



The Letter to the Hebrews

Chapters 7-13

The Literary Structure of Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews		Chapters 1-13	
The Supremacy of Jesus Christ and the New and Better Covenant	Pay Attention: The Word of the Covenant: The Son of God	The Supreme Son of God	1:4-2:18
		The Supreme Covenant Mediator	3:1-4:13
	Draw Near: The Sacrifice of the Covenant: The Blood of Jesus	The Supreme High Priest	4:14-7:28
		The Supreme New Covenant	8:1-10:39
The Response: New Covenant Faithfulness	The Life of the Covenant: Faith in Jesus	The Call to Faith	11:1-12:29
		Living Sacrifices	13:1-25

The main message of the book is that the Jesus Christ is the supreme mediator of the New Covenant which is a clarion call to draw near to God through the blood sacrifice of Jesus and follow him by faith and in covenant faithfulness to the end of the age.

The author of Hebrews is asserting that Jesus is the climactic, final, authoritative, greatest, and supreme revelation of God. The Jewish Christian readers may have been tempted or even pressured to fall back into their Mosaic roots and not continue press forward into the full implications and life of the new and better covenant. There are of course serious and practical implications with the assertion of Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of God.

The message of Hebrews not only helps to properly contextualize the prior revelations and commands of God preceding the coming of Jesus Christ, it sets its hearers on a clear path way towards a life of holiness and godliness in the present (1:1-4:13). It also provides the foundation of a glorious hope in the fulfillment of the promised future for the people of God as they draw near to God's throne (4:14-10:18). The only appropriate response to God's revelation and covenant promise in Jesus Christ is faith and covenant faithfulness (Hebrews 10:19-13:25).



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Draw Near: The Sacrifice of the Covenant: The Blood of Jesus (4:14-10:18)

Hebrews 1-4 is a call to pay attention to and obey the living and active word. Hebrews 5-10 is a call to draw near to God through the person and work of Jesus as High Priest and atoning sacrifice on the cross.

He introduces this section with the charge which he will develop through the next five chapters:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession....Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

The challenge for the Hebrews is that they are slipping away from a relationship with God rather than drawing in. There are several reasons for this. One, they are immature. This immaturity is due to an inattentiveness and hardness of heart toward the Word (see chapters 1-4). The root problem is deeper in that it is related to human weakness and the sin nature. Jesus is the only one who can help us overcome human weakness and sin. He has fought the battle over these two forces and won the victory. He alone can help us—only the believer must “draw near”, not “fall away”.

The Supreme High Priest (4:14-7:28)

The writer of Hebrews now develops a theological argument for the supremacy of Jesus’ high priesthood in the order of Melchizedek over the priesthood of Aaron and Levi. The section has four sections (of which the first three have been covered in last week’s lecture):

1. The Challenge to Draw Near to the Throne of Grace Jesus the High Priest. (4:14-16)
2. The Calling of Jesus as a Priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek. (5:1-10)
3. An Excursus on Christian Maturity and Apostasy (5:11-6:12)
4. The Oath of God for a Better Priest that brings a Better Hope than the Law of Moses (6:13-7:28)

The Oath of God for a Better Priest that brings a Better Hope than the Law of Moses (6:13-7:28)

At the heart of the writer is God’s stated purpose is a promise made to Abraham. The promise is found in Genesis 22:

By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. –Genesis 22:17-18

The writer argues that this promise is guaranteed by an oath. Because God does not have anything higher than himself to swear by, he swears by himself. The fulfillment of this promise to Abraham and Abraham’s heirs is absolutely guaranteed by the oath of God. Therefore the heirs of Abraham receive two unchangeable things: The Oath and The Promise. What is the promise? Multiplication and Blessing.



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The Blessing for Abraham came in his lifetime through the priesthood of a rather enigmatic figure named Melchizedek. His name means the "king of righteousness" and he was the King of Salem (Shalom), which means Peace (7:1).

The writer will argue that the priesthood of Melchizedek supersedes, or is greater than the priesthood of Levi and Aaron for three reasons: the Abrahamic tithe, the change to a new order of priesthood by indestructible resurrection power versus the weak and useless law, the confirmation by oath of God in the promises of Scripture.

He first uses an argument based in Abraham's tithe. First, he is great because the patriarch Abraham in offered him tithe, a tenth of all his spoils and received a blessing from him. The lesser (Abraham) is blessed by the greater (Melchizedek). (7:6-7) The Levites themselves tithed Melchizedek as they were in the loins of Abraham (7:9-10).

The second argument comes from a comparison priesthood according to the law vs. priesthood according to "the power of an indestructible life". With Jesus there has come a change in the priesthood, which necessitates a change to the laws. There is nothing the law of Moses related to anyone other than a Levite serving at the altar of God. Jesus as a member of the tribe of Judah. But the law was imperfect and weak (7:18). The change was wrought by the power of the resurrection (7:16) which enables the fulfillment of the divine promise of Psalm 110:4:

'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.' Psalm 110:4

The promise/purpose was confirmed by oath. Just as the Lord God swore an oath to multiply and bless Abraham (6:13-20), so has the Lord sworn by oath to anoint the Messiah as a 'priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The finite, sinful and temporary priesthood which always would require an endless supply of new priests with continual sacrifices has been once and for all time and people been replaced by a permanent priesthood in one Great High Priest.

...but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. Hebrews 7:24-28

The bottom line is that God has given us a better High Priest in Jesus because he is permanent, sinless, and completely effective for all time for all people. This is why he can "save to the uttermost those who



draw near to God through him"! (7:25) Because he is the superior high priest, his coming and ministry guarantees a superior new covenant (7:22).

The Supreme New Covenant (8:1-10:18)

Having established the supremacy of the High Priesthood of Jesus, the writer now turns his focus to the supremacy of the covenant that comes by the ministry of the Great High Priest.

The writer's thought progresses:

1. Jesus' priesthood Inaugurates the ministry of the New Covenant (8:1-13)
2. Jesus: The Mediator of a New Covenant (9:11-28)
3. Jesus: The Sacrifice of the New Covenant (10:1-17)
4. The Call to Enter the Holy Place (10:18-39)

Jesus' priesthood ushers in the ministry of the New Covenant (8:1-9:10)

Quoting the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34), the writer argues that God had long ago announced his intention to make the first covenant obsolete by superseding it with a new and better covenant. As Moses instituted the construction of the tabernacle, the ministry of the priesthood and the sacrifices, he was merely making a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things he saw in the glory cloud on the Mountain.

Why would the worshiper want the earthly, shadow and the temporary priesthood, worship and temple, when the real and the permanent priesthood and heavenly throne room is revealed and available in Jesus Christ.

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

The New Covenant makes the first covenant obsolete (8:13). Working inward toward the place of worship and holiness, the writer will now describe how the shadow and temporary points toward and is superseded by the new covenant realities in Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant.

The writer describes in detail the earthly tabernacle with its holy place and most holy place. He describes the ministry of the priests and the sacrifices offered. These merely point to the greater realities of Jesus as both priest and sacrifice.

Jesus: The Mediator of a New Covenant (9:11-28)

The coming of Christ marked the unveiling of the reality of worship in the true Holy Place.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means



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of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. – Heb. 9:11-12

All the ministry of the earthly priesthood and sacrifices could accomplish was the “purification of the flesh” (9:13). The new covenant promised to change the state of the heart. So the “blood of Christ through the “eternal Spirit” purifies “our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14).

Purification from sin requires blood sacrifice. The priests role is to offer blood sacrifices to purify. Jesus priestly ministry was entirely effective because of the nature of the sacrifice which he offered.

²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:23-26

Jesus: The Sacrifice of the New Covenant (10:1-17)

The priestly ministry of Jesus was entirely effective because he offered not the blood of bulls and goats, but a sacrifice of himself “once offered”.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. –Hebrews 10:10

The blood of animals could never truly take away sin. The proof of that is in the need for continued repetition of the sacrifices (10:2). The benefit of the old covenant sacrifices is in the continual reminder of sin (10:3).

The two key components promised by the new covenant in Jeremiah are:

1. The Indwelling Holy Spirit: The law is written on the heart.
2. The Forgiveness of Sins: God will remember their sins no more.

Jesus in his priestly ministry through his blood sacrifice has “perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (10:14). Therefore, there is now no more need for any further “offering for sin” (10:18).

The Call to Enter the Holy Place (10:18-39)

Having taught the promise, the supremacy and the means of the fulfillment of the New Covenant in Jesus as High Priest and Sacrifice, the writer now encourages the people of God to enter into the real holy place.



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Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. –Hebrews 10:19-22

Jesus has given us full access into the Holy Place of God throne room. It remains for us to draw near in full assurance of faith and trust in God.

The author of Hebrews has come full circle to the resolution to the concern voiced in 5:11-6:12. The concern for the members of the church was that they were falling away rather than moving closer to a more intimate communion with God. Their minds had grown dull to the word and they lacked maturity (Hebrews 6). They were going back to the old familiar rather than growing in maturity in light of their conversion and baptism. Yet because of the great ministry and sacrifice of Christ, our privilege is full access to God. So he offers three exhortations by way of encouragement:

1. Let us draw near [to God]....(10:22)
2. Let us hold fast to the hope without wavering...(10:23)
3. Let us consider how to stir up one another...(10:24)

Because the New Covenant is ultimate and final, the consequences in our application of it are ultimate and final. We are reaching the final Day (10:25). So now is not the time to shrink back, but to hold fast and persevere to the end. Yes the challenges and struggles with sin and persecution are hard. But, the stakes could not be higher both negatively and positively. So he exhorts:

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For,

*“Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.” –Hab. 2:3-4*

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. –Hebrews 10:35-39

The only wise response to the revelation of the New Covenant is to “have faith”!



The Response: New Covenant Faithfulness (11:1-13:25)

Life in the New Covenant is one lived by faith. The writer now defines and calls the church to the life of faith (11:1-12:29). He then challenges the people of God to offer themselves as living sacrifices in worship to God. (12:30-13:25)

The Call to Faith (11:1-12:29)

Here we find one of the clearest definitions of faith in the whole of Scriptures.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. Hebrews 11:1

Verse by verse, the author tells the story of redemptive history making the case that a vibrant relationship with God has always been one of faith in the promises of God. The faith of the heroes of God, is what the “ancients were commended”, yet they never saw or received in their lives the fulfillment of the New Covenant as those now living have.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. 11:39-40

The call therefore is to follow their example and witness in embracing by faith the promises of God in the New Covenant through Jesus. Jesus himself shows the way as the perfecter of our faith:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:1-2

Yes it is hard, yes there is suffering, yes the Lord will discipline us in order to sanctify us that we might share in his holiness. Through it all the call is to have faith in God through Jesus Christ. They had the Mount Sinai which was awesome and terrifying. However, we as the heirs of the New Covenant have access to Mount Zion.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. –Hebrews 12:22-24



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So the call to the New Covenant believer is to hear the voice of the God of the New Covenant and offer our lives in acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (12:28-29).

Living Sacrifice (12:30-13:25)

So the sacrifices that are pleasing to God, are not those offered at the Temple in Jerusalem (13:10-11). That is to go backward and reject the New Covenant.

No the sacrifices that please God are those offered in worship by spiritual fruits of love and service (13:1-3), in holiness of life eschewing sexual immorality and honoring marriage (13:4), in not being corrupted by love of money (13:5), in following the leadership and example of Godly Christian elders (13:7, 17).

The Christian life in these last days will be one of suffering for the Name of Jesus. He suffered so we should be willing to offer our lives in joining him in his sufferings (13:13). WE can bear anything now, because we have assurance and faith in the hope that is offered in the New Covenant:

¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. –Hebrews 13:14-16
