

Message Thirteen: A Better Covenant

Hebrews 8:1-9:28 — Understanding Hebrews Series, Part 13

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

After an entire chapter spent on the person of Melchizedek, the author pulls back and tells us, in effect, "here is what all of that was actually for." Chapters eight and nine turn from the priest himself to where he ministers and what he mediates — a sanctuary, and a covenant. And running through both chapters, and honestly through most of this letter, is one small word repeated so often it becomes a kind of drumbeat: *better*.

I. The Main Point — Seated, Not Standing

"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Notice the word "seated." Later in this letter we'll be told explicitly what that posture means: "every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:11-12). The old priests never sat down, because their work was never finished — one sacrifice always demanded the next. Christ sat down because His did not.

II. A Word Study in "Better"

Trace this one word through the letter and you'll see it forms the actual spine of the argument. Christ has "become so much better than the angels" (1:4). The author is confident of "better things" concerning his readers, "things that accompany salvation" (6:9). Christ's priesthood brings in "a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (7:19), and He has "become a guarantee of a better covenant" (7:22), "established on better promises" (8:6). The heavenly things themselves are cleansed "with better sacrifices" (9:23). Believers who lost earthly possessions for Christ's sake knew they had "a better and an enduring possession" waiting for them (10:34). Abel offered God "a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (11:4). The patriarchs desired "a better, that is, a heavenly country" (11:16). Some under persecution refused release, "that they might obtain a better resurrection" (11:35). God has provided "something better for us" (11:40). And the blood of Jesus "speaks better things than that of Abel" (12:24).

That is not incidental repetition. It's the letter's whole argument in miniature: nothing in the old order was fake or wasted — it was real, valid, God-given — and every piece of it was still only a preliminary sketch of something greater still ahead.

III. Why Christ Could Not Serve on Earth

"For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'" (Hebrews 8:4-5). We already know why — Christ came from Judah, not Levi (7:13-14) — but notice what this detail actually proves. The earthly tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifices were never the main event. They were a copy, built to a pattern, of something that already existed in heaven. Christ didn't need to minister in the copy. He went straight to the original.

IV. A New Covenant, Promised Long Before It Was Needed

"He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second" (Hebrews 8:6-7). And then the author quotes Jeremiah, proving this was never a last-minute improvisation: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people... For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 8:8-12).

Notice carefully who this covenant is made with: "the house of Israel and... the house of Judah" — the very same nation the old covenant was cut with at Sinai. This new covenant has not yet been enacted. It awaits the same coming day this whole letter has been pointing toward. And notice the closing line: "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13) — written, remarkably, while the old system was still functioning, not long before it would be swept away in history for good.

V. A Sanctuary With Two Rooms

The tabernacle itself had two sections. In the first, priests ministered continually. Behind a second veil stood the Holy of Holies, entered only once a year, only by the high priest, only with blood. And notice the aside the author drops into the description almost in passing: "the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing" (Hebrews 9:8). The floor plan itself was a sermon. Every wall and veil in that structure preached the same message: full access to God was not yet open. That limitation was deliberate, and it was waiting for something to change it.

VI. The Blood That Actually Redeems

"Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption... how much more shall the blood of Christ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:11-14).

And here is why it matters for you personally: "for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15). The same inheritance this letter named back in chapter one — "those who will inherit salvation" (1:14) — is now shown to rest on this exact foundation: a death that actually accomplished what animal blood never could.

VII. Applying "A Better Covenant"

That recurring word "better" is not decoration. It's a sober claim about where you actually stand. You are not living under some provisional arrangement, waiting for an upgrade still to come. You already stand under the better covenant, secured by better blood, resting on better promises — the very thing every shadow and copy in the old order was pointing toward.

And since the veil that once kept the way "not yet made manifest" has been opened by Christ's own blood, the appropriate posture toward God is not hesitancy but confidence — a note this letter will strike explicitly and directly in the chapter just ahead.

Looking Ahead

Next, we finish this section of the letter in chapter ten, where the author draws every comparison of these last several chapters — priesthood, covenant, sanctuary, sacrifice — to a single point: Christ's one offering has done what all the old offerings, repeated endlessly, never could.