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Let's Begin

Ray Stedman, an influential pastor of a former generation, once said of the old and new covenants in Scripture, "The Old Covenant can be summarized this way: Everything coming from me, nothing from God. The New Covenant may be summarized this way: Nothing coming from me, everything from God." This makes perfect sense if we take the Hebrews author's words at face value. He writes, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

Our Lord Himself spoke of a New Covenant, a covenant sealed with His personal blood (Matt. 26:28). As we turn our focus upon the New Covenant—a "better" covenant built upon "better" promises—we will follow the simple outline below:

- I. The Minister of a Better Tabernacle (vv. 1-5)**
- II. The Mediator of a Better Testament (vv. 6-13)**

I. The Minister of a Better Tabernacle (vv. 1-5)

Hear the words of the author, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (v. 1). Throughout the entire book of Hebrews is a single, golden thread: *Jesus is better than anything God ever revealed before.* The progression in the letter cannot be missed. Jesus is a better *person* (chapters 1-4); He is a better *priest* (chapters 5-7); and He is a better *provision* (chapters 8-10). Hence, it makes no sense to ponder the earthly temple any longer, a word the Hebrews recipients desperately needed to hear.

Note the author offers a summary of his argument with the words, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum." The Greek term translated "sum" is *kephalaion*, and comes from a word that literally means "the head." Hence, used in this way, the author is offering the leading point about his argument. Contrarily, we could say he is giving us the "bottom line."

And, just what is the leading point of his entire argument thus far? Jesus is not an earthly priest; instead He sits as priest on the heavenly throne!

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Our minister does not minister on earth. He ministers in the direct presence of the Almighty Father. Therefore, the author begins his discussion on the minister of a better tabernacle by offering two key factors for us to consider.

First, the majesty of Jesus is revealed (v. 1). He sits on heaven's throne—"set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty." The term "set" is the Greek word *kathizō*, and means "to sit down." In contrast to the Old Testament priest who never sat down while serving the people, Christ sat down in His deserved position of honor and authority—at the right hand of the Father (Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 7:55; Rom. 8:34). Our priest not only grants service to us, He rightly deserves worship from us (Matt. 2:17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38).

Second, the ministry of Jesus is revealed. The author writes, "A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer



Reflection Connection

Take a few moments to meditate on the heavenly tabernacle in contrast to the earthly tabernacle. List as many contrasting differences as you can and share them with the entire group.

gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount” (Heb. 8:2-5).

While Christ is *seated* on the throne at the right hand of the Father, He also continues to *serve* His people. The author states that Jesus is “minister of the sanctuary” and “true tabernacle.” The term translated “minister” is the Greek term *leitourgos*, which was used of public servants of the government in the first century. In fact, some European countries still employ “minister” in that capacity. In Scripture, the term denotes one who serves the people in some religious or spiritual role. Jesus is our servant working for us, on us, and even in us.

In addition, He ministers within the confines of a “true tabernacle.” The author is contrasting the Old Testament tabernacle where the Hebrews met God with the better tabernacle of heavenly glory. The former tabernacle was a mere shadow or “copy” of the heavenly tabernacle, the true tabernacle. It stood only as a visible copy of the invisible reality no human could see. Even more, the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament tabernacle could not be compared to the glory of the sacrifices offered in the heavenly realm. Earthly priests prepared offerings which merely pointed to the full and final sacrifice made by Christ in heaven. In Him, we have the substance. Lesser priests offered only a shadow of things to come; that is, Jesus Christ dying for our sins on Calvary’s cross.

II. The Mediator of a Better Testament (vv. 6-13)

Not only is Jesus Christ a better minister of a better tabernacle, He is also the mediator of a better covenant. Note the author’s words, “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” (Heb. 8:6-9). The “more excellent ministry” possesses a more excellent “mediator.” The Greek term translated “mediator” is *mesites*, and literally means “a go-between.” It was used of one who stood between two warring parties with a goal to come away with peace.

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In addition, the Greek word translated “covenant” is *diatheke*, which means “to set out in order” or “dispose in order.” In the Hebrew, the term “covenant” came



from a verb meaning “to cut.” Sacrifices were the “cut” between God and men. Hence, it was an agreement between two parties. Today we speak of “cutting a deal.” The New Covenant was superior to the old in many ways. Note two forms of argument the author of Hebrews makes.

First, he exposes the failures of the Old Covenant (vv. 6-9). He plainly states no need for a second covenant would have been necessary had the first covenant been “faultless” (v. 7). In other words, the Old Covenant was not blameless. Why? Because the Old Covenant could not establish a personal relationship between God and human beings. It could expose sinful guilt but could not make one free from guilt. It condemned but could not set people free.

The Old Covenant was, in essence, God taking “them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.” They were treated as infants. Nevertheless, “they continued not”— God kept His part of the agreement but they trampled upon their part of the agreement. Therefore, the tragic consequences resulted in God saying, “I regarded them not.” The law could well show people their sins. But the law could not forgive sin or take away the consequences of sin.

A measuring stick can show how tall you might be, but it cannot affect your height in the least. So it is with the Old Covenant. Its failure to make people right with God is striking. Know also the failure is not in the measuring instrument. God’s law was not the real problem. Rather it was the sinful human heart. Israel agreed to keep their part of the agreement. The failure was ultimately in the people, not in God (cp. Ex. 24:7; 19:5-8; Rom. 8:3).

Second, he explains the features of the New Covenant (v. 10-13). The Lord

Jesus Himself announced the New Covenant, “Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). With the Lord’s words in mind, observe the author’s words here, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb. 8:10-13). Several features of the New Covenant are offered.

First, the new covenant is *unconditional* (v. 10). A full six times the promise “I will” is recorded in these verses. In the Old Covenant, men had certain

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conditions they had to meet before the covenant was enacted. Under the New Covenant, however, God meets all the conditions. He fulfills all the terms. As Stedman put it in the introduction, “Nothing coming from me, everything from God.” Men and women may break their promises to God. God never breaks His promises to them.

Second, the New Covenant is *spiritual* (vv. 11-12). The law in the Old Testament was external in nature. However, the New Covenant promised a law put in their “minds” and written “on their hearts.” The Ten Commandments were engraved on stone tablets. External by nature, the law could *control* a man but could not *change* a man. For transformation, it would take an internal factor, one only a spiritual law could accomplish. Hence, the mind, emotion, will, and affections were all involved in the New Covenant transaction. God literally gave us entirely new hearts making us new creatures in Christ (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17).

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Moreover, an information transaction also took place: the Lord “knows me,” and I “know” the Lord. The knowledge a believer possesses presumes God’s knowledge of the believer. It comes from within through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Nor is the knowledge of the Lord particular to specific men and women. Instead, from the “least” to the “greatest” people know the Lord. No special spiritual class exists (cp. John 14:26).

Third, the New Covenant is *eternal* (v. 13). God made the “first old.” What does the author mean by the “first” being “old”? He explains in the follow-up phrase declaring the “first” as a covenant which, “decayeth and waxeth old,” is ready to vanish away. In short, the Old Covenant is obsolete. Interestingly, at the time the book of Hebrews was written, the Temple still stood intact. The priests continued to make sacrifices on the altar. However, only a few years after Hebrews was penned, the Temple was destroyed (circa 70 A..D.), and the temple sacrifices were gone forever. Christ’s sacrifice is eternal. Neither its value nor effectiveness will ever fade away or become obsolete.

Golden Greek Nugget

The author speaks plainly of the first covenant which, he says, has now decayed and is ready to “vanish” away (v. 13). The Greek term translated “vanish” is *aphanismos*, and is the negation of a word meaning “to cause to appear.” The word suggests abolition. The first covenant has no effect on believers who are under the New Covenant of the Lord.

Wrap Up

In this study, the New Covenant triumphs as superior to the Old Covenant. Believers have a better minister of a better tabernacle. Indeed they have a mediator who ever lives to make intercession for them. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is spiritual, unconditional, and eternal. Priests continually offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. Not the Lord Who, upon the vicarious sacrifice of Himself for the sins of His people, sat down at the right hand of God on high. We eagerly await His return when we will forever be with Him in eternity.

