

JESUS IS



BETTER

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Jesus Christ Better Than . . .

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Jesus Christ Better Than...

Readings from the Book of Hebrews

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An Introduction

The book of Hebrews is filled with perplexities that leave the average reader scratching their head. Questions are raised and often left unanswered. Yet there is a consistency to the book when viewed from the vantage point of higher ground.

Sometimes the pieces do not make immediate sense, but when viewed from the larger point of view they give way and clarity is the end result. How do we make sense of the book of Hebrews?

First, we must understand that the intent of the author is to show how everything up to this point in the revelation of God was in preparation for the manifestation of Jesus Christ. He is the reason for all antecedent thought.

Who Jesus is and what he does is tied directly to the *Seed Promise* in Genesis 3:15 and the *Blood Picture* in Genesis 3:21. From those anchor points, the ship of the biblical narrative flows freely forward. Every story exists as a shadow of this incredibly dense substance. Hebrews unveils the substance behind all biblical shadow.

Second, everything before Christ is perfect but deficient. Their design was for inadequacy. Although each piece was deficient and inadequate when compared to the fullness in Christ, each piece fulfilled its limited inadequacies perfectly. They did this by causing those present to want more than what they had.

Third, none of the preceding elements could completely satisfy those to whom they were given. Each piece left the individual wanting more and anticipating more.

Finally, Jesus Christ is shown to be better than anything that preceded him. He is the ultimate. There is nothing more than him and there is nothing less than him. In him all cravings are met. He is the satisfier of man's design. He completes us.

There is nothing beyond him and there is no one beside him. Jesus is truly enough in this life and in the life to come.

As you read the book of Hebrews, you will come across paragraphs and passages that a first glance and second glance and third glance and . . . will leave you baffled. Do not be troubled. Although the whole is made up of the parts, the parts are there to make us embrace the whole. They are not there to distract us from Christ. So regardless as to what one might think concerning a select paragraph or passage, do not allow the shadow to rob you of the substance.

Everything in Hebrews (as with all revelation) is about Jesus. So when you find yourself perplexing over a specific idea or thought, step back and see him. It is always about him. In conclusion, seek him and enjoy the journey.

1

Jesus Christ, Better Than . . .

*“Having become as much better than the angels,
as he has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Heb. 1:4).*

Read Hebrews 1:1-14

The book of Hebrews provides for the reader a picture of the Christ who towers over all things created.

Throughout the book, the author uses a word that speaks of one who is “better than” the object to which it is being compared. A quick glance shows one who is better than . . .

- Christ is “better than” the angels (Heb. 1:4).
- Christ is “better than” Moses (Heb. 3:1-6).
- Christ is “better than” the Old Testament Levitical Priesthood (Heb. 5-7:19, 22).
- Christ is “better than” the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:6, 9).
- Christ is “better than” the Old Testament Sacrificial system (Heb. 10).

The superiority of Christ is without dispute. Chapter 1 begins by setting forth the Son. The author uses statements that speak of no one else.

- [God, the Father] appointed [Jesus] heir of all things (1:2a).
- Through [Jesus], he made the world (1:2b).
- [Jesus] is the radiance of his glory (1:3a).
- [Jesus] is the exact representation of his nature (1:3b).

- [Jesus] upholds all things by the word of his power (1:3c).
- [Jesus] sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having made purification for sins (1:3d).
- [Jesus] is much better than the angels (1:4a).
- [Jesus] has inherited a more excellent name than [angels] (1:4b).

Philippians 2:9 says that Christ was given a name that is above every name because of his obedience before the Father. When time gives forth to eternity and “the summing up of all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10) takes place, then every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord (Phil. 2:10, 11).

The name of Jesus will radiate throughout the created universe. It will be the lyrical content of every song, the theme of every book, and the visible purpose of every play. His name will be heard in the beauty of his creation. Everything will be “from him, through him, and to him” (Rom. 11:36).

<p>His name will radiate throughout the created universe.</p>

Scripture tells us that he is better than the angels. Our fickle culture has a fascination with the supernatural and the paranormal but miss him who is invisible. In our quest to satisfy the void within us as image bearers, we turn to supernatural things. However, they are mere circus mirrors making distorted reflections of what is true. Angels and demons enamor us as if they are the issue or reason, primary or preeminent. Yet they are only tools of a master artisan (1:7, 14).

In contrast to angels,

- Jesus Christ is the second member of the Godhead (1:5-6).
- Jesus Christ is regal and kingly (1:8-9).
- Jesus Christ is Creator and immutable (1:10-12).
- Jesus Christ sits on a throne triumphantly (1:13).

In Jesus Christ, we have one who is better than...the angels.

Because this is true, we endeavor to be a Christ-Exalting fellowship. *We are determined to shout the supremacy of God in all things by finding, celebrating, and declaring that Jesus is enough in this life and in the life to come.*

We do this because Jesus Christ is better than . . .

May it please our heavenly Father to direct our hearts in the pure joy of seeing him who is all satisfying and sufficient. May you find Jesus in the book of Hebrews.

2

Jesus Christ, a Little Lower than the Angels

“But we do see him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus.” (Heb. 2:9)

Read Hebrews 2:1-18

Chapter 2 in the book of Hebrews picks up where chapter 1 left off. The message brought by the Son of God is so binding on the hearer that no one can escape its verdict (2:1-3).

In keeping with the theme of our Lord being better than the angels, chapter 2 speaks of him being “for a little while... made lower than the angels” (2:9). Theology calls this the “incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ,” when God became man. Chapter 2 speaks of five consequences of our Lord’s incarnation. The purpose of the incarnation of Jesus Christ was so that. . .

- He might taste death for everyone (2:9)
- Through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (2:14)
- He might deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (2:15)
- He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (2:17)
- He might be able to help those who are being tempted (2:18)

The depth of such statements will forever elude us. All of these actions are consequences of our Lord “stooping.” He condescended. Through the incarnation, he became something that is lower than the angels by taking on human flesh.

Why was he willing to become that which he had created? It was not to help angels, “But he gives help to the offspring of Abraham” (2:16).

In becoming lower than the angels, he did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He came to help his people. The work of our Lord Jesus Christ stands as a colossal monument that towers over all things created. The nature of his death and its infinite worth makes all self-effort pale by contrast. By claiming autonomy, humanity “spits” on the sufficiency of Christ.

Jesus tasted death so that we might never feel its sting or sample its bitter dregs (1 Cor. 15:55). In his death, the believer overcomes the evil one (1 John 2:13). In his death, we are born for freedom (Gal. 5:1). As our merciful and faithful high priest, he is our eternal advocate, who placates the wrath of the judge (1 John 2:2). Because he suffered, “He will not let us be tempted beyond our ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that we might be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

There is no surer foundation than Christ Jesus.

All this is ours because, for a while, he became lower than the angels. How unsearchable are his ways. Theologically we can ponder the mystery; much discussion can take place and theological precision and insight derived. But when the dust settles, these truths form the bedrock for the believer. There is no surer foundation than Christ Jesus.

Deny the truth, exist in unbelief, rebel against the light, shut your heart to it, curse the cure. But know this: nothing will change. Your lack of faith cannot undo what has been done. IT IS WRITTEN!

You can no more perform the action than you can merit the consequence. Trying to merit grace is like trying to drain the ocean, stop the rain, resist the avalanche, number the stars, or count all the sand on the seashore. **You cannot merit grace; you can only accept it.** For a while, he became lower than the angels . . . and he did it for you.

May it please the Lord to let you enter into his rest. God never promised the absence of heartache in this life. Only in the life to come will there be no more tears. What he has promised today is his joy (John 16:33), so let us live in light of what is true. Let us grab with our minds the power of Hebrews 2, and let us believe that God is doing his good pleasure in us and through us to those around us. As always, may we continue to dance in the reign of his grace.

3

Consider Jesus

*“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle, and High Priest of our confession”
(Heb. 3:1).*

Read Hebrews 3:1-19

In chapters 1 and 2, Jesus is seen as being “better than” the angels. Here in chapter 3, he is “better than” Moses (3:1-6). Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest (2:17) and apostle and high priest of our confession (3:1). As such, he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses (3:3).

Verse 6 exhorts the reader to “hold fast.” “Hold fast” is used three times in Hebrews (3:6, 14; 10:23). The verse strongly communicates a message of perseverance. This kind of construction has an unsettling effect on many. How are we to understand the author’s intent? First, let us consider the opposite of “holding fast.” Second, let us consider Jesus.

First, what is the opposite of “holding fast and being firm until the end?” Those who do not hold fast . . .

- Are not his house (3:6),
- Have hardened their hearts (3:8),
- Go astray in their hearts (3:10),
- Do not know his ways (3:10),
- Do not enter his rest (3:11),
- Have an evil and unbelieving heart (3:12),
- Are falling away from the living God (3:12),

- Disobedient (3:18),
- Unbelieving (3:19).

Those who do not hold fast have become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (v.13). Those who fall away and do not hold fast are unbelievers.

Second, let us consider Jesus. Verse 14 tells us “those who hold fast are partakers of Christ.” The word “partakers” is used six times in the New Testament and all but one is found in Hebrews (Luke 5:7; Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8). It means, “To participate in, to be an associate, to be a partner.”

Because Jesus Christ is faithful as a Son, his church is his house (3:6) and we are participating in him.

It is the believer’s position in Christ that produces steadfastness. It is not the “holding fast” that is producing the position. I hold fast because he is holding fast.

<p>I hold fast because he is holding fast.</p>
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In light of this thought, the author of Hebrews makes a very practical application in verse 13.

“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

In contrast to falling away from the living God (v.12), we are to encourage one another day after day as long as there is time. The word “encourage” is **parakaleo**. It is one of our powerful grace words. It means, “To call alongside of.” It is the word that reaches down and pulls people up.

Cross-country is a five-person team sport. You can only win when all five members of the team finish. Each individual's placement is tallied and the lowest collective team score wins. Sometimes when running, you become winded and you will start "sucking" air. Your legs become heavy and your mouth feels like it is filled with cotton. When that begins to happen, you must put yourself in the middle of the pack. When you run in the middle of the pack, it is the strength of the pack that keeps you going until you catch your wind and get your legs back. **Parakaleo** is that kind of word. It is a pack word. The one who comes alongside of others does so with the intent of allowing the winded to catch their breath and the fainting to gather their strength. This is what Jesus would have us do.

Perhaps today you find yourself "winded" and "rubbery." Your local church family is the pack of God, ready to come alongside of you. We believe he uses us in this way. Friend, today let us consider Jesus. He and he alone, is the apostle and high priest of our confession. Moreover, for that, we praise his name.

4

Jesus is “That Rest”

Let us be diligent to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11).

Read Hebrews 4:1-16

The word “rest” is used ten times in the book of Hebrews (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 [two times], 11). It is from the same root word found in Matthew 11:28-30:

²⁸ “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you **rest**. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS**. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

The word does not imply cessation of labor or work. Rather, it means rest from the crippling, debilitating, numbing anxiety caused by burdening stress and worry. We would find the complete rest we long for if only we could exist without any unbelief or doubt in God’s provision. Yet, there is no one capable of existing in a state of total trust or surrender. Although there are some who would disagree, we cannot have perfect trust this side of heaven. Although, I do believe it is possible to take our moments of belief and crunch them together in what would appear to be uninterrupted faith. However, everyone, without exception, encounters periods of a faltering faith. This does not mean you have become, or even are, an unbeliever. It simply means you still exist in a body that contains an old nature. Nothing more and nothing less.

Hebrews 4 is a “warning passage.” The erroneous slant that many place on it is this: If the individual does not persevere to the end, he will find himself coming up short and failing to either gain heaven or receive reward.

Chapter 4 follows on the heels of chapter 3, and the same big idea of persevering faith carries into this chapter. Believers have a persevering faith and unbelievers are characterized by a failing faith (4:3).

The word “strive” or “labor” in verse 11 is the same word used in 2 Timothy 2:15 for “study” (KJV). The idea is one of giving yourself to the task, of not being distracted, of being singularly focused.

Although we can find a temporal rest from this present life in Christ Jesus, there is, nevertheless, a rest that is to come that all believers enter into when they meet God face-to-face for the first time. Verse 12 reminds us that only the Word of God has the kind of insight and authority to make any kind of legitimate discernment in the evaluation of humanity. Verse 13 assures us that no one will be able to escape its judgment. Hebrews 2:3 poses the same conclusion, “How shall we escape . . . ?”

The warning passage is for all who would neglect his provision and thus harden their heart (4:7). The Word listened to must be accompanied by faith (4:2). Without faith, it will be impossible to please God (11:6).

Because we have a great high priest (4:14) who is currently standing as our intercessor (Heb. 2:17, 18) and advocate (1 John 2:1, 2), we will hold fast.

Our great high priest is sympathetic (4:15). We will find in

him mercy and grace (4:16). He knows those who are his (John 10:4) and in their behalf he sits on a **throne of grace** (4:16).

What a beautiful picture . . . “a throne of grace.”

- Because it is a throne of grace, one’s performance is of no consequence in their standing before or reception by the Father.
- Because it is a throne of grace, one’s personal possessions are of no avail in their standing before or reception by the Father.
- Because it is a throne of grace, one’s pedigree does not matter in their standing before or reception by the Father.

Our great high priest sits on a throne of grace.
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The whole tone of the warning passage is a threat for any who do not believe in Jesus for the saving of their eternal soul. For those who believe, it is a promise. Our great high priest sits on a throne of grace. Every time we approach him, we find him to be merciful and gracious. He is always present to help in every expression of need.

May it please our Father to open our eyes in order that we might see the fullness of what Christ is for us and what we are in him. May we continue to be a place where grace reigns.

5

Jesus Christ, Designated by God as High Priest

“Being designated by God as a high priest . . .” (Heb. 5:10).

Read Hebrews 5:1-14

As sinners, we stand before the immutable and inescapable judgment of God. God is both master and king. We are guilty and worthy to receive the judgment against us. We need a mediator, one who will stand in our defense and represent us before the authority and justice of God.

Jesus Christ is our divinely appointed high priest. The word “designated” in Hebrews 5:10 means, “To herald, to call forth, to name.”

In the Old Testament Mosaic code there was a division within the twelve tribes of Israel. Those who were born within the tribe of Levi were to become priests and maintainers of the Tabernacle. Within the tribe of Levi, those born of Aaron were to become priests. One of these priests was to function as the high priest, and it was his responsibility to enter into the Holy Place and offer up a blood atonement for his sins and for the sins of the nation once a year on the Day of Atonement. His role was exclusive and far reaching. Yet despite all of the honor that could possibly be placed on this individual, he was still a mere mortal offering up a temporary sacrifice. It was because of who he was and what he did that the sacrifice had to be repeated year after year. Yet, Hebrews tells us that Jesus is better than the Aaronic line of priests. As we will see in

chapter 7, Jesus is after the line of Melchizedek.

Within the book of Hebrews, Jesus Christ is identified as . . .

- A merciful and faithful high priest (2:17).
- The apostle and high priest of our confession (3:1).
- Our great high priest (4:14).
- A high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15).
- A high priest by divine appointment (5:5-10).
- A high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (6:20).
- A high priest who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens, who does not need to offer up sacrifices daily (7:26-27).
- A high priest who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (8:1).
- A high priest who entered the Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (9:11-13).

Hebrews continues to offer to the reader, “solid food” (5:12). Some within his audience had become “dull of hearing” (v.11). An indicator of whether or not one was “dull of hearing” or capable of receiving “solid food” was rooted in whether they were teachers. A teacher is one who has the power of discernment, who is able to distinguish between good and evil (vv.12-14).

In my own pursuit through the book of Hebrews, I have struggled to lay hold of the author’s transitions and the integration of his themes. There is no question that the essence of his message is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

As our high priest, Jesus Christ represents us before his Father and ours.

Not only is he our mediation, but he is our identification.

Not only does he answer, once for all, the question of our sin debt and then our continuing acceptance, but he also allows us to have a complete and confident access before the Father because of our identity in him as a high priest.

Not only is he our mediation, but he is our identification.

For an audience that is Jewish, such truth is solid food. The impact that this would have on his reader cannot be overestimated. To the Jewish mind this was dramatic and startling. **To think the average individual could enter freely into the Holy of Holies and function in the capacity of high priest without regard to one's gender, status, or ethnic origin, was overwhelming.** Nevertheless, this is true. As we consider Jesus Christ, designated by God as a high priest, let us lay hold of this singular truth. Let us bathe in it and have it wash over us. This is what he is for us and we are in him. As we come to understand this truth, may we truly dance in the reign of his grace.

6

It is Impossible for God to Lie

*“So that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us”
(Heb. 6:18).*

Read Hebrews 6:1-20

I continue to marvel at the movement within the book of Hebrews. Like an unfathomable body of water, there is a constant current that draws us to our Lord Jesus Christ, yet it is a tide that ebbs and flows. Various undertows can pull the unsuspecting into catastrophic danger.

At times, the book appears to be gangly and unmanageable. It is a struggle to make it fit into a seamless garment or draw it into parallel and symmetric boxes. Nonetheless, the theme is constant and persistent. Jesus Christ is better than everything created.

True to form, chapter 6 is no less perplexing in its structure than it is glorious in its content. Nuggets abound. One of those nuggets of truth is **“It is impossible for God to lie.”** Everything God said is true. James tells us that in God “there is no variation or shadow due to change” (1:17). Every promise concerning our justification, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, sanctification, adoption, identification, and glorification is just as he has said. **He cannot lie.** The promises of God stand true. It is unfortunate, but nonetheless real, that our own unbelief often finds us swallowed up by its threatening outlook and overbearing

oppression. Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks of this menace to our steadfastness in faith. Yet we are equally assured by the author in verse 19 that, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul." Our focus must be on the person of Christ. He is the bedrock into which our own anchor of faith has embedded itself. The people of God, you and I, will not be like the one who doubts, "Who are like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." "We are not the double-minded" (James 1:6, 7). It is when we see the storm clouds gather over our souls and the fog of unbelief seeks to obscure our minds that we remind ourselves, "**It is impossible for God to lie.**"

In Numbers 23, Balak of Moab sought to have the prophet Balaam speak ill of the nation of Israel. Balaam reluctantly obliged and prophesied of the nation of Israel. In 23:19 he uttered this statement, "God is not a man, that he should lie, Nor a son of man, that he should repent; Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" Balaam confirmed Balak's worst fears. God's promises to the nation of Israel would hold fast.

Nothing can alter what God has determined to do.
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In 1 Samuel 15, the prophet Samuel confronted the unbelief of Israel's first king, Saul. Samuel prophesied and then said, "Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man that he should change his mind" (15:29). His word is a sure word. **Nothing can alter what God has determined to do.**

The certainty of what is written rests on the bedrock of God's unchanging character. The prophet Malachi assures the people of Israel that for this reason and this reason only they would not be consumed as a people.

“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

Paul says this same truth in Titus 1:2.

“In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago” (Titus 1:2).

In Hebrews 6, we come full circle. When God makes a promise, “He guarantees it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which **it is impossible for God to lie.**” Because this is true and non-negotiable, “We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (6:19).

My Anchor Holds

W.C. Martin, 19th Century

*Though the angry surges roll,
on my tempest driven soul,
I am peaceful, for I know,
Wildly though the winds may blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure,
that can evermore endure.*

*Troubles almost 'whelm the soul;
griefs like billows over me roll;
Tempters seek to lure astray;
storms obscure the light of day:
**But in Christ I can be bold,
I've an anchor that shall hold.***

Today, flee to Christ for refuge. Let his sure Word be for you a strong encouragement. In so doing, “Hold fast to the hope set before you.” He is our steadfast anchor. No matter how fierce the storm or great the battle, his anchor holds.

7

But Jesus Holds His Priesthood Forever

“But Jesus, on the other hand, because he continues forever, holds his priesthood permanently” (Heb. 7:24).

Read Hebrews 7:1-28

Chapter 7 continues the thought begun in chapter 6, “Jesus, a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).

Chapter 7 contrasts and compares the Levitical priesthood and that of our Lord’s. He is the one who arose out of the order of Melchizedek (7:11). Jesus is described as “a better hope” (7:19). Consider with me the contrast and comparison that exists between the Levitical priesthood and that of our Lord’s.

Jesus Christ as our High Priest

- Received homage from Levi (v.9),
- Attained perfection for those whom he represents (v.11),
- Received his priesthood by having an indestructible life (vv. 16, 23, 24),
- He always lives (v.25),
- Is holy (v.26),
- Is innocent (v.26),
- Is undefiled (v.26),
- Is separated from sinners (v.26),
- Is exalted above the heavens (v.26),
- Does not offer up a habitual sacrifice (v.27),
- Was appointed high priest because of his eternal perfection (v.28).

Because of who he is, we are able to draw near (vv. 19, 25). His priesthood arose out of a limitation that was intrinsic to the Levitical line (v.18). We have an eternal salvation because it is rooted in an eternal priest.

Consider the words penned by Norman J. Clayton, a bricklayer turned musician.

My Hope Is In The Lord
Norman J. Clayton, b. 1903

*My hope is in the Lord Who gave himself for me,
And **paid the price of all my sin** at Calvary.*

***No merit of my own** his anger to suppress,
My only hope is found in Jesus' righteousness.*

Refrain
*For me he died, For me he lives,
And everlasting life and light he freely gives.*

*And **now for me he stands** before the Father's throne,
He shows his wounded hands, and names me as his own.*

***His grace has planned it all**, Tis mine but to believe,
And recognize his work of love and Christ receive.*

As I read the book of Hebrews for personal study, my desire is to hear the voice of God in the written text. After reading chapter 7, I penned this prayer. I share it with you and trust that God might use it to encourage his people.

“Right now you are my high priest who intercedes for me before the Father. My rest is found in knowing you live forever as my eternal advocate, intercessor, and mediator. You never fail, falter, sleep, grow weary, slip, stagger, or forget. **You are my present rest because you are my eternal priest.**”

You are my
present rest
because you are
my eternal priest.

8

Jesus Christ, the Main Point

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heaven” (Heb. 8:1).

Read Hebrews 8:1-13

Everything points to Jesus Christ as the fullest and final great high priest who, based on a New Covenant, mediates before the Father in behalf of his people.

Hebrews 8:1 begins with “the main point.” This one thing is true: God is putting things right. Everything in the Book of Hebrews is driving us to this point.

Notice the larger context in which we find chapter 8. The larger idea of Jesus Christ as the superior High Priest runs from Hebrews 4:14-10:18. This larger section can be divided into three connected pieces. Hebrews 4:14-7:28 speaks to Jesus as a better priesthood. Hebrews 8:1-13 addresses Jesus as the establisher of a better covenant. Finally, Hebrews 9:1-10:18 shows how Jesus is the better sacrifice. This chapter focuses on Jesus as the establisher of a better covenant.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant. This new covenant presupposes something preceding and thus “old” (Jer. 31:31). Jesus references this new covenant when celebrating the Passover with his disciples in the upper room in preparation for his own death (Luke 22:20). He identifies his work as the establishing of this new covenant. Paul speaks

to this event in 1 Corinthians 11:25. Paul also describes himself and others as servants of a new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6). The Book of Hebrews openly references the disappearing of the first covenant and the cutting of a new covenant (Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24).

The inauguration of the New Covenant began with the birth of the church. As a whole, we have a skewed view of the early church. We take what we experience in the 21st century and transpose it unto the 1st century church. Although Acts 2 speaks of a numerical explosion on the Day of Pentecost, chances are most local churches were made up of relatively small groups of perhaps 10-20 people meeting in homes that were predominately either Jewish, or Gentiles who were strongly sympathetic to Jewish culture. Thus, I believe the early church saw itself as the recipients of God's promises uttered to the nation of Israel. The early church did not see itself differently or separated from the nation of Israel, but rather as Jews who recognized and accepted the messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. I am not saying what we call the church became spiritual or ethnic Israel. I do not believe that is the issue. The issue is what those early believers understood Jesus to mean and what is meant by the author of Hebrews.

Although there is an immediate fulfillment of the New Covenant in time, I also believe we must accept a future and fuller expression of the New Covenant. This is often referred to as an "already - not yet" aspect of biblical promises, or an inaugurated eschatology.¹ The idea behind such thinking is **the future is now**. There is a tendency to throw everything we know about our Christian faith into the unrealized future, but there is an invasion and penetration of the future into our present. **Our faith not only sustains us in the future, but is the substance of our lives today.** Here in Hebrews, the author seeks to show why we must not stay in or return to the

first covenant, but must look to Jesus as the fullest and final mediator of a better covenant. There are three reasons as to why this New Covenant is necessary and thus better.

This New Covenant is necessary and thus better because of

- A superior high priest (v. 1),
- A superior place (vv. 2-5), and
- Superior promises (vv. 6-13)

Notice how this chapter ends.

¹³ “When he said, ‘A New Covenant,’ he has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (Heb. 8:13).

Friends, there is a better covenant based on better promises. Sad to say there are some Christians who believe they are saved by grace, but live their lives according to the Old Testament law, the old covenant. Warren Wiersbe states, “They want the New Covenant for salvation and the old covenant for sanctification.”²

You and I in Christ have been transformed. We have moved from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13). We now **KNOW** God. This is not an arrogant boast, but of one in whom the Spirit of God lives and who testifies with my spirit that I am his child and compels me to cry out, “Abba, Father.” This is not something I secured through self-help or personal achievement. This boast, this rest, this assurance is the consequence of Jesus the Messiah offering himself up as a sacrifice for my sins.

Friend, are you free? You and I are living in a New Covenant with God where he keeps his word and you and I simply enjoy him.

“And so my question to you, my friend, is simply this: ‘Have you entered into the promised blessings of the New Covenant – the forgiveness of your sins, the blessing of a new heart, and the joy of drawing near to God in Christ?’ If you have not, why not do so today, by simply acknowledging your need of salvation and by trusting in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of lost sinners, making a way of salvation possible?”³

The idea of Jesus Christ as our great high priest is not abstract or uneventful. It is the means, and only means, of finding any sense of peace and rest in this tumultuous world. Friend, **the future is now**. Embrace Jesus and enjoy him forever.

¹ http://www.theopedia.com/Inaugurated_eschatology

² <http://religiondocbox.com/Judaism/67782834-The-better-covenant-hebrews-8-warren-wiersbe.html>

³ <http://bible.org/seriespage/whats-new-about-new-covenant-hebrews-86-13>

9

Jesus Christ, Once for All

*“And not through the blood of goats and calves,
but through his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all,
having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).*

Read Hebrews 9:1-28

Hebrews 9 continues the comparison and contrast between the old Levitical system of temporal sacrifice and the final sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first ten verses provide information concerning the old that sets the stage for the contrasting connector of verse 11, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of good things that have come . . .”

In describing the old, verse 9 draws this basic conclusion: “Both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience.” The contrast to this is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is “the good things to come.” The old system could not bring an eternal sacrifice because it was based on a temporal offering. Jesus Christ as a perfect high priest offered himself as the perfect eternal sacrifice (v.12). This statement is clear throughout the New Testament record (Matt. 26:26-30).

The once-for-all nature of our Lord’s death is stressed throughout the book of Hebrews (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10). The nature of the offering cancels the necessity to bring a perpetual sacrifice. Because the offering offered is an indestructible life, the payment made is infinite. Thus, it is only offered once for all and results in an eternal redemption (vv. 12, 25). Jesus Christ is “the author of [an] eternal

salvation” (5:9) and his sacrifice brings with it an “eternal inheritance” (9:15).

An aspect often overlooked when considering the lavish nature of his substitutionary death is that Jesus did what the old could not do.

- The old could not make perfect the conscience of the worshiper (9:9).
- The old could not purify the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9:14).
- The old could never make perfect those who draw near (10:1).
- The old could never cleanse permanently the worshiper (10:2).

Please think through this with me as we consider together the biblical record and the lavish nature of his substitutionary death. Remember, **“What the old could not do, Jesus did.”**

In the death of Christ, those who have drawn near to God through it:

- Have a perfect conscience.
- Have a conscience that has been purified of dead works.
- Have been made perfect.
- Have been permanently cleansed.
- No longer have any consciousness of sin.

You and I are the ones who, through faith, have drawn near. We draw near through his blood. It is not our action of drawing near, but his action that draws us near. James 4:8 is one of those verses that many use, but few understand. Drawing near to God is not a man-centered or man-generated action. We draw near to God when we rest in the finished work of Christ on behalf of condemned sinners. To draw near

is to be saved. I have drawn near to God because I stand before him in the finished work of Christ and his eternal ministry of intercession.

Friend, our own experiences are often our greatest hindrance in accepting such truths. We cannot deny the experience, but neither must we deny the truth. The Scripture never asks us to live in denial, but it does invite us to believe the truth.

We draw near to God, when we rest in the finished work of Christ in behalf of condemned sinners.

The truth liberates. It sets us free from manipulative minds. Our experiences are to enhance and reveal. They are not the substance; they are only shadows. We are to see him in the experience. Consider Hebrews 9 and remember God is renewing our minds through the study of Scripture that results in life transformation. Learn to enjoy the moment as you rest in him.

10

Jesus Christ, the Good Things to Come

“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things” (Heb. 10:1).

Read Hebrews 10:1-39

Like most of the chapters in Hebrews, chapter 10 is organically connected to the previous chapter and has the strong sense of contrasts and comparisons showing the richness of Christ and his lavish grace.

The Old Testament sacrificial system was only a shadow of the good things to come (v.1). The inherent inadequacy of the Old Testament sacrificial system reminded worshippers every year of their sin (v.3). Their inherent inadequacy made it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (v.4). The temporal nature of the sacrifice demanded daily repetition and its temporal nature prohibited it from taking away sins (v.11).

In contrast to the shadow, Christ is “the very form of things” (v.1). All things are but shadows of him, for he is the substance and true form.

Because of who he is and what he has done:

- He can make perfect those who draw near (v.1).
- He cleanses once (and forever) those who come to him (v.2).
- Those cleansed no longer have any consciousness of sin (v.2).

- He abolishes the first in order to establish the second (v.9).
- We have been sanctified (v.10).
- Once he offered, he sat down (v.12).
- He offered one sacrifice for sin forever (v.12).
- Through his one offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (v.14).

<p>The forgiveness of his people is full and complete.</p>
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Because of the lavish nature of the sacrifice offered, God will never remember the sins of his people again (vv. 17, 18). The forgiveness of his people is full and complete.

It is because of what precedes that “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus” (v.19). The author of Hebrews summarizes his preceding thoughts with three exhortations.

- Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (v.22).
- Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (v.23).
- Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (v.24).

What does a sufficient sacrifice look like for the sins of his people? It looks like verses 22 through 24. The people of God draw near, hold fast, and stir up because Jesus “opened up for them the partition that existed between them and their heavenly Father” (v.20).

What the old could not do, Jesus did. May it please our Father to open blind eyes, deaf ears, and mute tongues. May it please our Father to enlighten dark minds and lift the fog that clouds

the eyes of his people. How delightful to know God is for us and not against us! May we find his lavish grace to be a sustaining and comforting force in our daily moments of life.

11

The Reproach of Christ [is] Greater Riches than the Treasures of Egypt

“[Moses chose] rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Heb. 11:25, 26).

Read Hebrews 11:1-40

Chapter 11 in the book of Hebrews has been rightly called, “The Hall of Faith.” Throughout the chapter, constant reference is made to those who “by faith” persevered in their pursuit of God’s truth.

Chapter 11 finds its seed thought in Hebrews 10:32-34. Here Paul reminds his audience of the sufferings they endured for their faith. **They valued Jesus above all things created, even above their own lives.** At the end of chapter 10, the author reminds his audience that they “are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (v.39).

Chapter 11 continues on the theme of faith. Verse 1 provides a definition of faith, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The two statements are in a construction of synonymous parallelism; they are saying the same thing. **That which we cannot see, we still believe to be true.** It is through faith the believer finds approval before God (v.2). For it is through faith that what God said is believed to be true. Faith is an affirmation

of approval. **Faith does not make it true**; it simply agrees with the statement. This same idea is contained in verse 6. Without faith, it is impossible to please God for without faith, God is being called a liar. God rewards faith with eternal life (Rom. 10:13). God rewards faith by making the New Testament believer a joint-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17). God rewards faith by placing the New Testament believer into Christ and thus blessing him with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). **Every believer has faith and the reward of faith.**

Chapter 11 provides multiple pictures of those who had faith: Abel (v.4), Enoch (v.5), Noah (v.7), Abraham (vv.8, 17), Sarah (v.11), Isaac (v.20), Jacob (v.21), Joseph (v.22), Moses (v.23), those who kept the Passover (v.28), Rahab (v.31), and all those contained in verses 32-40. Verses 32-40 are a strong parallel to 10:32-39.

Those of faith have always suffered and sacrificed in their pursuit of God. We see this thought in Acts 14:22, 1 Thessalonians 3:3, and 2 Timothy 3:12.

“strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, **“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”** (Acts 14:22).

“so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; **for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this”** (1 Thess. 3:3).

“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

The people of faith always choose to endure ill-treatment as the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. They consider the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (vv. 25, 26). Christ is so valued above all things created that whatever hardship comes because of him is well worth the exchange. This is Paul’s

thought in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

As you live a life of grace, remember to keep your mind focused on Jesus. Someday all that we deem important will appear petty. Let us live well knowing what awaits us. **He stands with open arms and an approving look. His thoughts toward you are of life and freedom, not death and bondage.** Continue to live life from the divine perspective by the ongoing renewal of your mind.

His thoughts towards you are of life and freedom, not death and bondage.
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12

Seeing Jesus Christ in Our Suffering

“For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:3).

Read Hebrews 12:1-29

The person of Christ threads our chapter divisions together. Chapter 12 begins with “Therefore.” The “Therefore” connects chapter 12 with what preceded in chapter 11.

Many have stumbled in their understanding of the “chastening” or “discipline” of the Lord in verses 5 and following because of their failure to connect what is stated with the surrounding context. Their misinterpretation understands the “chastening” of Hebrews 12:5 and following to be because of sin, making the discipline punitive and penal. Yet, this is not the case. It is an unfortunate view because of one’s failure to see Hebrews 12 in light of Romans 4:6-8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and especially Hebrews 9:23-10:4.

We must see the admonition of verse 1 and 12 against the backdrop of those who are being *persecuted for their faith*. Such is the context with 10:32-39 and 11:32-40. It is for this reason the audience is encouraged to look to Jesus who is the founder and perfecter of their faith (v.2). He is the one who will finish what he alone began (1 Thess. 5:24; Phil. 1:6). It is for this reason the audience is encouraged to “lift their drooping hands and strengthen their weak knees” (v.12).

The author wanted his audience to know that the sufferings they were currently facing were coming from the hand of

their heavenly Father, and as such, they had purpose (v.10). In the persecution of faith, there is a refining process. This is stated in several other places.

“But he knows the way I take; When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

“For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined” (Ps. 66:10).

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

“It is as we are suffering that the treasure within our earthen vessels is seen” (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

The suffering is the “chastening.” The suffering is the “discipline of the Lord.” There is nothing negative about the chastening or discipline. It is positive, beneficial, and to be expected.

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Although the content of chapter 12 is against the backdrop of chapter 11, the author of Hebrews once more points us to Jesus Christ. **He becomes for the believer the supreme object of their affection.** We are told to look to Jesus, who is the founder and perfecter of our faith. Why are we to look to Jesus? Because **he counted the outworking of his Father’s perfect will in the crucifixion and resurrection as his joy.** He took joy from his suffering and exaltation because it was the outworking of grace and love (Phil. 2:1-11).

Because of this, we are to “Consider him” (v.3). Think about this whole scenario. Most who read this short study are not, and probably will never be, persecuted for their faith. There

is a sense in which the application to us must be made in principle, not directly. Nonetheless, as long as we occupy this body of flesh and live in a fallen world, we will face sin's curse and consequence. What is to be our mindset in the midst of our daily trials in a decaying, temporal world? **We are to joy in knowing that our Father's perfect will is being played out in the everyday events of our daily life.**

We are to joy in knowing that our Father's perfect will is being played out in the everyday events of our daily life.

We are not to live in denial or try to fake happiness. **We cannot deny reality, but rather embrace reality. It is the God-centered, Christ-exalting, Grace-based viewpoint that provides stability in an unstable world.**

Today, may it please our heavenly Father to enable us to joy in knowing he is performing his perfect will. Today, may it please him to help us see that all things are a shadow of his Son. Today, may it please him to make us mindful of the Holy Spirit's sure work of preservation in the life of his people. As always, may you continue to dance in the reign of his grace.

13

It is Good for the Heart to be Strengthened by Grace

“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.” (Heb. 13:9)

Read Hebrews 13:1-25

Chapter 13 provides a series of exhortations, which are built on and flow from the one who is “better than” all things created. It is critical for the New Testament believer never to separate the commands of the New Testament from what they know to be true. **The New Testament believer is never working for God’s approval, but always working from God’s approval.**

Verse 9 is pivotal in this chapter. It is easy for us to forget that mixing error with truth only creates error. We do not strengthen truth, but undermine and negate its reality when we abandon our position in Christ and endeavor to establish our own works righteousness. The message of grace is what strengthens the heart. Nothing is as satisfying and sustaining as the pure message of grace.¹ Christ is the message, and grace is the platform for all of God’s dealings with his people. Grace stabilizes the heart. Grace assures the people of God that their standing before the Father is secure and confirmed. Nothing

The New Testament believer is never working for God’s approval, but always working from God’s approval.

can shake the heart that stays on the truth of Christ and his work of grace on behalf of his people.

Interestingly enough, there is a parallel between grace and food. Like food, grace sustains, nourishes, delights, and satisfies. Often we fail to appreciate and then appropriate the grace of Christ as has been and is being lavished upon his people.

A.T. Robertson makes this observation concerning Hebrews 13:9:

“The new is not always wrong any more than the old is always right. But the air was already full of new and strange teachings that fascinated many by their very novelty. How true it is that in the atmosphere of so many windy theories only the heart is stable that has an experience of God's grace in Christ.”²

It would appear almost impossible to imagine that even during the days of the apostles there were positions taught that were undermining the gospel of grace. The person of Christ and his substitutionary sacrifice at Calvary was already coming under fire.

The book of Hebrews stands as a bastion, a bulwark, a citadel of immutable and irrefutable evidence. It silences the charges raised against Christ. There is no doubt as to who he is and what he has done for his people. He is God's answer. He is the zenith, the apex, and the pinnacle of sufficiency. He satisfies the deepest longing of the human heart. He is the end of the quest. In him, longing ceases and the heart finds its rest.

My friends, heaven is just around the corner. He is awaiting your arrival. His face shines as a delighted Father in the Son

he loves. His embrace is warm and his pleasure is real. Your pilgrimage is almost over. Today, let us continue “to go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (v.13). In our pursuit of him, let us not falter. Let us “seek the city that is to come” (v.14). Let us “through him continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God” (v.15).

In moments like these when my heart is strengthened by grace, I can almost see the city . . . and the Son’s good pleasure. Today, “Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings too closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith**” (12:1, 2).

As we close off the book of Hebrews, may we be encouraged to study anew his precious Word and in so doing, “Consider him.”

¹ For further reading see <https://rickthomas.net/the-dangerous-doctrine-of-grace-and-how-it-misguides-christians/>

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/robertsons-word-pictures/hebrews/hebrews-13-9.html>

A Final Word

Well . . . if you are like me in any way, you are probably winded from this breeze through Hebrews. The height to which the book of Hebrews takes the reader is breathtaking. This is true for two fundamental reasons. First, we are incapable of fully grasping the grandeur of this panoramic view. Second, the height from which this revelation is captured is so incredibly high that the air is very thin. It is difficult to get a full breath of air in one's lungs. Wheezing and gasping is the order of the day. No one walks away from Hebrews believing they fully understand the depth of its message.

There is simplicity in that Jesus is better than anything outside of himself. That alone is worth the climb. But let us not be fooled by the simplicity of this one thought. The contrasts are incapable of being completely understood, but to think of the detail is to miss the panoramic view. To overanalyze the water is to miss the thirst-quenching properties of the water. Take my word for it . . . and the word of an innumerable host . . . Jesus Christ is enough in this life and the life to come. There is nothing outside of him that can do for you what only he can.

The book calls us, yea, demands of us a repeat performance. Take your time. Climb once more Mt. Hebrews and see for yourself. Jesus Christ is better and all of God is causing you to see this. Embrace his working and celebrate his unconditional love for you. It will make you dizzy, but once you adjust to the height you will rest in the cool green pastures of his choosing.



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