Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 9

Louis T. Talbot

Biola University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/talbot-pub

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/talbot-pub/106

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Louis T. Talbot Archive at Digital Commons @ Biola. It has been accepted for inclusion in Talbot Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Biola. For more information, please contact eileen.walraven@biola.edu.
LESSON IX

CHRIST—"THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT" THAN THE MOSAIC COVENANT
Hebrews 8:1-13

"A high priest . . . a minister of . . . the true tabernacle . . . a more excellent ministry . . . the mediator of a better covenant . . . established upon better promises,"
Heb. 8:1, 2, 6.

The first verse of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews states the central theme of the book, as we have repeatedly said in these lessons; and verse two introduces the second division of the main argument:

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (verse 1).

". . . a minister of the sanctuary (or 'holy things'), and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (verse 2).

In other words, verse one takes us back to the first seven chapters, wherein "such a high priest" as Jesus, the Son of God, is described in all His eternal glory and compassionate love—"better than" the prophets, "better than" angels, "better than" Moses and Joshua, and "better than" Aaron and all his sons, the Levitical priests in Israel. It has been an orderly development of the argument: First, our Lord’s priesthood is mentioned in 2:17, 18 and called "merciful and faithful." Then we are told to "consider . . . the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus" (3:1). The next reference to His priestly work tells us of His heavenly character, His sympathetic understanding of our needs, and of our access into His presence, even unto "the throne of grace" (4:14-16). Then in 5:1-10 we are told that He met both the human and the divine qualifications of a priest, and that He fulfills every duty of a priest. And in chapter seven we have the climax of the discussion concerning His holy,
eternal, omnipotent Person. Indeed, to repeat for emphasis, chapter seven might be called the highest point in the epistle; verse 25, the summary of the whole:

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

"Such a high priest"—"holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, and all-wise—"such a high priest" as the One described in the first seven chapters of the epistle, is Jesus the Son of God! And this is the "chief point" of the book; or, as the marginal rendering expresses it, "Now to sum up what we are saying: We have such a high priest...." (8:1).

Not only has the development of the argument been orderly; but with each added paragraph the Holy Spirit has faithfully and painstakingly proved that the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills every righteous demand of His holy law. That could be said of no earthly priest, not even of the best Judaism could produce.

Thus far the Holy Spirit has written mainly about our Lord's Person; in 8:1-10:18 He writes mainly about His work for us at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Even in emphasizing His holy, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient Person, the Holy Spirit has thrown much light also upon His ministry of love and power and grace; and it follows also that the glories of His blessed Person shine out on the pages of chapters 8:1-10:18. Indeed, it is difficult for us to talk about the one without referring to the other. But the emphasis in 8:1-10:18 is placed upon His ministry nearly two thousand years ago at the cross and even now at "the throne of grace"; whereas the emphasis in the preceding chapters has been upon His "altogether lovely" Person. And in both His Person and His ministry He is shown to be superior by far to Aaron and all the Levitical priests.

This second section of the "chief point" of the epistle, which proves that Christ is "better than" Aaron in His ministry, is too long for us to consider it all in one lesson; yet it should not be divided. Although it is a unit, we shall have to break it up into at least three studies; and even then we can only touch the fringes of its deep and profound truths. But as we look at it in outline, we find that the Holy Spirit proves that our Lord ministers:

1. In a better tabernacle than the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness, 8:1-5; cf. 9:1-10.
2. Under a better covenant than that of the Mosaic Law, 8:6-13.
3. Rendering a better service than that of Aaron and his son, 9:1-12.
4. Having offered a better sacrifice than the animal sacrifices of Judaism, 9:13-10:18.

Today we shall consider only chapter eight, which deals mainly with Christ, the "mediator of a better covenant," even as He ministers in "the true tabernacle," which is in heaven. In our next lesson we shall see the emphasis placed upon His "better service." And in 9:13-10:18 we shall see how the Holy Spirit dwells at length upon the "better sacrifice" of His own precious blood, at the same time continuing the contrast between the old covenant and the new, the Levitical ministry and the better, perfect ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any Hebrew living in the days of Paul and honestly seeking the truth could not fail to be convinced from this epistle, that "Christianity is better than Judaism, as seen in its Founder, Christ." He was compelled to leave the types and shadows of Judaism for the reality and the fulfillment in Christ Jesus; otherwise, turning his back upon the Lord he went off into gross apostasy. Any honest seeker after truth today must, likewise, be convinced and converted as he lets the Holy Spirit interpret these inspired pages concerning the ministry of our Great High Priest at heaven's throne. May we let Him be our Teacher, as today we compare the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant, of which "such a high priest" as the Lord Jesus Christ is the Mediator.

**OUR ASCENDED GREAT HIGH PRIEST**

"We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens," 8:1.

This is the third time in this epistle that reference has been made to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm
110:1; for in Heb. 1:3 and 1:13 we are told also that the Lord Jesus Christ is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high; and we shall read the same quotation in Heb. 10:12 and in Heb. 12:2. It is as if the Holy Spirit would emphasize the fact that, having finished the work of redemption on Calvary, the Son of God heard the Father’s voice, bidding Him and all believers everywhere to rest in that finished redemption; bidding the Son of God to take the position of honor and glory and power, there to wait till all His enemies should become His footstool. And it is as if the Holy Spirit would reassure us by reiterating the blessed truth that our Great High Priest is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high, there to minister for us at “the throne of grace.” As our Great High Priest, He ever lives to intercede for His blood-bought children. As our Great High Priest, He comforts and strengthens and sustains us in every trial. Thus His priestly work, which was begun at the cross, is continued at the throne of God. The chief idea of priesthood is ministry; and we have a Priest upon His throne, whose sacrifice is efficacious, whose prayers avail, whose mediatorial work satisfies every just and holy demand of a thrice-holy God.

Aaron and his sons could never rest in a finished work of their own. There was no chair in the Jewish tabernacle, for the priest’s work was never done. Only once a year Aaron could enter the Holy of Holies for just a few moments, not daring to sit down in the presence of the Shekinah Glory. But Jesus, the Lord of Glory, having finished His sacrificial work, ascended into heaven and sat down, even in the Most Holy Place. When He cried out on the cross, “It is finished,” He was telling men, angels, and demons that the full price of the sinner’s redemption had been paid. Oh, that men would believe it and rest in His gift of a full and free salvation! No paltry works of ours can add to Christ’s perfect work on Calvary’s Cross!

“A MINISTER OF . . . THE TRUE TABERNACLE”

“We have such a high priest . . . a minister of the sanctuary (or ‘holy things’), and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is necessary that this high priest also have somewhat to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those (Levitical priests) who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is warned of God when he is about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount” (Heb. 8:1-5, R. V.).

These verses, together with chapter nine, present a striking contrast between the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness and “the true tabernacle,” which “the Lord pitched, not man.” We shall have to leave the fuller discussion of chapter nine until our next lesson, but let us turn to it and read it just here.

Aaron and his sons ministered in the tabernacle in the wilderness; Christ ministers in the heavenly tabernacle, of which the earthly sanctuary was only a “pattern.” We are not told just what “the true tabernacle” is like; but since God repeatedly admonished Moses to make the earthly sanctuary “according to the pattern” which He showed him in Mount Sinai, we know that the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness set forth, in shadow and in type, the glories of that heavenly tabernacle, which “the Lord pitched, not man.” And again we are reminded of the words of prophet and apostle,

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (I Cor. 2:9, cf. Isaiah 64:4).

A careful reading of Heb. 8:1-5 and Heb. 9:1-28 will show us the following contrast between the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness and “the true tabernacle,” in which our Lord ministers in heaven:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Tabernacle in the Wilderness</th>
<th>The True Tabernacle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Earthly, 8:5; 9:1.</td>
<td>2. Heavenly, 8:5; 9:11, 23.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “gifts” which “every high priest” in Israel offered were the willing expression of thanksgiving and praise to Jehovah from His ancient people; the “sacrifices” were required by a holy God to show the faith of the believer in the promised Redeemer, and had to do with atonement for sin. Christ, our Great High Priest, has offered Himself “once for all,” as a full atonement for sin; and, as our Priest, He offers now the “gifts” of our praise and thanksgiving to God for such a Saviour. As our Representative before the court of heaven, He burns up the dross, as it were, in all our prayers and praise, and presents them without fault to the Father. That is the meaning of Heb. 8:3. Our Heavenly Priest takes out all the pride and selfishness and self-will from our prayers and praises; He presents only those things which glorify our Triune God.

Heb. 8:4 simply emphasizes the fact that His is a heavenly, not an earthly ministry. “For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest”; that is, he did not come through the Levitical order; and “if he were on earth,” would not intrude into the Levitical priesthood. He did not do that during His earthly ministry; He obeyed completely the Law of Moses, under which there were “priests that” offered “gifts according to the law.” In a former lesson we saw that terrible judgment came upon the sons of Korah and the rebellious princes in Israel who intruded into the priests’ office. We saw that King Saul’s offering of a sacrifice, as a priest, was one of the sins which cost him his kingdom. Still later King Uzziah intruded into the priest’s office, and was smitten with leprosy, even until his death. (See II Chron. 26:16-21.) Not so our Lord, during His life on earth; coming through the royal tribe of Judah, He did not presume to serve as a Levitical priest. Indeed, our last lesson showed us that His priesthood is of a higher order than that of Aaron; for His is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Accordingly, the Holy Spirit explains further, in Heb. 8:5, that the Levitical priests served “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things,” even as the earthly tabernacle was a “copy” (R. V.) of the heavenly sanctuary. The Lord’s sacrificial work on Calvary ushered in His priesthood; He continues His Great High Priestly ministry in heaven; there-fore, the Levitical priesthood, “a shadow of good things to come” in Christ, has been done away, even as the Jewish tabernacle has perished long ago.

The Holy Spirit’s interpretation of the typical teaching concerning the Jewish tabernacle doubtless made a strong impression on the Hebrews, to whom this epistle was addressed; for nearly half of the book of Exodus is devoted to a detailed description of that earthly sanctuary in the wilderness. All of chapters 25-40 of Exodus, with the exception of 32-34, are given over to that description. The importance which God attached to it is seen in the fact that the minute details are written twice in the inspired record: First, the instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai concerning the “pattern” of the tabernacle; then the story of how Moses built the sanctuary “according to the pattern” which God showed him in the mount.

It is significant, also, that the tabernacle and not the temple is used by the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a type of “the true tabernacle” in heaven; for the tabernacle in the wilderness foreshadowed Christ and His church, whom He is leading on a pilgrimage from this godless world to heaven itself; whereas the beautiful temple which Solomon built prefigured the millennial glory of the Lord Jesus. Egypt is a type of this world out of Christ; Canaan represents heaven; the Shekinah Glory, leading Israel from Egypt to Canaan, foreshadows the Holy Spirit’s leading Christ’s blood-bought church from this godless world to heaven, called in the Epistle to the Hebrews “the holiest of all.”

We can not enter upon a detailed study of the Jewish tabernacle just here, lest we wander too far afield from the message of Hebrews; yet a knowledge of the general plan of the tabernacle is necessary to the understanding of this epistle. The members of our radio Bible class who studied the Jewish tabernacle with us some months ago will recall that we spent many weeks on that subject, and presented the lessons in a book of nearly three hundred pages. Just here we can only outline briefly some of the high points of the message, as explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews. To any members of our radio audience who have not made a study of the Jewish tabernacle, let me repeat that a careful reading
of Exodus 25:1–40:38 is necessary to the understanding of Hebrews.

The tabernacle itself was composed of two rooms, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, and was surrounded by an outer court. Perhaps the diagram presented here will help us to visualize the general plan. This sanctuary stood "in the midst" of the twelve tribes of Israel; for, by express command of God, three tribes pitched their tents on each side of the tabernacle, according to their families and their tribes. Between these tents and the tabernacle itself were the tents of Moses, Aaron, the priests, and their families on the east; and those of the three families of the Levites on the north, south, and west, respectively. The Shekinah Glory, in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, stood above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, literally "in the midst" of the people, overshadowing them by day and by night. When God wanted His people to resume their journey, the Shekinah Glory lifted and went before them; when He wanted them to rest, the cloud of glory stood still, and the tents of the people were pitched around the tabernacle.

The outer court was made of fine white linen, hung upon pillars of brass, fastened upon sockets of brass. There was only one gate, with a hanging of blue, purple, and scarlet; and no Israelite dared enter except through that gate.

Before the gate in the outer court, stood the brazen altar, where the animal sacrifices were offered. Between the altar and the door of the tabernacle was the laver of brass, where the priests washed their hands and feet before they entered the Holy Place to minister before the Lord.

The Holy Place was twice as long as it was wide; the Holy of Holies was a perfect cube. The door leading into the Holy Place and the veil which separated the two rooms, as well as the inner covering that went over the top, were all of the same material as that which hung over the gate—fine twined linen of blue, purple, and scarlet hues, beautifully embroidered with figures of cherubim. Over the innermost covering above was another of pure white goats' hair; over that another of rams' skins dyed red; and over that yet another of badgers' skins (or seal skins).

In the Holy Place were three pieces of furniture: The golden candlestick on the south; the golden-covered table of shewbread opposite the candlestick on the north; and the
golden-covered altar of incense between the two and before the veil. In the Holy of Holies there was the golden-covered ark of the covenant, above which was the mercy seat of pure gold. And the six pieces of furniture, including the two in the outer court, were placed in the form of a cross. As we realize that the very arrangement of these precious articles fulfilled God’s express commands to Moses, we begin to see something of the typical significance of this sanctuary in the wilderness. They were, in very truth, a shadow of the cross.

Moreover, each piece of furniture was a remarkable picture of the promised Messiah and Lord. The brazen altar, where the animal sacrifices were slain, foreshadowed the cross of Jesus, the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29). Brass, in the Scriptures, speaks to us of judgment; and in His death our Lord bore the penalty of all our sins.

When Moses inducted Aaron and his sons into the priest’s office, he took them to the door of the tabernacle and washed them all over once for all; but day after day, year after year, before any priest could enter the Holy Place to minister before the Lord, he had to wash his hands and feet at the laver of brass, which stood between the brazen altar and the door. The one washing all over speaks of cleansing once for all from the penalty of sin by the blood of Christ; the many washings at the laver of brass foreshadowed the continual confession of sins done in the flesh, with the consequent cleansing which comes to the sinner saved by grace as he goes to Christ for forgiveness. With our hands we serve the Lord; with our feet we walk with Him; and both must be clean from the daily defilement of our pilgrim walk if our testimony is to count for His glory.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

The seven-branched golden candlestick foreshadowed our union with Christ, the Light of the world. (See John 8:12.) It was never to go out; and it was lighted from the brazen altar in the outer court. Christ is the Light of life only to those who will love Him as the Lamb slain! And He is the only true Light to the believer, even as the candlestick was the only light in the Holy Place.

On the table of shewbread there were twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The priests ate the shewbread every sabbath day, and put fresh loaves upon the golden-covered table. Here again we see the prophetic picture of our communion with Christ, the Bread of Life to our souls. (See John 6:35.)

Upon the golden altar sweet incense was burned, the smoke of which went up with the prayers of the priests on behalf of Israel, whom they represented. Again, this is a foreshadowing of our Great High Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God, whose prayers on our behalf are as sweet incense to the Father. (See Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34.)

The veil, as we shall see in Heb. 10:20, prefigured “His flesh,” which was broken for us when our Lord died upon the cross. The veil of the tabernacle—as also of the temple—closed “the way into the holiest of all” (Heb. 9:8). Only the high priest dared enter the Holy of Holies, beyond the veil; and even he could enter there, where God dwelt, only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. To disobey this command of God meant certain death; for the Holy of Holies was a type of heaven; and the way to heaven was opened only by the shed blood of Christ on Calvary. That is why, when He died, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matt. 27:51). History tells us that the unbelieving Jews sewed it together again, but their stubborn blindness could not alter the fact that God forever opened the way into heaven itself by the shed blood of the Lamb of God. That is why Paul could write to the Roman Christians, saying that “we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:2). That is why he could urge the Hebrew Christians to “come boldly unto the throne of grace,” drawing near “with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 4:16; 10:22). That is why Christ died to bring us near unto Himself!

We have seen that the Holy of Holies was a picture of heaven; and that there God dwelt “in the midst” of His people in the Shekinah Glory. That beautiful pillar of cloud and fire stood above the mercy seat, which covered the ark of the covenant. Within the ark were the two tables of
stone, upon which were written the ten commandments; Aaron's rod that budded, proving that he was God's chosen priest; and a golden pot of manna, to remind Israel of God's provision by the way. The mercy seat was made of pure gold. On each end was the image of a cherub of gold, beaten out of the one piece. These two cherubim faced each other, and looked down upon the mercy seat, whereon Aaron sprinkled the blood of the animal sacrifice. And between the cherubim stood the Shekinah Glory. The cherubim in the Scriptures seem to protect the holiness of God, keeping sinful man back, except on the basis of the death of Christ on the cross. But Aaron, the representative of a sinful people, could enter God's presence, because upon and before the mercy seat he sprinkled the blood, which pointed on to Christ and His full atonement on Calvary. Therefore, Aaron did not die, when once a year he entered that Most Holy Place. God's judgment throne had been changed to a throne of grace, a mercy seat, because upon it was the sprinkled blood. And beneath the mercy seat was the holy law of God, hidden from view, covered by the blood. The ark of the covenant is an eloquent picture of Christ; within His heart He kept unbroken God's holy law; and as we approach Him by faith in His finished work on the cross, we may enter boldly into heaven itself and the glorious presence of God. He who kept that law fully for us is our Representative at heaven's court; His mediatiorial work on our behalf is sufficient. Yes; He longs for us to "draw near" unto Him. He wants our fellowship and love and praise.

How could Gospel-hardened Hebrews turn away from such a Saviour? How can Gospel-hardened men today reject His matchless love?

Before we leave this brief outline of the typical significance of the Jewish tabernacle, we must pause to note that the beautiful hangings over the gate, the door, and the top of the sanctuary foreshadowed the glories and perfections of Christ. Blue is the heavenly color; and our Lord came down from heaven. Purple speaks of the royalty of the King of kings. And scarlet reminds us of His sacrifice on the cross. The cherubim, embroidered upon these beautiful hangings, suggest again that the angelic creatures whom they represented protect the holiness of God.

The pure white goats' hair curtain, which went over the top of the beautiful linen curtain, makes us think of the sinless character of the Son of Man in His earthly ministry. The rams' skins dyed red suggest His sacrifice; the badgers' skins made Him appear, as it were, one like unto His brethren according to the flesh. To the man outside of Christ, He seems to be only a good man - not God; but to the believer-priest, He is seen in all His uncreated glory and deity.

The white linen curtain which formed the outer court speaks to us of the righteousness of God. None dared enter the sanctuary where God dwelt except through the gate, by the way of the altar. Even so Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). None may enter into God's presence except by the way of His cross. He is the gate; He is the door; His flesh is the veil. He alone has forever opened the way to heaven by His own precious blood. There is no other way of access to God.

The walls of the tabernacle were made of boards of acacia wood, covered inside and out with pure gold, set up on the sands of the desert in sockets of silver, and fastened securely together with bars of acacia wood covered with gold. The silver sockets were made from the redemption money of the children of Israel; and the boards foreshadowed individual believers in Christ united in the one bond of His love. Once trees, rooted in the earth, they were cut down, robbed of their earthly glory, then covered with a glory not their own. Likewise, the members of the bride of Christ, in whom His Holy Spirit dwells, established upon the redemption which He purchased with His own blood, see in themselves "no good thing," but take as the free gift of His grace the glory which He has provided. And He dwells "in the midst" of His redeemed, even as the Shekinah Glory dwelt "in the midst" of God's ancient people, Israel, long centuries ago; for "where two or three are gathered together in my name," He said, "there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Such, in brief, is the typical significance of the Jewish tabernacle in the wilderness, a "copy" or "pattern" or "shadow" of "the true tabernacle," which the Lord built and not man. It was very beautiful; it must have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in our money; it was a sacred place; but it was material and perishable. Many cen-
turies ago it vanished away; for it had served the purpose
God had for it—to foreshadow the glories of Christ, and His
relationship to His church. Yet the very remembrance of
its glory causes us to wonder just how beautiful “the true
tabernacle” in heaven must be. It is “a greater and more
perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” (Heb. 9:11). Our
Great High Priest is there, ever living to minister for us
before “the throne of grace.” And He bids us “draw nigh”
unto Him in worship and love—unafraid, because His sprin­
kled blood has changed God’s judgment throne into a mercy
seat.

"From every stormy wind that blows,
   From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat;
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.

"There is a place where Jesus sheds
   The oil of gladness on our heads,
A place than all beside more sweet;
It is the blood-bought mercy seat.

"Ah! whither could we flee for aid,
   When tempted, desolate, dismayed?
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,
   Had suffering saints no mercy seat?

"There, there, on eagle-wings we soar,
   And sin and sense seem all no more;
And heaven comes down, our souls to meet,
   And glory crowns the mercy seat."

THE NEW COVENANT IS “BETTER THAN”
THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Not only does our Great High Priest minister in a better
tabernacle than the sanctuary in the wilderness; but He is
also ministering for us under a better covenant than that
of the Law of Moses.

"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).

God had been dealing with Israel in grace from the
time He called Abraham to be the father of the nation
until He led them out of bondage in Egypt and unto Mount
Sinai. He had borne them “on eagles’ wings” and brought
them unto Himself (Exod. 19:4). Then He said unto them
through Moses,

"Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and
keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure
unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and
ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy
nation” (Exod. 19:5, 6).

When the children of Israel answered the Lord, they
showed how little they realized their weakness and frailty;
for they presumptuously said,

“All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exod. 19:8).
They were exchanging God’s grace for the yoke of bondage
to the law, which they could never keep because of their sin.
Even while Moses was on Mount Sinai, receiving from God
the ten commandments, Aaron was leading them in the
worship of a golden calf; they were dancing naked around
that image, in shameless idolatry. They were even giving
credit to gods of gold for having led them out of Egypt!
(See Exod. 32:4.) No wonder Moses broke the tables of
stone when he beheld such ingratitude, such iniquity! He
dared not take the law into the camp; for had he done so,
the penalty upon the guilty would have been immediate
death. God did not rebuke him for breaking the tables of
stone; Israel had already broken the commandments written
thereon. Moses, therefore, in righteous indignation, broke
the two tables of stone upon which the holy law had been
written “with the finger of God.”

That law was “the old covenant,” contrasted with “the
new covenant” in the eighth chapter of Hebrews. It was
“added because of transgressions, till the seed (Christ) should
come” (Gal. 3:19). It was given to Israel to show the
“exceeding sinfulness of sin.” (Cf. Rom. 7:13.) It was
“our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24).
God knew, from all eternity, that He was going to make a
new covenant, which was to be sealed by the blood of the
Lord Jesus Christ; and knowing of this gift of pure grace,
which He was to bestow, He wrote it in the Hebrews' own Old Testament by the pen of Jeremiah, some six hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. That is the prophecy quoted by the Holy Spirit in Heb. 8:8-12, quoted from Jer. 31:31-34.

When Jeremiah wrote that prophecy, the ten northern tribes of Israel had been taken into the Assyrian captivity, and he was being persecuted because he foretold the Babylonian captivity, unless Judah repented of her idolatry. Humanly speaking, it seemed impossible that the twelve tribes should ever be re-united as a nation, or that they should ever again return unto the Lord in united worship and praise. But Jeremiah believed in the Saviour to come; he believed God's promise concerning Israel's restoration; and, under the guidance of inspiration, he wrote of the coming into the world of Jesus, the "Mediator of a better covenant" than that of the Law of Moses. He saw that it was to be all of grace, by faith in the shed blood of Israel's Messiah and the Saviour of the world. If Jeremiah had not believed God, if he had written out of human wisdom only, he could not have expressed such faith as he did in this prophecy concerning "the new covenant" which God was going to make "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." But faith in God's Word led him to believe that the divided, scattered, idolatrous nation would one day be reunited, in worship of the living God. Jeremiah believed in Jehovah; and the Holy Spirit guided him as he wrote that marvelous prophecy quoted in Heb. 8:8-12. Let us read it just here, together with verse 7, which plainly states that the old covenant of the Law of Moses was not "faultless" because Israel's sin forbade her keeping it:

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them (i. e., the Israelites), 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 re-

garded them not, saith the Lord. 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" (Heb. 8:7-12).

In these wonderful words there is not one suggestion of anything that the sinner must do or can do to receive God's blessing; it is all of grace. There are no commands: No "If ye obey ... "; "If ye observe to do ... " For this prophecy of Jeremiah foretold the coming of Christ to die for the sinner, to offer the free gift of His salvation. God's sovereign grace is emphasized by the repeated "I will's" of this reassuring passage:

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... "
"This is the covenant that I will make ... "
"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."
"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people ... "
"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness."
"I will ... remember no more ... their sins and their iniquities."

Six hundred years passed between the time when Jeremiah wrote these words and the day when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Our Lord went about His earthly ministry, setting His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and His cross. Then, shortly before His betrayal and suffering and death, He said to the eleven disciples, even as He taught them the meaning of the broken bread and poured out wine, emblems of His broken body and shed blood,

"... this is my blood of the new covenant (or 'testament'), which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28).
Later the Apostle Paul, referring to the Lord’s Supper, wrote to the Corinthian Christians, saying,

"... after the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament (or 'covenant') in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:25).

When our Lord uttered these words, He was telling His eleven disciples that the “new covenant,” about which Jeremiah had prophesied six centuries previously, was about to be sealed by the blood of Calvary’s Cross. He was telling His disciples, and Christians throughout all the centuries to follow, that His new covenant of grace was to do away with the old covenant of the Law of Moses. Throughout His teaching on earth He had repeatedly said that the sinner could be saved by faith and faith alone. And every time we who love Him partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are remembering Him in worship and thanksgiving for His new covenant, sealed with His precious blood—remembering Him till He comes. When we see Him, we shall no longer need these reminders of His work for us on Calvary; we shall be with Him forever!

But let us look again at Jeremiah’s prophecy, to see how much “better” the new covenant is than the old:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Old Covenant</th>
<th>The New Covenant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Written on tables of stone, Exod. 32:15, 16; 34:1.</td>
<td>3. Written on mind and heart, Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowledge for the few (i.e., only the priests were specially taught spiritual things.)</td>
<td>5. “All shall know me,” Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ceremonial cleansing.</td>
<td>6. Full forgiveness, Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worthy of note that the new covenant is referred to by Jeremiah and by Paul, in quoting the prophecy, as being made “with the house of Israel and . . . the house of Judah.” The Gentiles are not mentioned. It was not given to the prophets to know about church truth, “which throughout the ages hath been hid in God,” but “which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men . . . that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:1-12). The teaching concerning the church as the mystical body of Christ, His bride, was first revealed unto Paul, as this passage in Ephesians plainly states. But in the Epistle to the Hebrews Paul was addressing Jews, proving to them, from their own Old Testament Scriptures, that Christ is “better than” Judaism; therefore, he repeatedly quoted from their prophets to convince them of the claims of Christ. It is in Ephesians that he sets forth most clearly spiritual
truth concerning Christ and the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, though that truth can not be separated from the Epistle to the Hebrews either. Indeed, it was written to instruct Hebrew Christians, members of the church, as well as to warn those Hebrews who were “enlightened,” but not regenerated.

In writing to the Romans Paul said that to the “Israelites... pertaineth... the covenants” (Rom. 9:4). By that he meant that God had made a covenant with Abraham, promising the Saviour and giving the land of Canaan to Abraham’s people; that He had made the Mosaic covenant with Israel; that He had made a covenant with David, promising the King to sit upon David’s throne; and that, through Jeremiah, He had promised the “new covenant,” all of grace. The whole body of Scripture teaches that God will keep every covenant He has made with Israel. He has already given to Abraham a great nation; and through that nation, the Saviour and the Holy Scriptures. He has already sealed the new covenant with the precious blood of His well beloved Son. And He will one day send that once-rejected Son and King to sit upon David’s throne, to rule over Israel restored to Abraham’s land. God always keeps His covenants!

But the blessed truth for the church today is that she, too, enters into “the new covenant,” sealed with the blood of Christ. That is why Paul could write to the Ephesian Christians, saying,

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:11-13).

When our Lord said to the eleven disciples,

“This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins,”

He included every sinner of every race and color and tongue. His death on the cross provides salvation for “whosoever believeth in Him.” And it is all of grace!

The Mosaic covenant was given to Hebrews, not to Gentiles; yet we find Gentiles today clinging to it, just as many Hebrews clung to it in the days of Paul—all this in spite of the fact that God took Israel out from under the old covenant, and brought her into the new!

What Jeremiah and Paul, in Hebrews, were saying was that “the new covenant,” made with Israel, guarantees God’s restoration of His chosen people to their own land of Palestine, and His forgiveness of their national sin in rejecting their Messiah. In that coming day the Son of David will sit upon David’s throne. Then all the Gentile nations will share in the millennial blessings. “All shall know” the Lord of Glory. In that day there will not be millions of people in heathen darkness. Israel, as a nation, will enter into the blood-covenant of Jesus, the Son of God; and “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

What our Lord was saying to His disciples when He instituted the Lord’s Supper; what Paul was saying in Ephesians and throughout his epistles was that, in this church age every individual Jew or Gentile who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation has entered into the blood-covenant, foretold by Jeremiah and sealed by the blood of Christ. Not only so, but he is a member of the church, which is the bride of Christ.

We who love the Lord have been brought into “the new covenant,” the blood-covenant—not by keeping the ten commandments, not by any works of our own; but by the free gift of God’s grace. If I should offer you a book, my friend, you would not keep on saying, “I’ll try to take it.” You would reach out and accept it. Why say to God, as He offers you the free gift of His salvation, “I’m trying to be a Christian”? Cease trying; begin trusting!

“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

Oh, that Sunday School teachers would see that John 3:16 is written on the hearts of their pupils before they have
them learn the ten commandments! Our churches need to be taught something of the grace of God; then Christians will want to obey Him because they love Him!

A striking paragraph from the pen of the late F. B. Meyer, that godly man whose ministry has been a source of inspiration to thousands, summarizes the meaning of the new covenant; we quote it here:

"Do you ask how God can call this a covenant, in which there is no second party? The answer is easy: Jesus Christ has stood in our stead, and has not only negotiated this covenant but has fulfilled in our name, and on our behalf, all the conditions which were necessary and right. He has borne the penalty of human weakness and transgression. He has met all demands for a perfect and unbroken obedience. He has engaged to secure, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, a holiness in us which could never have been obtained by our own efforts. And as He has become our Sponsor and Surety, so God is able to enter into these liberal terms with us, saying nothing of all the cost to His Son, but permitting us to share all the benefits; on this condition only, that we identify ourselves with Him by a living faith, intrusting all spiritual transactions into His hands, and abiding by the decisions of His will. This is the new and better covenant, which has replaced the old."

The God who took Israel "by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt" has written His law upon our hearts, if we love Him; and out of the heart are "the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Through the new birth He has made us "partakers of the divine nature." We need no earthly priest to teach us about Him; He is our Great High Priest; and "all shall know" Him who meet Him at His cross. He is "merciful" to us in our "unrighteousness." And, blessed assurance! He remembers our "sins and iniquities no more" forever! May we let His Holy Spirit teach us in ever-increasing measure to "know" Him in all His unfathomable love!

The New Covenant Has Done Away With the Old

The closing verse of the eighth chapter of Hebrews adds a finality to the whole argument that can not be refuted:

"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 (i. e., 'grows old and aged, and is near to disappearing')."

When an old garment has served its purpose and is worn threadbare, it is cast off. It vanishes away. When the Law of Moses had served its purpose; when, for fifteen centuries, men proved to themselves that they could not obey it perfectly; when it had revealed to man the "exceeding sinfulness of sin"; God gave the new covenant, setting aside forever the old covenant of the law. His holy law had been magnified in Christ, fulfilled by Him, forever vindicated; and by grace He ushered in a new age, a new covenant, the old having vanished away. The sentence of death was passed upon the old covenant. To quote another, "Leviticalism died when Christ died and arose!"

And that includes the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath; it includes trying to work for one's salvation.

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4).

The Hebrews living in the days of Paul were without excuse if, after reading this epistle, they went back to the temple, offering lambs and calves and goats and turtle doves and young pigeons. They were without excuse if they persisted in the ceremonies and ritual of decaying and aged Judaism. It had served its purpose, and God meant for it to vanish away.

Christians living in this year of our Lord nineteen hundred and forty-three are without excuse if they do not have assurance of salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ. They are without excuse if they try to mingle law and grace. To attempt to work for eternal life is to deny the efficacy of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus; it is to doubt His promise, spoken many centuries ago, yet fresh and meaningful today and forever,

"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."