being? Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor. 11:23–26 make it clear that the New Covenant was established by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. According to Heb. 12:24, Christ is today the Mediator of the New Covenant.

But Jer. 31:31 states that God promised this New Covenant to the Jews. What right do we have to apply it to the church? The answer lies in the dispensational character of the Book of Acts. We recall that Acts 1–7 is God's offer of the kingdom to the Jews. When the Holy Spirit came to the believers at Pentecost, the New Covenant was in force. Had the nation repented and received Christ as Messiah, all of the blessings and promises of the New Covenant would have followed. But Israel refused the message and resisted the Spirit, and thus the nation was set aside. It is at this point that God brought the Gentiles into the New Covenant and formed the church out of believing Jews and Gentiles. So, we today in the body of Christ share in the New Covenant; but the nation of Israel at some future date will enjoy these same blessings when it "looks upon Him whom they have pierced" and the kingdom is established (Zech. 12:10).¹

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (696–699). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.