

The New Covenant

A Self-Study Course

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Contents

	Page
How to Study This Course	2
Lesson 1: Messiah's Blood of the Covenant	3
Lesson 2: Messiah Was "Made Perfect" & Became a Priest Forever	12
Lesson 3: Messiah Another Priest Like Melchizedek	21
Lesson 4: Messiah's New Covenant Ministry A	30
Lesson 5: Messiah's New Covenant Ministry B	40
Appendix A: Some Passages about Priestly Concerns	51
Appendix B: The New Covenant Inheritance according to Hebrews	53
Answers	59

How to Study This Course

Importance of This Subject

In the Bible God revealed the meaning and direction of history. There are many aspects, which we can organize in our minds by fitting them into the framework furnished by the covenants. God's covenants are His solemn promises revealing the plan He is carrying out—where He is leading history. The most important covenant is called the New Covenant, which our Lord Jesus told believers to celebrate regularly in the Lord's Supper. In fact, the words *New Testament* actually mean *New Covenant*—twenty-seven books about it. So this course is merely an introduction.

Course Description

This study of the New Covenant has five lessons. Each lesson has objectives indicated by the questions just under its title. There are also sets of numbered questions in each lesson, to help you learn the most important matters. Answer each set before you look up the provided answers near the end of the course. The first number for each question is the lesson number. For example, Q1.1 and Q1.2 are questions 1 and 2 in Lesson 1. Q4.5 is question 5 in Lesson 4.

These lessons began as sermons written out and preached at intervals. Therefore, they have more repetition and review than usual, also many Scriptures printed out that a student would normally have to look up. Most Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version, 1984.

Course Goals. Among other things, you should be able to

1. tell how the Abrahamic Covenant, Old Covenant, and New Covenant were inaugurated.
2. contrast Jesus to Old Covenant priests in His person and His work.
3. list four ways in which Jesus is like Melchizedek.
4. list four ways the New Covenant is better than the law.
5. list five means by which the New Covenant works.

Messiah instead of Christ. John 1:41 records the first witness by a person destined to become an apostle. Andrew witnessed to his brother Simon: “‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ).” As this record shows, Andrew used the title *Messiah* (representing Aramaic *Messias*), equivalent to the title *Christ* (representing Greek *Cristos*). Both terms meant “Anointed” to be King. This King, Christ/Messiah died for our sins in His first coming but will come back to rule as predicted. Trouble is, many now wrongly consider *Christ* just a name. We forget its royal meaning to the original speakers and hearers. So, to preserve that meaning, I often substitute *Messiah* for it (as John 1:41 authorizes). NIV 2010 sometimes made the same change. For example, John 20:31 tells the object of that Gospel: “believe that Jesus is the *Messiah*...and... have life....” And Acts 5:41-42 repeats the same good news as constantly preached by “the apostles....Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the *Messiah*.” Believing that good news brings us under the New Covenant, which **Messiah** inaugurated with His death and now administers. Therefore, I begin each lesson title with “**Messiah**.”

When you study the Bible, you will be enriched if you respond to God and continue in His Word. But you will be impoverished if you only learn facts but do not respond.

Lesson 1

Messiah's Blood of the Covenant

What is the meaning and purpose of biblical covenants? The historic setting for the Abrahamic Covenant? the Old Covenant? the New Covenant? the means of inaugurating each? Has "the blood of the New Covenant" been "sprinkled on" you?

Read the following five passages. The Exodus passage concerns the Old Covenant (the law); the others, the New Covenant. Note especially the words I have bolded. What key phrase in the Exodus passage is repeated or paraphrased in all the New Testament passages?

Exodus 24:3-8

3 When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." 4 Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Matthew 26:26-29

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. **28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.** 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Mark 14:22-25

22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

25 "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

Luke 22:14-20

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."** 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Introduction

The Hubble telescope, which orbits our earth, can take pictures in space impossible for ordinary telescopes. In 2004 it was trained for several days on an empty section of the sky near the Galaxy Orion. To the naked eye the area was only as big as a grain of sand held at arm's length. Astronomers now claim that the feeble photons of light coming from that area started their journey about thirteen billion years ago, from the farthest stars ever discovered. When the faint images were analyzed, they revealed over ten thousand galaxies, each having billions of stars. That one speck of the sky is being called the "ultra-deep field." It is calculated that there are over a hundred billion galaxies in the universe.

We believe that one Person made them all. How appropriate are the words of the shepherd boy in Psalm 8. Verses 1 and 8 both say: "Oh, Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Verses 3 and 4 continue: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

The invisible God made the visible world—and man to rule it—then began to reveal Himself. He saw to it that we have a record of the meaning of His revelation. It's called the Bible. The Bible itself provides us a framework by which to organize the many aspects of God's revelation. The framework consists of His solemn promises and agreements that He emphasized. The Bible calls them covenants. In them God revealed the plan He is carrying out—where He is leading history. In this lesson we will look briefly at three of those covenants.

Putting a covenant into effect is called "ratifying" it or "inaugurating" it. In the Ancient Near East, as well as other places and times, there was often an impressive ceremony to ratify an important covenant. The ceremony portrayed the symbolic death of those who made the covenant. Usually they sacrificed one or more animals and represented that death as their own death. In other words, they pledged their lives to keep the covenant. ("May I die as this animal died if I do not keep my part of the agreement.") The ratifying blood was called "the blood of the cove-

nant.” The ceremony was similar to the solemn oaths humans sometimes make then sign with their own blood.

As I said, we will look at three important covenants God made to show us His own unfailing plans. They are (1) His covenant with Abraham, (2) His first covenant with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, that is, the law, and (3) His New Covenant. All three were inaugurated with blood. In each case I will ask and answer two questions: why the covenant was needed and how it was made. Our key phrase is found in Exodus 24:8 and Matthew 26:28, both of which mention “the blood of the covenant.”

Before you continue, test your memory. Then check your answers against those given at the end.

Q1.1 What are biblical covenants? How do they help us understand the Bible?

Q1.2 In the solemn ceremony ratifying an important covenant, what did the death of animals represent?

Q1.3 What key phrase in the account of the law ratification is repeated or paraphrased in the New Testament passages about the New Covenant?

I. God's Covenant with Abraham

A. Why was it needed? Because of the relentless moral breakdown on earth, including

- Genesis 3: our fall and being kept from the tree of life.
- Genesis 4: the first child a murderer, his civilization perverse.
- Genesis 5: the unrelieved march of mankind to death. Over and over again we read “and he died.”
- Genesis 6: the wickedness of all the world until God destroyed that world with a flood.
- Genesis 10-11: the nations after the flood again go off in the wrong direction, trying to unite in one worldwide godless government at the tower of Babel. God stops them in their tracks.

B. How was it made?

1. It was promised in Genesis 12:1-3. This included God's blessing Abraham personally, making him into a great nation, and blessing all other nations through him.
2. It was ratified with blood in Genesis 15. Read the selected verses. Notice which aspects of the covenant were emphasized on this occasion—giving Abraham many descendants and causing him to inherit the Promised Land. Notice also that the covenant was ratified by killing some animals and by God symbolically identifying Himself with their death. He passed through them in the form of fire, signifying that He would no sooner change that covenant than if He had died like the animals.

Genesis 15:3-11, 17-18

3 And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” 5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

7 He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

8 But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

9 So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

 17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates...”

So what did this ceremony mean? By it God ratified His covenant with Abram (Abraham) by symbolically dying. When the fire passed between the pieces of the sacrifices, that symbolized that in the death of those animals God Himself died, who made the covenant (Jer. 34:18-20). By believing such promises, Abraham was counted as just before God and became the spiritual father of all believers.

In Chart A row 3 concerns the Abrahamic Covenant. On the basis of what you have just read, finish filling out that row. In column 2 tell why that covenant was needed. In column 3, how it was ratified. As you read about the next two covenants, fill out rows 4 and 5.

CHART A Three Important Biblical Covenants		
Covenant Name	Need for It	Its Ratification
Abrahamic Covenant		
Old Covenant (The Law)		
New Covenant		

Now let us pass to a later covenant,

II. God’s First Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai (the Law)

A. Why was it needed? To guard Israel from wickedness—and show them God’s standards. The rest of Genesis tells how God gave Abraham a big family, which became a nation. His grandson Jacob had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. But Abraham’s nation was wicked. Jacob himself still has a reputation for being deceitful. His sons sold their own brother Joseph into slavery. Judah began living with the wicked Canaanites and like the Canaanites. In contrast, Joseph was exceptional for his godliness and preserved his own nation in

Egypt. But Israel eventually became slaves and idol worshippers in Egypt. When the time came for them to return to Canaan, the Canaanites had reached the depths of depravity. How would Israel resist such wickedness? They desperately needed to learn to be like the God who had chosen them. And don't we all need to know God's standards and see how we measure up!

In Exodus chapters 1-18 God used Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt and to His mountain. There He would make His first covenant with the entire nation and institute His kingdom over them. The covenant would serve as the constitution of His kingdom on earth.

B. How was it made? In three steps:

It was first promised, then proclaimed both publicly and privately, then ratified by blood.

1. It was promised in Exodus 19:4-6. When Israel first reached Mt. Sinai, God announced that He would make His covenant with them, which agreement is also called the law. He made clear that its purpose was to be the constitution of His kingdom. Read Exodus 19:4-6.

4 "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

So Israel would be God's kingdom and treasure, holy like Him, and priests for the world.

2. It was proclaimed in Exodus 20. God first spoke His most basic laws from the mountain, then wrote them on stones. He also gave Moses other laws to write down. Exodus 20 records God's words from the mountain and the people's response. After hearing the Ten Commandments, they were afraid they would die if God kept speaking. They asked Moses to speak for God instead, and then remained at a distance while Moses approached God in the thick darkness.¹

Now we come to the third step in making the law covenant,

3. It was ratified in Exodus 24:3-8. Reread those verses, noticing how that covenant was ratified.

3 When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." 4 Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. 6 Moses took half of the blood and

¹ Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 You shall have no other gods before me...." [Here follow the rest of the Ten Commandments. Then notice the people's response.]

18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

21 The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

So the law covenant was ratified by killing sacrifices and sprinkling their blood of the covenant on the altar and the people. Such blood was also applied to other parts of the tabernacle and its furniture. As usual, it was not just killing the sacrifice that ratified but applying the blood where it was needed.²

Before leaving the discussion of this first covenant with Israel, I will comment on two more things:

4. The ruler and priesthood under the law
 - a. The main ruler under the law was God Himself. He had Israel construct Him a dwelling place, which was the tabernacle, later replaced by the temple. In the Holiest Place was His throne, the gold-covered ark, from which He gave the laws.³

No one had the right to enter His presence, although the High Priest went in with sacrificial blood once a year. The Book of Hebrews discusses these things at length. It reminds us that the tabernacle was only a symbol of God's real dwelling place in heaven. It also discusses

- b. The priesthood that administered the law and kept it in operation. Exodus 28:1-2 begins that discussion:
 - 1 "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests.
 - 2 Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor."

Under the law no one could become a priest except a descendant of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi. No one else was allowed to offer sacrifices in the tabernacle or enter the Holy Place. Even priests did not have access into God's presence. And the priesthood kept

² The Book of Hebrews, which says a great deal about the law covenant and the New Covenant, makes the following comment in 9:16-20. I have changed the word "will" to "covenant" each time. It means that and is always translated that way elsewhere.

16 In the case of a covenant, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a covenant is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep."

³ Exodus 25:8-9, 21-22 explain the main purpose of the sanctuary and ark:

8 "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. 9 Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.-----

21 Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. 22 There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."

changing because death eventually stopped the ministry of each priest. That was one of several weaknesses of the first covenant, which led to a better covenant.

- Q1.4** When God promised His covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, what three things did He say they would be? (See Exod. 19:4-6.)
- Q1.5** In the Old Testament kingdom, where was God's throne from which He gave His laws?

III. God's New Covenant with Israel

A. Why was it needed?

1. Because the covenant of law was weak.
 - The tabernacle was only a shadow of God's real dwelling place in heaven, to which it never gave access.
 - The priesthood consisted of men that died.
 - The sacrifices of animals could not cleanse anyone's conscience or take away his sins.
2. Because of Israel's rebellion and idolatry. They did not keep the law.
3. Because there is no other way for us to inherit God's blessings forever. That is what Hebrews 9:15 says:

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, **that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance**—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

We will discuss this reason in a later study.

B. How was it made?

It was promised centuries earlier, anticipated just before it was made, and ratified by the death of Messiah Himself.

1. It was promised, for example, in Jeremiah 31 (also earlier in other ways, such as in Deut. 30:6, as circumcising their hearts). Part of this promise is quoted word for word in the Book of Hebrews. As you read, notice that God would make this New Covenant with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah," that is, with ethnic Israel. It was not promised for us Gentiles but *for the same nation God uprooted and tore down*. He will some day build and plant them. In other words, God guarantees ethnic Israel an eternal future and a better covenant.⁴

Now read the following, watching for three ways the New Covenant would be better than the first covenant.

Jeremiah 31:27-28, 31-34

27 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. 28 Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD....

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

⁴ In Romans 9:3-5 the apostle Paul reminds us that all the covenants belong to Israel.

³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'

because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Did you notice at least three ways the New Covenant would be better than the old one?

- a. God would put His law into His people's minds and write it on their hearts, instead of on stones.
 - b. There would be a real relationship between Him and them, not just symbolic.
 - c. God would forgive their sins.
2. It was anticipated just before it happened, in the first Lord's Supper. Read Matthew 26:27-28:
- ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Mark 14:24 says the same thing. In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus called the wine the "blood of the covenant." That is the same phrase used in Exodus 24:8 to refer to the death of animals. When their blood was sprinkled on the people and holy things, that ceremony ratified the first covenant. In the Lord's Supper the wine symbolizes His death, with which to ratify the New Covenant. By observing the Lord's Supper, we celebrate that New Covenant constantly. At the first Lord's Supper Jesus looked forward to what was about to happen. We now look back to it.⁵

3. It was ratified by Messiah's blood.⁶
- This is a process still going on. The sacrifice was made once for all, but the blood has to be sprinkled. It has already cleansed the true tabernacle in heaven. And many people have been sprinkled one by one as they come in faith. To say it in terms of the Lord's Supper, each of us must eat the bread and drink the wine. That is the same picture Jesus drew in John 6, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53; continue to v. 58). In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the apostle Paul says the same thing: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"

⁵ Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25 paraphrase the phrase, saying, "the new covenant in my blood." This means basically the same thing but emphasizes the covenant rather than the blood.

⁶ For an explanation of why I often substitute *Messiah* for *Christ*, see "How to Study This Course."

One last thought. This marvelous covenant was promised to Israel. How did we Gentiles get included? Certainly, not because we were better than the Jews. In fact, we were dead in sins, disobedient, and objects of God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). We were "foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God" (Eph. 2:12). Why, then, did God include us? Only He knows why He loved us, chose us, and made us alive for His own reasons (Eph. 2:4-10). We "who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (2:13).

Did you complete Chart A as instructed? If so, it should now be similar to the following.

CHART A		
Three Important Biblical Covenants		
Covenant Name	Need for It	Its Ratification
Abrahamic Covenant	the relentless moral breakdown on earth	by killing some animals and by God symbolically identifying Himself with their death
Old Covenant (The Law)	to be the constitution of God's kingdom, guard Israel from wickedness, and show them His standards	by killing sacrifices and sprinkling their blood of the covenant on the altar and the people
New Covenant	because the covenant of law was weak, Israel did not keep it, and to enable us to inherit God's blessings forever	by the death of Messiah Himself and its application to ("sprinkling" on) those who respond to Him in faith

Now answer the following questions about the New Covenant:

Q1.6 From Jeremiah 31 I summarized three ways the New Covenant would be better than the old one. Can you say them in your own words?

Q1.7 The blood of the New Covenant was shed once but is "sprinkled" in stages. What other figure of speech points to the same process of ratification?

Conclusions

1. In this lesson I have talked about the Person who made this universe we live in and made us. Though invisible to our eyes, He is more real and lasting than anything we see or feel. His glory is evident in the things He has made. He has also revealed Himself on many occasions by what He has said and done, things He got recorded in this book called the Bible. Among them he revealed why He made us and what His plan is. All the main features of His plan can be hung on covenants such as those we have just considered. These covenants are solemn promises and agreements that show what God has in mind and how He is working on our behalf.

2. We have looked briefly at three divine covenants: the one with Abraham, the law covenant with the nation of Israel, and the New Covenant to be made with Israel but already active. Each of these was ratified with the blood of the covenant, that is, with death. The first two depended on the blood of animals symbolizing the death of the covenant-maker. But the New Covenant

depended on the blood of the covenant-maker Himself. The Person designated to rule the world was Himself sacrificed at the cross.

3. This New Covenant is the greatest treasure ever imagined. Anyone who gets to be in it will have all sins forgiven and will have perfect access to almighty God and His inexhaustible resources. He will live forever in the coming kingdom with joy and peace. Do you have the price to be part of this covenant? Well, the price was already paid by the King Himself. We just have to come in humble faith and repentance and accept Him. The simplest Scriptural statement is that we must believe that this Jesus who was crucified is the Messiah, the King, the Lord. In response we get baptized in His name as the gate into a new life. His blood of the covenant is sprinkled on us, and the blessings of the New Covenant begin to flow. What is your response?

Lesson 2

Messiah Was “Made Perfect” & Became a Priest Forever

Levitical priests: What did they do in general and in detail? What kind of persons were they? How did they get installed in office?

Jesus as priest: How and when did He become a priest?

Begin this lesson by reading the following passage. As you read, observe two requirements for a person to be a priest and how Messiah Jesus got qualified.

Hebrews 4:14 to 5:10

4: ¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

5: ¹Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

“You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”

⁶And he says in another place,

“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹and, once

made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Introduction

Many years ago Central American Mission asked me to help start a Bible School in Puebla, Mexico. My wife and I moved there with our small children. Since we both had tasks in the school, we had to get a maid to work in our home. It seemed that everybody we met had grown up in the Catholic Church. Our maid Trini was no exception. Trini’s mother sometimes told my wife stories about the priests.

I’ll never forget one time I visited the Catholic church in the nearby *colonia* where Trini’s family lived. The priest was dressed in some of his special robes. He didn’t know me and probably didn’t see me. That day he wanted to show gratitude to his flock for a favor they had done for him. Well, Catholics nearly always have a mass, which is similar to our Lord’s Supper. But in the mass the priest supposedly transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Then the people eat some of that transformed bread. They call it the sacrament of the Eucharist. Well, on that occasion the priest said that the Lord’s sacrifice in the mass has infinite value. But then he said something startling, that for their sake he *was about to concentrate its value and apply it all to them!* That is the power he thought he had as a priest. Today I want to introduce a much better kind of priest who ministers for us if we are true disciples. Our priest is Jesus, who was “made perfect,” then became a priest forever. In fact, that is the title of this lesson: “Messiah Was ‘Made Perfect’ & Became a Priest Forever.” In the next lesson I will explain why He is like Melchizedek.

What does a biblical priest do? Primarily he administers a divine covenant. This is the second of a series of studies about God’s New Covenant that we Christians live under. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper, that is what we celebrate. Our Lord said, “This is my blood of the covenant,” or “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood.” We live and we die by that covenant.

But before proceeding, let me take some moments to refresh your memory about

I. God’s Covenants

A. What are His covenants?

They are His formal agreements, as recorded in the Bible, that show us how He is proceeding in order to save us completely. Isn’t it amazing that He would care so much about us and also inform us! He doesn’t need these covenants for Himself; He will fulfill His part regardless. But He makes the covenants for us. He explains His ways so that we will cooperate. He doesn’t treat us like machines but like human beings whom He is transforming. We must cooperate with Him. But in order to do so, we need to know His purposes and procedures as revealed in His covenants.

All of God’s covenants have one eventual goal. We can state that goal as the author of the Book of Hebrews did in his chapter 2. In verses 5-9 he quoted from Psalm 8 to show that we will have rule over all of God’s creation in what he calls “the world to come.” In the words of the psalm, we will be “crowned with glory and honor.” Then in verse 10 Hebrews 2 goes on to say that God is “bringing many sons to glory.” That glory is our dominion in the world to come. That is

the final goal for all of God’s covenants, to enable us to rule in the coming world, the eternal kingdom.

In the previous study we considered

B. Three of God’s covenants,

one with Abraham and two with the nation of Israel. All three were ratified with blood, which means they were put into effect by death. The first one we looked at was

1. The covenant with Abraham. God’s promises to Abraham are listed in Genesis 12. He promised to bless him, make him into a nation, and bring salvation through him to the whole world. Later God ratified that covenant by passing between the parts of sacrificed animals. Thus He made the death of those animals symbolize His own death. He is determined to bless Abraham and His descendants—determined enough to die. By faith in Abraham’s God, we also share in that blessing. The Abrahamic covenant is basic to all the rest of the Bible. The second covenant we looked at was
2. The law covenant, God’s first one with Abraham’s nation, Israel. Often it is simply called the law. He made it at Mt. Sinai, right after He rescued Israel from being slaves and idol worshipers in Egypt. Exodus tells the whole story. Like the covenant with Abraham, it was also ratified with the blood of animals, which Exodus 24:8 called “the blood of the covenant.”

God was about to give Israel the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. The Canaanites living in the Promised Land had reached the depths of wickedness. Don’t be wicked like Canaanites, God warned Israel, but be holy like Me. He made laws that would hold them in check, like children. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, He taught them about His character and His requirements. He had them build Him a portable temple, called the tabernacle, in which He could be in their midst as their King. That covenant and its laws still teach the world about God; we still need to pay attention to it and learn. We also began looking at a third covenant, called

3. The New Covenant, which is the subject of this series. This covenant was also promised to Israel, though by God’s grace it is already being applied to us. It was needed because the law covenant was inherently weak. Sacrifices for sin under the law could never really take away sins. The law could never really give open access to God. In the tabernacle not even priests could enter His Holy of Holies, which represented the highest heaven. And the priesthood kept changing. Every priest was a sinner who eventually died and had to be replaced. But the New Covenant changes all that—and gives us full access to God Himself. Like the law, it was also ratified by “the blood of the covenant” (Matt. 26:28). But in this case it was not the blood of animals but the blood of Jesus Himself, the one who made the covenant.

Those are all matters we looked at previously. In this study we will begin to see how the New Covenant achieves its goals through the priest who administers it. In order to do that, we should first understand what a biblical priest is and what he does. So in Division II we will look at the following four matters in the case of law covenant priests:

- A. Their choice, meaning how they were chosen to be priests
- B. Their character, meaning what kind of men they were

- C. Their consecration, meaning how they got inducted into their office; and
- D. Their concerns, meaning their duties and responsibilities.

But first see if you can answer some questions.

Q2.1 As a general statement, what does a biblical priest administer?

Q2.2 What divine institution was designed to remind us constantly of the New Covenant?

Q2.3 What is the eventual goal of all of God’s covenants?

Since law covenant priests were from the tribe of Levi, they were called

II. Levitical Priests

Practice reading and saying those two words: Levitical priests! Those were the men God chose to administer His law covenant. The covenant depended on them. Hebrews 7:11-12 refers to that Levitical priesthood and explains that “on the basis of it the law was given to the people.” In other words, because there were such priests, the people could have that covenant.

About those priests consider first

A. Their choice (how they were chosen to be priests)

That is recorded in Exodus chapter 28. In previous chapters God had ratified that covenant with Israel and instructed Moses how to make the tabernacle and its furnishings. Now look at 28:1.

“Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests.”

So how did Moses’ brother Aaron get to be the high priest? And how did his descendants get to be the other priests and his successors? Well, God chose them without telling why (but see Exod. 32:25-29). He chose only men who were Levitical and Aaronic, that is, descendants of Levi through Aaron. That made their priesthood hereditary. God did warn later, however, that physical defects or ritual uncleanness could disqualify them. A priest could not be blind or lame, for example. The high priest could not even join in the usual mourning for the dead, even if his mother or father died (Lev. 21). And he could marry only a Hebrew virgin.

The second thing we will look at about Levitical priests is implied in the next verses, 2 and 3, of Exodus 28:

B. Their character, symbolized by their special garments

²Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. ³Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest.”

These garments represented their holiness and purity. Most priests wore white linen robes, to symbolize their purity before God. The high priest usually wore garments of great beauty and value, symbolizing other spiritual qualities. For example, his long blue robe was a reminder of the heavenly laws God had given. It had cloth pomegranates hanging from it, alternating with tinkling golden bells. The next garment put on after the robe was a shorter garment called an ephod (learn to spell it). It and its sash had several beautiful colors used in the tabernacle, including threads of gold. Attached to the front of the ephod was a breastpiece with precious gems representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes were also named on precious

stones on his shoulders. And fastened to his turban was a plate of pure gold. It was called a crown and was engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord.”

It would have been wonderful if Levitical priests had been as holy and good as their garments symbolized, but they never were. None of them had the character a priest really needed.

That became evident even in the third matter we will consider,

C. Their consecration (that is, their installation as priests)

Exodus 29 tells about a seven-day process of consecrating the first priests and the altar. Every day these men were washed, dressed, and anointed with special oil. Animals were sacrificed for their sins and to consecrate them. Blood and oil were applied to their right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. And they ended each day in a fellowship meal with God, eating meat and bread chosen from the sacrifices. After seven such days of being consecrated, they themselves were allowed to offer the sacrifices on the eighth day. The ceremony on that day is described in Leviticus chapters 9 and 10. We will read only 9:23-24, the climax near the end of the day.

²³ Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. ²⁴ Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

What a glorious occasion that was! God had accepted the new priests and their sacrifices. However, tragedy soon struck, showing a basic weakness of the law covenant. Read the next two verses, Leviticus 10:1-2:

¹ Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. ² So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

Even that one incident is enough to show that Levitical priests were deficient. We need a better priesthood, which we certainly have in Jesus.

We will begin to compare our priest to Levitical priests after we consider one more matter about the latter,

D. Their concerns (that is, their responsibilities, duties)

In regard to these concerns, I have chosen as examples only three passages out of many. There is a fuller list in Appendix A, page 51. In each case I have bolded words that indicate the Levitical priestly duties. The first passage I have chosen is

1. 1 Chronicles 23:13b

Aaron was set apart, he and his descendants forever, **to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the Lord, to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in his name forever.**

Do you see four main priestly concerns here? (Reread the bolded phrases.) These duties were so important that God gave another rule after Nadab and Abihu acted irresponsibly and

died for it. Priests were not to drink wine or other fermented drink when on service. (God often warns us to stay sober, too.⁷) Now, read the second passage, in the NIV 2010 version,

2. Leviticus 3:6-11. This is a typical passage including a priest’s responsibility in regard to animal sacrifices. The sacrifice in this passage was a fellowship offering. Part of it went to God, part to the priests, and the rest was eaten by the worshipers. Notice that the priest had to complete the sacrifice by applying the blood to the altar.

⁶“If you offer an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the Lord, you are to offer a male or female without defect. ⁷ If you offer a lamb, you are to present it before the Lord, ⁸ lay your hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the tent of meeting. Then **Aaron’s sons shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar.** ⁹ From the fellowship offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, the internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them....

¹¹ **The priest shall burn them on the altar** as a food offering presented to the Lord.”

Let’s take an actual example of this sacrifice. This story took place in the time of the judges. God’s tabernacle was at Shiloh, in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. The high priest was named Eli and the two other priests were Eli’s two wicked sons, Hophni and Phineas. A man of Ephraim named Elkanah lived not too far away, in Ramah. Each year Elkanah took his family to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to God. Elkanah had two wives. His favorite was Hannah, who desperately wanted children but had none. Peninnah did have children and made life bitter for Hannah. Each year one of Elkanah’s sacrifices at Shiloh was a lamb for a fellowship offering, together with its grain offering. He put his hands on the lamb’s head, then cut its throat and caught its blood in a bowl.

One of the priests took that blood from Elkanah and sprinkled it on the sides of the altar. He also took the lamb’s fat tail and other fat parts and part of the grain offering and burned them on the altar for God. But he kept the lamb’s breast and right thigh for himself, as God had instructed. On some occasions Hophni or Phineas would take other parts that God had not given him. Anyhow, what was left of the fellowship offering and grain offering was for Elkanah and his family to eat. Hannah, however, would not eat but would only pray for God to give her a child. So fervent was she that the high priest Eli thought she was drunk. When he found out that she was praying, he tried to encourage her. And indeed, God finally gave her a son, whom she named Samuel.

That story of Elkanah’s worship was not unusual, though most priests were not as bad as Hophni and Phineas. Priests had to know and practice the ritual for all kinds of offerings. For example, the spring barley harvest could not start until they offered the first grain to God. They kept the fire burning on the altar, adding wood and arranging the offerings on it. They led in worship by offering incense, which symbolized prayer, in the holy place. (Do you remember that Zechariah was offering incense when the angel appeared to him and promised the birth of John?) Priests instructed people what procedures to follow to be restored to public worship. They sounded the trumpets for assembly or for battle (Num. 10:2-10). In short, the priest had to know just what God required and lead the people in doing it. He represented

⁷ “Be sober” is the literal meaning of the forms of the verb *nepho* used in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and 1 Peter 4:7; 5:8. The NIV interprets it by saying “be self-controlled.”

them before God. But he also represented God before them, as illustrated in the third passage I have selected,

3. Numbers 6:22-27. Here God instructed him to pronounce divine blessings on the people. The Lord said to Moses,²³ “Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how **you are to bless the Israelites**. Say to them: ²⁴ ‘The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ ²⁷ So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

What a high and noble calling Levitical priests had! This concludes our brief survey about them. We have looked at four matters: their choice, their character, their consecration, and their concerns.

Now pause to answer these questions.

- Q2.4** What book and chapters did I cite to show how Levitical priests were chosen and what character they should have?
- Q2.5** What symbolized the character they should have?
- Q2.6** What tragedy showing their weakness occurred on the day when Levitical priests first ministered?

Now we will begin considering our New Covenant priest, Jesus. Our information will come mostly from the Book of Hebrews. The middle chapters of that book are the most important study of His priesthood. They show how Jesus is a better priest than Aaron. After a brief introduction in 4:14-16, chapters 5-7 deal with His priestly person, and chapters 8 to 10:18 deal with His priestly work. But in this particular study we will look briefly at only one matter. That is

III. How Jesus Became Our Priest

The Scripture for this is Hebrews 5:1-10, right after the introduction.

First I will summarize from

A. Hebrews 5:1-4, two requirements for being a priest

1. The first requirement is to be a man, in order to deal gently with weak human beings. This disqualifies angels from being priests—or even God’s Son before He became a man.
2. The second requirement is for God to choose you. You can’t make yourself a priest. Not even Jesus could do that.

Now we will look at the next paragraph in more detail,

B. Hebrews 5:5-10, how Jesus met the two requirements

Notice that the second requirement is put first.

1. God chose Him. Since He is a priest who is also king, God chose Him for both offices. Verse 5 records how He chose Him to be king; verse 6, how He chose Him to be priest. Verse 5 quotes Psalm 2:7: “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” Observe that it says, “*Today I have become your Father.*” This was not His previous relationship to God but His **new relationship** as a man. As a man He became God’s “Son,” which means His royal heir, the king. This language was well known in the Ancient Near East and in the

Old Testament for installing a king. (See my writing “[The Title Son of God.](#)”) It meant that Jesus will inherit it all; He will rule as king over everything.

Then Hebrews 5:6 quotes another divine decree. This one, from Psalm 110:4, made Him priest:

The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind:
“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

So Hebrews 5 quotes divine decrees in which God chose Messiah as both king and priest. He did not qualify for either of these offices before

2. He became a man. To be God’s Son and thus His royal heir on earth, He had to be born in the family of David. To qualify as priest He had to experience the suffering described in the next verses. Verse 7, for example, says that “he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.” That apparently refers to His struggle in the garden before He was crucified. But don’t forget that God always brings good results from the sufferings He allows to His chosen ones. In Jesus’ case, verses 8 and 9 say that “he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once *made perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation.” Hebrews 2:10 had said the same thing: “It was fitting that God...should *make* the author of [our] salvation *perfect* through suffering.”

In what sense was He made perfect? Only that He became fully qualified to be our priest. Hebrews 2:17-18 meant the same: “he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God...¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

Since Jesus is also divine, a question arises. Was He really tempted, and did He really suffer? Yes, He really was and He really did. He did not escape real suffering as a man because He did not use His divine attributes. Consider one example. In the desert the devil really tempted Him to despair of His Father and make bread for Himself. No doubt it seemed to Him that He might die; He had not eaten for forty days. And He *did not know* that His testing was about to end. He lived, as we do, by faith and not by divine knowledge of everything. So He was tempted as we are, and He certainly suffered. But He never sinned.

One more question. When did Jesus finish His sufferings and become our priest? I will suggest **C. When He was consecrated to be priest**

I believe He began His priestly service when He offered Himself on the cross. Immediately God showed that there was a new arrangement, because He tore the temple veil from top to bottom. At that point Jesus was “made perfect,” as it says (Heb. 5:8), and became our priest. So that was also His one and only sacrifice for sin. When He rose from the dead and ascended to the Father’s right hand, He was already priest. There He waits to rule, but He does not wait to intercede. Nor do we wait for His powerful ministry. No long line in the hot sun. No reason to faint. Our priest is already seated with God on His throne, able to deal with everything we need. Hebrews

7:26-28 sums up what kind of person He is, as we will see in the next lesson. We will also see why He is like Melchizedek—and what He does as priest.

- Q2.7** Hebrews 5-7 discusses our priest as a person. The first verses give what two requirements for becoming a priest?
- Q2.8** Hebrews 5 quotes God’s two decrees making Jesus King (Son) and Priest. Copy the most relevant words from each decree.
- Q2.9** Did He get these titles before He became a man, or after?
- Q2.10** Based on “made perfect” (Heb. 5:8), what exact time did I suggest when Jesus began His priestly ministry?
- Q2.11** In what sense was Jesus “made perfect” through His sufferings?
- Q2.12** Make a plan to memorize Hebrews 4:14-16, the introduction to the section on Jesus’ priesthood. At least write it all out (see answer) and set times to read it.

Conclusions

1. I have to warn you about false and dangerous “priests.” They may wear special garments; speak sacred words; conduct religious rites. They may claim unique spiritual power to forgive sins. Their organization may call itself Christian but does not understand this subject. They use Christian words but act like Levitical priests. God did not choose them. We no longer need such priests to guide us on earth. We have all we need in Jesus, His Word, and His people.

2. I want to encourage you by means of Hebrews 4:14-16,. I will print each verse and make comments. Make your own responses.

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

This tells why we should never give up on our Christian faith. It is because we have a great high priest not on earth but on God’s very throne. There is now a man seated beside God, the man named Jesus, the man destined to inherit everything as God’s Son. The next verse tells what He is like:

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

He can truly feel our pain because He was tempted just like us. His temptation was real, not fake. It was sometimes so severe that He wept. How then, should we respond to having such a priest and such access to God? Verse 16 tells how:

¹⁶Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Our high priest has taken away our dread. He has made God’s throne for us a constant source of mercy and grace. We are urged to go to that throne in prayer, even when we have failed miserably. He will never let us down.

Lesson 3

Messiah Another Priest Like Melchizedek

Melchizedek: what are five historical facts about him? four ways in which he pictures Jesus the Messiah as better than Levitical priests? What is the main advantage in the covenant Jesus makes possible?

Begin this lesson by reading the passages printed below: Genesis 14:17-20; Psalm 110:1, 4; Hebrews 7:1-19, 26-28. These are the only Bible passages that mention Melchizedek. They were written centuries apart but dovetail together. As you read them, make a list of all the facts you can about that ancient king/priest. Also, notice the bolded words in Psalm 110 and quoted in Hebrews.

Genesis 14:17-20

17 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).
 18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High,
 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,
 “Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
 Creator of heaven and earth.
 20 And blessed be God Most High,
 who delivered your enemies into your hand.”
 Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Psalm 110:1, 4

1 The LORD says to my Lord:
 “Sit at my right hand
 until I make your enemies
 a footstool for your feet.”

 4 The LORD has sworn
 and will not change his mind:
**“You are a priest forever,
 in the order of Melchizedek.”**

Hebrews 7:1-19, 26-28

¹ This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

⁴ Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.

⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ And without doubt the lesser person is blessed

by the greater. ⁸ In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. ⁹ One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. ⁸ ¹³ He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ **For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”**

¹⁸ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

.....
²⁶ Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Introduction

In everything worthwhile, a great deal goes on behind the scene. We just see the results. For example, lots of us like many pieces in Oscar Hammerstein II musicals. Think of “Ooklahoma” and “Surrey with the fringe on top,” and “The hills are alive with the sound of music.” They seem simple but only got that way with an awful lot of work. The same goes for a clear sermon squarely based on Scripture. You can’t imagine how much study and preparation it requires behind the scenes. How much more that is true for the transformation God provides through the New Covenant. There was a long preparation, a most costly sacrifice, and constant intercession by our priest in heaven. We would have known nothing about the plans and activities behind the scenes unless God had told us some of it. We would have just seen results.

This is our third lesson on what God has told us about the New Covenant. We celebrate that covenant every time we take the Lord’s Supper. The wine, our Lord said, is “the blood of the covenant.” That refers to His death that ratified it, that is, put it into operation. Earlier covenants had also been ratified with blood. For an example, take the first covenant God made with Abraham’s nation Israel. It was also known as the law. It was ratified with the blood of animals, which *symbolized* the death of those who made the covenant. In that case the covenant makers

⁸ NIV 2010 changes 7:12b to read “and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood.” The revised statement is true but is not the point of verse 12. Instead, the point is that a covenant can be only so good as those who administer it. The NET Bible has it right: “for *on that basis* the people received the law.”

didn't actually die but pledged their lives by shedding the blood of animals. The New Covenant was different, however. The blood that ratified it was *the actual death* of the One who made the covenant, Jesus. That is what He told us to remember every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus not only made the New Covenant; He also administers it as priest. Most of what the New Testament says about that covenant is in connection with Him as priest, and is in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In our second study we began to consider Him in that office. We looked in the Old Testament first, so we could compare Him to the men who administered the old law covenant. Those men were all from the tribe of Levi, so they are called the Levitical priesthood. We considered four aspects: their choice, their character, their consecration, and their concerns.

As to choice, God selected Moses' brother Aaron and his family to be priests. You had to belong to that family; no one else could qualify. Next we looked at their character. Their special garments symbolized spiritual qualities, but the men never measured up. They had serious defects, which were apparent even in the next aspect, their consecration into office. On the very day the first Levitical priests began to serve, two of Aaron's four sons violated the priestly rules and were destroyed. When they offered unauthorized fire in the Holy Place, "fire came out from the presence of the Lord, and consumed them, and they died." They were chosen but utterly failed in character. Finally we considered some of the Levitical concerns. Those priests represented the people before God and God before the people. They led the people in worship; they completed the offerings; they blessed the people in God's name; they taught them God's laws.

After looking at the Levitical priesthood, we turned to the New Testament to study the New Covenant priesthood in the same four aspects. Jesus as priest is the theme of the whole heart of the Book of Hebrews, from 4:14 to 10:18. That theme begins with a marvelous introduction in 4:14-16, with which I end each lesson 2-5 (and which you should be memorizing). After that introduction it discusses first what kind of priestly person Jesus is, then what kind of priestly work He does. In Lesson 2 we began to study His person—first His choice. God chose Him to be a priest after He chose Him to be a king (God's Son and heir). Hebrews 5 quotes God's decrees putting Jesus into each of those two offices. Both decrees took effect after He became a man.

That's how far we got in our second lesson. When we reached the name Melchizedek at Hebrews 5:10, we stopped. In this third lesson I am eager to press forward and explain what that name means for us. But at this point the Book of Hebrews pauses to issue an important warning, which I must briefly sketch.

I will call this warning

I. The Danger of Falling Away

First consider

A. The warning itself

It is quite lengthy, beginning in Hebrews 5:11 and continuing to the end of chapter 6. This is one of five major warnings to the Hebrews who were the original readers of the book. Many of them had believed in Jesus for a considerable time but were very hard to teach. They were not progressing. They should have been eating spiritual meat but were only drinking milk (5:12b-14).

They were still like little children learning their ABCs (5:12a). They were not becoming mature. They seemed in danger of falling away from the light of the New Covenant and going back to the shadows of the Old Covenant. But if they did, there would be no hope back there (6:4-6). They would be destroyed like land that has plenty of care and plenty of rain but doesn't produce a useful crop. "Land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless," Hebrews says; "In the end it will be burned" (6:7-8). That was the warning.

But along with the warning was

B. The assurance

that the readers of Hebrews would really not be like worthless land. Through works of love they would continue to show that they truly trusted in Jesus (6:9-12). They would eventually obtain the full blessing God had promised to give Abraham and all believers like him. That divine blessing was nearly all future, seen only by faith. It is still unseen except to faith, but certain. God solemnly swore to give it (6:13-19). Also, Jesus went ahead of us into God's presence as our representative, our high priest (6:20).

On that note the author of Hebrews finally finished this warning about the deadly danger of falling away. He was confident that most of his readers wanted to go on to maturity. So he returned to his theme of our New Covenant priest. And so will I. In Hebrews chapter 7 we will see how Jesus is *better* than all Levitical priests. He had to be chosen, just as they did. But in His priestly character He is not like them; He's like Melchizedek. That unusual man is a key to understand what kind of priest we have. Before we continue, answer these questions.

- Q3.1** In the introduction to this lesson, I listed five concerns of Levitical priests. Please copy them.
- Q3.2** Jesus as priest is the theme of the whole heart of the Book of Hebrews, from 4:14 to 10:18. You should be memorizing its introduction: 4:14-16. Repeat those verses now; at least read them aloud.
- Q3.3** To review, Hebrews 5 quotes God's two decrees affecting Jesus as a man. For each one, indicate the psalm from which it is quoted and the office it bestows.
- Q3.4** Starting at 5:11, Hebrews pauses to warn the readers because they are not maturing and are slow to learn. I called it the danger of falling away. From what to what?

So next we will consider

II. Who Melchizedek Was

We will look at two main things about him: one historical and the other typical. He was

A. Historically, a king-priest who blessed Abraham

Even the name *Melchizedek* means "king of righteousness": *Melchi* means "king" and *zedek* means "righteousness." A name like that may seem unreal, but Melchizedek was a real person. He was an actual king of ancient Jerusalem, which was then called *Salem*, meaning "peace." But how important could he be? There were lots of kings over small city-states back then. And only four verses tell about him. Abraham, the father of the faithful ones seemed more important. It was Abraham who received God's covenant that is backbone for all that follows. It is his story that fills Genesis 12 to 25. He's the one who moved to the land God promised to him (but still has not given him). It was he who built altars to worship God, lived there in tents, and at the age of one hundred fathered the promised son through whom he became a nation.

Melchizedek entered the picture when Abraham rescued his own nephew Lot. Lot had come with his uncle to the Promised Land but had moved to the wicked city of Sodom. Eventually some kings from the east came with their armies and defeated Sodom and its allies. They were taking back east as captives Lot and other Sodomites, along with their possessions. When Abraham heard about it, he swiftly pursued them with his own little army. He caught them where Syria is today, defeated them, and rescued his nephew. As he was bringing back all the recovered goods and people, two kings came out to greet him. Look at the brief story in Genesis 14:17-20. This is the only information the Bible gives us about Melchizedek himself.

17 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,
“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

20 And blessed be God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

So Melchizedek was both king of Jerusalem and priest for God Most High, the Creator whom Abraham worshiped. He brought out food for Abraham and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tithe of the spoils. A strange and short little story. But the Bible has good reasons for everything it includes. This story is no exception, though the reasons for it were not explained until centuries later.

So you are about to reread God’s explanation in Hebrews 7:1-3. It gives more information about the meaning of Melchizedek. This NIV version has four sentences. But the original Greek has only one sentence. Its subject is in verse 1: “This Melchizedek.” The predicate with its main verb doesn’t come until the end: “remains a priest forever.” So the main point of this long sentence is that “Melchizedek...remains a priest forever.” In other words, he is pictured as an eternal priest.

Notice that main point as you read. Notice also the ways in which Melchizedek was

B. Typically, made like God’s Son

¹ **This Melchizedek** was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God, he **remains a priest forever.**⁹

⁹ Here is the King James Version in Hebrews 7:1-3:

1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

3 Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

In my twelve years in the Bible school in Mexico, I had the privilege of teaching the Book of Hebrews several times. Each time when we reached this chapter 7, I divided some of the class into two debating teams. This was the first time most of them had ever taken part in a debate. As you may know, a debate gives arguments for and against a main proposition. Here is the proposition my students debated: “According to Scriptural evidence, Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ.” One team debated that He was the pre-incarnate Christ, in other words, that he was divine. The other team debated that he was not divine but just a man. I knew the side would always win that said he was divine. The language in Hebrews 7 is so strong. It says that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, with no beginning of days, nor end of life, nor descendants. So who could he be but the pre-incarnate Christ?

But the winners of those debates were wrong. Verse 3 does not say He *was* the Son of God but was “*made like* the Son of God.” NIV 1984 simply says, “*like* the Son of God,” and NIV 2010 says, “*resembling* the Son of God.” But the more literal King James translation is more helpful here: “*made like* the Son of God.” In other words, God made Melchizedek a type of Christ. In what ways? Here are four of the ways he was not like Levitical priests but like Christ.

First, Melchizedek was king as well as priest. Normally, the law would not let priests act as kings or kings as priests. A bad example of this was King Uzziah. When he foolishly entered the temple to burn incense there, leprosy broke out on his forehead and afflicted him until he died.

Second, Melchizedek was unlike Levitical priests because his priesthood depended on his personal qualities and not on his family. We don’t even know what family he belonged to. On the contrary, Levitical priests had to be descendants of Aaron.

Third, Melchizedek’s ministry *was pictured* in Scripture as endless, though it was not. The Scriptural account shows no beginning or ending of his priesthood—and no successors, *as though* he were “a priest forever.” In contrast, Levitical priests kept changing because each generation died.

Fourth, Melchizedek *was superior* to Abraham and to the Levitical priests that were still in Abraham. That is the point of the next verses in Hebrews 7. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received a tenth of the spoils from him, Levi and his priestly descendants had not yet been born. They were still in Abraham and, as Hebrews says, they “paid the tenth through Abraham.” In other words, Abraham did not represent only himself but also his descendants. So Melchizedek was represented as superior. Before continuing, answer the following questions.

- Q3.5** Can you list five historical facts the Bible gives about Melchizedek?
- Q3.6** Hebrews 7:1-3 in Greek is one long sentence explaining Melchizedek’s importance. What are the subject and the predicate (with the main verb)?
- Q3.7** What does it mean by describing Melchizedek with no beginning of days, nor end of life, nor descendants?
- Q3.8** List four aspects in which Melchizedek was not like Levitical priests but like Messiah.

Now, let us look at the same four points as they apply to Jesus and affect us.

III. How Jesus Is Like Melchizedek

First, we will consider those four ways He is a better priest. Second, we will consider what kind of covenant He makes possible, and third, a summary of His person as priest.

We will begin with

A. Four ways He is a better priest

1. The first way is that, like Melchizedek, Jesus is king as well as priest. In order to qualify as king, He had to be a descendant of King David, from the tribe of Judah, which He was. That is the main point of the first chapter of Matthew. After many years of studying this matter, I do not believe His promised kingdom has begun yet. We belong to it (Col. 1:12-13), but it is still future. The world does not yet acknowledge Him as Lord, but they will have to. We do so already. Therefore, we not only count on His intercession for us as priest; we also obey His royal commands. In fact, in his first epistle John tells us that “we know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands” (1 John 2:3).
2. The second way Jesus is like Melchizedek and better than the Levites is that His priesthood depends on His personal qualities, not His family. As I just said, He had to be from the Hebrew tribe of Judah to qualify as king. But not to qualify as priest. Under the law Judah was the wrong tribe for priests. So what qualified Him? Hebrews 7:16 summarizes His qualifications in one phrase: “the power of an indestructible life.” That no doubt includes the fact that He is divine as well as human. The quality of His life was portrayed in the four Gospels, and will continue for ever. His enemies tried to destroy it, but they could not. It is indestructible.
3. The third way Jesus is a better priest is what we saw to be the main point of Hebrews 7:1-3. Melchizedek’s ministry was *pictured* as endless, and Jesus truly is a priest forever. Every priest of the Levitical line eventually died—and could not continue his ministry. But Hebrews 7:25 says about our priest, “He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.” Thank God that He prays for us even when we do not pray. He prays for us when we are new Christians groping and blundering. He still prays for us when we are much older but still blundering, and feeling weak and useless. When we are hurt or hungry or hopeless. If Jesus is truly our priest, we will never be abandoned no matter what happens.
4. Fourth and finally, just as God acknowledged that Melchizedek was superior to Levitical priests, He did the same with Jesus. He did so by taking an oath when He made Jesus priest:

The LORD *has sworn*
and will not change his mind:
“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”

Certainly God doesn’t take an oath to make Himself tell the truth or remind Himself to fulfill what He says. Instead, it is one way to draw our attention to an important and settled matter. In this case it guarantees that Jesus will mediate a better covenant with better results. We

will analyze that covenant more in coming studies. For now I will mention only the main improvement.

Now read Hebrews 7 verses 18 and 19 in the New American Standard Bible (with my emphasis). These verses tell

B. What kind of covenant He makes possible

FOR, ON THE ONE HAND,
there is a SETTING ASIDE of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect),

AND ON THE OTHER HAND
there is a BRINGING IN of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Did you get that? The law has been set aside because it could never make anything or anybody perfect (that is, fully acceptable) before God. But the New Covenant gives us easy access to God. It was the change of priests that made this possible. If you do not draw near to God, you have only yourself to blame. God has done everything necessary to open the way for you.

Finally read

C. The summary about His person, in Hebrews 7:26-28

This tells what kind of priest we have and also anticipates the discussion of His work.

²⁶Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (NIV 2010)

Our priest has the character a priest really needs. *Holy* means that in His nature He is cleaner than fresh snow. All previous priests were morally sick. *Harmless* means He never does evil to His people. On the contrary, Aaron, the very first Levitical priest, led his people into the idolatry of the golden calf. *Pure* means our priest never gets defiled or disqualified. That was such a danger under the law that Israel often kept a backup priest ready in case theirs got contaminated. We need no backup. In short, our priest is *set apart from sinners*, sharing our nature but never our sin or its results.

The passage also anticipates the discussion in Hebrews 8-10. Our priest is *exalted above the heavens* in His place of ministry. He has offered a once-for-all sacrifice for sins. And He is God's royal heir, His Son, who has "been made perfect forever" but is waiting to rule.

Never has there been a priest really like Jesus. In fact, God now acknowledges no other high priest. Jesus is a man who felt and vanquished every kind of temptation, so He is able to sympathize. He is also divine, so His ability to intercede for us is never hampered. Aren't you glad to have such a priest! Before our conclusions, answer two more questions.

- Q3.9** Summarize the four ways I have listed in which Messiah is a better priest than Levitical priests. Note: They are essentially the same as the ways Melchizedek was a type.
- Q3.10** According to Hebrews 7:16, Jesus did not qualify to be priest because of His family but because of what?
- Q3.11** According to Hebrews 7:18-19, what is the main improvement in the covenant our better priest makes possible?

Let me list some rather obvious

Conclusions

1. God has provided a New Covenant to order our relationship to Him. It is not primarily a list of rules in which our main obligation is to keep them. If He had wanted that kind of law, He could have stuck with the Old Covenant and the Levitical priesthood. Instead, the New Covenant gives us full access to Him from the moment we believe—a living relationship with the living God. He doesn't welcome people who consider themselves holier or better than others. He does welcome sinners who want Him to transform them to become like Himself.
2. The same Person who ratified the covenant with His death is the One who administers it. He is the priest who sacrificed Himself to open our way to God. He represents us in God's presence and will constantly intercede for us forever. Do you trust Him as your own representative? Do you recognize Him as your Ruler and your Lord?
3. There is a great danger if a person responds to God and to Jesus in a superficial way—that is, not truly intending to be transformed. Jesus described such a person as a shallow layer of soil with a bed of rock just under it. He “hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (Matt. 13:20-21). Do pray for depth of soil, and that you will not fall away.
4. We close most of these lessons in the same way, by reading Hebrews 4:14-16 about our response to such a priest. I hope you can already repeat those verses from memory without errors. Try quoting them now. At least, read them aloud.
¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Lesson 4

Messiah's New Covenant Ministry A

Can you identify Yom Kippur and relate (a) how the high priest purified the holy places and (b) what the scapegoat ritual taught? How are the place and the covenant of Jesus' priestly ministry better than the same things for Levites? What are four Scriptural arguments that the New Covenant will be made with Israel?

Begin this lesson by reading two passages. The first one, Hebrews 8:1-13, quotes verses from Jeremiah 31 that you read in Lesson 1. As you did then, again list at least three ways the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 8:1-13 (NIV 2010)

¹ Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." ⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the New Covenant is established on better promises.

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord,

when I will make a New Covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

⁹ It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,
and I turned away from them,
declares the Lord.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.

I will put my laws in their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

- ¹¹ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
- ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."
- ¹³ By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete
and outdated will soon disappear.

Now read Hebrews 9:1-12 in the New American Standard Bible (NASB). As you read, see if you can draw a simple diagram of the tabernacle.

Hebrews 9:1-12, NASB

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

² For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were **the lampstand and the table** and the sacred bread; this is called **the holy place**. ³ Behind the **second veil** there was a tabernacle which is called **the Holy of Holies**, ⁴ having a **golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant** covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶ Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹ which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰ since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² 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.

Introduction

God's covenants provide a skeletal framework for everything else in the Bible. They are solemn promises in which God revealed the plan He is carrying out. This is our fourth study of the New Covenant, which we celebrate every time we take the Lord's Supper. The wine, our Lord said, is "the blood of the covenant." That refers to His death that ratified it, that is, put it into operation. Not only did He ratify the covenant; He is also the priest who administers it. In this study and the next, we will consider His priestly ministry as discussed in the Book of Hebrews.

Hebrews shows how marvelous our priest is by contrasting Him to the Levitical priests of the Old Covenant, the law. In chapters 5 and 7 it shows that He is superior in His person. In fact, He belongs to a better priestly order: that of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and all the Levites who came from Abraham. He was not only a priest but a king. And the

Bible pictures him as priest forever, based not on an imperfect earthly family but on an imperishable life. Likewise, Jesus was appointed both king and priest and will continue forever.

Now we will move from Jesus' person to His work, which is to administer the New Covenant. This is discussed in Hebrews chapters 8 to 10. Again, His greatness is seen in contrast to the Levitical priesthood. To appreciate the argument, we should be aware of the Old Covenant background the original readers of Hebrews knew so well. So in our imagination let us travel back to a solemn celebration in which Levitical priests did the most important thing they could do. It was known as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which God required every year early in the fall. It first took place at the tabernacle built in the Desert of Sinai at Moses' instructions.¹⁰ The tabernacle was a marvelous tent for God set up right in the middle of God's people Israel when they were all living in tents.

So we need to join Israel in the desert before dawn, to observe

I. The Divine Ritual for Yom Kippur

We are now in the desert north of Mt. Sinai not long after the Israelites have built the tabernacle. In our imagination we have become Israelites ourselves, a few among many thousands. We find ourselves on the south side of the encampment walking north toward the tabernacle in the middle of the camp. The Day of Atonement ceremonies will begin there at daybreak. We must not eat or drink all this day until evening. It is the only day of the year in which God tells worshipers to "afflict their souls." That means to abstain from normal pleasures in order to concentrate on confessing sins and getting right with Him.

So as we follow the crowds toward the tabernacle, everyone is quiet. The desert air is crisp and clear. Since there are no street lights, we can see the sky packed with stars. The moon is more than half full. But a few in the crowd are lighting their way with torches or oil lamps.

It is still dark when we approach

A. The sacred enclosure and the tabernacle

Do you see the pure white curtains that set off the enclosure or courtyard? They hang from silver hooks on bronze posts. They enclose about half a football field in size. Look near the west end of the enclosure, to our left. Do you see the dark top of a tent inside, higher than the curtains? That's the tabernacle. What you see is some of its uppermost covering of hides of sea cows. We will not be allowed to enter that tent. But the priests who do enter can see the innermost curtains that form it, curtains of pure white linen, with blue, purple, and scarlet woven in, plus countless angels called cherubim. This tabernacle symbolizes heaven itself. Under its curtains are tall side walls and a west-end wall all of gold covering wooden frames.

The tabernacle has two rooms, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies. Only priests are allowed to go in, only into the Holy Place, and only when their service

¹⁰ The instructions for Yom Kippur are found in Leviticus 16. It took place on the tenth day of the month the Jews call Tishri, the seventh month of the religious year but the first month of the civil year. Months in the Jewish calendar do not coincide with our months. Instead, they always begin on the first night of a new moon and continue until the next new moon, a total of twenty-nine or thirty days. Tishri starts during our month of September. In it were three festivals, which the people of Israel still observe in a limited way: Day 1 is Rosh Hashana (like New Years); day 10 is Yom Kippur, (that is, the Day of Atonement); and days 15-21 are The Feast of Succoth (that is, Booths, sometimes called Tabernacles).

requires it. For example, a priest goes in each morning to tend the lamps and offer incense. When he enters, the lampstand made of pure gold is to his left on the south side. Across on the north side is a little gold-covered table loaded with holy bread, which gets replaced each Sabbath. But he offers incense and prays at the golden incense altar at the west end of the Holy Place. Although this altar belonged to the Most Holy Place (9:3-4), it was kept in the Holy Place so that it could be used daily. Right in front of it hangs the heavy veil barring the way to the Most Holy Place. Access is forbidden to that room, where God's glory rests on a golden throne called the ark. From there God rules over His people Israel. Not even priests have the right to go in there, but the high priest will do so today.

But we are not in the enclosure yet. We are on its south side. To get in, we must turn right and walk around to the east side. There are some heavenly-colored curtains there, gathered upward so we can enter under them. As soon as we enter the courtyard, we see in front of us a bronze altar about as high as our shoulders. It is called the altar of burnt offerings. On it the fire never goes out. The high priest will burn the flesh of several animals on it today. And sometimes, at great risk, he will go into the Holy of Holies.

So, now let us consider

B. The purpose and procedure for Yom Kippur

1. Its purpose is summarized in Leviticus 16:32-33. Read it.

The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments³³ and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the members of the community.

Twice this summary says that the priest will "make atonement." That means he will remove the defilement caused to God's earthly dwelling by Israel's sin. He will cleanse that dwelling primarily by applying the blood of animals that are sacrificed for that purpose. Their blood will be sprinkled on holy objects to ceremonially cleanse what it touches. If God accepts that cleansing by blood, He will stay with Israel to be worshiped there and to rule from there.

Now we will observe some ceremonies for Yom Kippur.

2. Its procedure in four stages. The high priest must stay as clean as possible on this day. So behind curtains in the enclosure he will bathe several times. He does so now, then completes the first stage, which is
 - a. The daily burnt offering. This is the same as every morning of the year. A perfect lamb gets its throat slit, its skin removed, and its body cut up and burned on the altar. Another lamb is offered every afternoon, in the same way. Each time the priest also enters the Holy Place to offer incense and pray. This is the first stage for Yom Kippur. The second stage is
 - b. The beginning of the special ceremonies. First, the high priest bathes again and changes to some white linen garments worn only on this day. He moves to a young bull standing between the altar and the sanctuary. This is a special sin offering for him and the rest of the priests. He places his hands on the bull's head and confesses his sins and their sins. Then he moves to two goats for the people's sins. From an urn he pulls out lots desig-

nating one goat for the Lord and the other to be released and escape, which we call the scapegoat.¹¹ He marks these goats with little strips of red cloth tied to a horn of one and the throat of the other. Then he returns to the bull for the priests. With a sharp knife he cuts its throat, saving its blood in a basin. This brings us to the third stage of what we are observing for Yom Kippur. In this stage the high priest is

- c. Cleansing the holy things with blood. Dressed in pure white, he will go four times behind the inner veil into the Most Holy Place. First time in, he takes burning coals and puts incense on them to fill that holiest room with smoke. He adds his own prayers for the nation before he comes out. Second time in, he takes in the basin of blood from the young bull for the priests' sins. He sprinkles some of it once upward on the ark and seven times down in front of it, then comes out.

Now he slaughters the people's goat for the Lord and saves its blood. He takes that goat's blood and, third time into the Most Holy Place, he sprinkles it in the same place and same way as the bull's blood. When he comes out, he continues sprinkling the blood of these sin offerings in the Holy Place the same way he did in the Holiest. First with blood from the bull, then from the goat, he sprinkles just outside the inner veil. Finally, he mixes the rest of the blood from the two sacrifices and sprinkles from that mixture on the golden altar of incense. Any blood that is remaining, he pours out at the base of the bronze altar of burnt offering. The bodies of these two special sacrifices must be burned outside the camp. Later the priest will enter the Most Holy Place a fourth time, in order to recover the censer.

So what has the high priest accomplished by sprinkling the blood from these sin offerings for the priests and the people? He has cleansed externally the holy places and objects so that Israel can continue to worship there. That includes the Most Holy Place, the veil, the Holy Place, the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering. But something big is still missing, which is dealt with in the fourth stage. And that stage is

- d. Releasing the scapegoat. Up to now the cleansing has all been external—none of it internal. In spite of sacrifices all year and on this special day, no one has a clean conscience. That has to be dealt with in a strange way. Now the priest confesses the people's sin, laying it on the head of the other goat, the scapegoat. Then, instead of sacrificing it, they lead that goat out of the tabernacle and toward the eastern desert. There, according to Leviticus 16:22, "the goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place, and the man shall release it in the desert." The goat escapes, is set free.¹² Isn't it strange that even after all the other sacrifices for sin, the scapegoat still has to bear the same sins and

¹¹ The second goat for the people is literally "for Azazel." Since *Azazel* means escape or release, it is often called the scapegoat.

¹² There is no ambiguity about the instruction to *release* the scapegoat (Lev. 16:22, 26) instead of kill it. Centuries later the Greek Septuagint confirmed that meaning, using the verb *exapostello* (to send out) in both verses. But some time after that, Jewish tradition changed the picture and obscured the meaning. Alfred Edersheim calls it "the later Jewish practice of pushing the goat over a rocky precipice" and thus killing it. This "Jewish ordinance of having it pushed over the rocks is signally characteristic of the *Rabbinical perversion* of its spiritual type" (*The Temple*, pp. 323-324, emphasis mine). Yet, some evangelical teachers wrongly accept the perversion as biblical.

escape into the desert? What does this teach us? In his book *The Temple*, Alfred Eder-sheim tells us. He explains as follows:

Though confessed guilt was removed from the people to the head of the goat...yet as the goat was not killed, only sent far away...so, under the Old Covenant, sin was not really blotted out, only *put away* from the people, and *put aside* till Christ came, not only to take upon Himself the burden of transgression, but to *blot it out and to purge it away*. (p. 320, emphasis of last eight words his)

Look at some of Edersheim's words again: "under the Old Covenant, sin was not really blotted out, only put away from the people, and put aside till Christ came." That was the teaching of the scapegoat. And that is as far as we will watch the special rituals of the Day of Atonement. After these, the high priest will still have to offer festive sacrifices for himself and for all the people. By evening Yom Kippur will be over and a new day will begin. Then he and everybody else will break their fast and participate in a joyful feast.

But now we will transport ourselves back to the present and return to the explanations in the Book of Hebrews. There we will see the meaning of these object lessons God has provided to teach us about Himself and our relationship to Him. In Hebrews 8 and 9 we will begin seeing how our priest's work, His priestly ministry, is better than that of Levitical priests. We will begin by answering the two questions of *where* and *what*: Where does our priest minister? and What does He do? In the next lesson we will see *how* He does it. Each answer will show how the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant. We will consider the answer to the *where* question after some review questions.

- Q4.1** From Hebrews 8 (when it quotes Jeremiah 31), list at least three ways the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant.
- Q4.2** In which chapters of Hebrews is Messiah's priestly work discussed?
- Q4.3** God required Israel to observe Yom Kippur. What did the name mean? When was it to take place? What was its purpose?
- Q4.4** Name the two rooms in the tabernacle, both holy, and the furniture that was in each room.
- Q4.5** Only priests could enter the first room; no one had the right to enter the second. What barred the way to it?
- Q4.6** On Yom Kippur, what did the high priest do with the blood of the slain sin offerings? What did he do with the scapegoat?
- Q4.7** What did Yom Kippur show about the limitation of Old Covenant sacrifices?

II. Our Priest Ministers in a Better Place

This *where* question is answered both positively and negatively in the first five verses of Hebrews 8. We will begin with the negative answer in verses 4 and 5. Read those verses.

⁴If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵**They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.** This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

This says that since our priest is not on earth, He does not minister where Levitical priests ministered,

A. Not in “a copy and shadow of what is in heaven”

The “copy and shadow” refers to the tabernacle we just visited in our imagination, God’s holy but temporary dwelling in the midst of Israel.¹³ It represented the real sanctuary in heaven. Remember the heavenly colors and all the gold? And the great numbers of angels woven in? It would suggest heaven to all the people, even though the only ones allowed to see in there were priests. Everybody in Israel knew how it was made.

And everybody knew it had two somewhat similar parts. However, priests ministered only in the first or outer room, called the Holy Place. They were not allowed in the second or inner room, called the Holy of Holies. The outer room was twice as long, but the inner room was a perfect cube and had God’s throne in it. The original Greek emphasizes their distinctness. As you saw in the New American Standard Bible in Hebrews 9, the original calls each of them a tabernacle. The Holy Place was the first or outer tabernacle, and the Holy of Holies was the second tabernacle.¹⁴ Priests ministered in the “outer tabernacle,” but not the inner one. Hebrews 9:8 says that “the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing.”

So nobody had the right to go into God’s presence. Nobody could approach Him, as long as divine service was limited to the earthly and temporary copy of heavenly things. And the Levitical priests ministered in that copy. But not Jesus. He ministers

B. In heaven, the real sanctuary

In fact, Hebrews 8 calls this the main point of the previous argument. Look at verses 1 and 2.

¹ Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, **who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,** ² **and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle** set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being. (NIV 2010)

Make no mistake about it. Where our priest sits is beside God on the throne of the universe. “Heaven is my throne,” God said in Isaiah 66:1, “and the earth is my footstool.” Psalm 103:19 agrees: “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” From there God issues decrees that will all be fulfilled. From there He sends forth powerful angels to do His bidding and to protect His elect ones. And seated beside Him there is a glorified man, a

¹³ Hebrews 9:24 later calls the tabernacle “a manmade sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one.”

¹⁴ Notice how the New American Standard Bible translates literally and calls each of them a tabernacle. Here again are verses 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 of Hebrews 9 in that version.

2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. 3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,... 6 Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 7 but into the second [here the word tabernacle is understood, the second tabernacle], only the high priest enters once a year.... 8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing.

Some English versions try to make the meaning clearer by using another word instead of *tabernacle* several times. The ESV has or implies the word *section* in all five verses. Holman and the NIV have the word *room* in verses 2, 3, 6, and 7, but *tabernacle* in verse 8. The NET Bible has *tent* in verses 2, 3, 6, 7, but *tabernacle* in verse 8. For Greek *prote skene* it translates “outer tent” in verses 2 and 6 but “old tabernacle” in verse 8.

man who retains the prints of the nails in His hands and His feet. A man who constantly intercedes for you and me. And through Him we have access to the Father.

Do we realize what a huge change this is!? Our priest is in the highest heaven—and we can go there any time by faith. There are several heavens, though English Bible translations don't always show that. For example, Hebrews 8:1 says in Greek that our priest sits “on the throne of the Majesty in the *heavens*.” That throne is in the highest heaven, which was represented by the inner tabernacle. But to get there, you must traverse the lower heavens, represented by the outer tabernacle, the Holy Place. That's what Jesus did. He moved through the lower heavens to reach the highest heaven and transfer the priesthood there.¹⁵ In fact, quoting Hebrews 8:4 again,

C. “If he were on earth, he would not be a priest”

Why not? Because the law appointed Levites to do that. Under that system all priests had to be descended from Levi and Aaron. That earthly Levitical priesthood was still operating when Hebrews was written. God had ripped the heavy veil in the temple from top to bottom when Jesus died. But He let that priesthood continue until the temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year A.D. 70. He has not reinvented it. While our priest ministers in heaven, no earthly sanctuary nor Levitical-type priests are valid. There are some who consider themselves priests on earth but have no right to do so. They dress in special robes; they burn aromatic incense; they celebrate elaborate ceremonies; they pronounce binding rules; but they have no biblical authority.

Q4.8 Where does Messiah serve as priest? Say it negatively then positively.

Q4.9 While He ministers there, what is true about earthly sanctuaries and Levitical-type priests?

Now we turn from *where* our Lord ministers to *what* He ministers. That is the topic in the rest of Hebrews 8, as I will briefly explain in division number

III. Our Priest Mediates a Better Covenant

Various Old Testament prophecies had spoken of a new arrangement God would make. For now we will consider why He called it new and to whom He promised it. First,

A. It is a New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13 quotes from Jeremiah 31, which called it new in contrast to the Levitical covenant. Read 8:6-9 and notice why God designed a new covenant.

⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

¹⁵ The two rooms in the tabernacle represented different parts or levels of heaven. The first room represented especially the lower heavens, which separate us from God's real abode and His throne in the highest heaven. Here are some examples where the original language uses the plural form, *heavens*. It does so about half the times in the Book of Psalms. For example, Psalm 103:19: “The Lord has established his throne *in the heavens*.” And half the times in the Book of Hebrews. For example, Hebrews 4:14 says that our priest “has gone through *the heavens*.” The apostle Peter, in the last chapter he wrote, used the plural form *heavens* five times. The apostle Paul also believed in several heavens. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 he said he had been “caught up into the third heaven,” where he learned things he was not permitted to tell.

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said:

“The days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

⁹ It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they did not remain faithful to my covenant,
and I turned away from them,
declares the Lord. (NIV 2010)

So centuries ahead, God promised a covenant different from the one made at Mt. Sinai, one “established on better promises.” What was wrong with the Old Covenant? The fault was with the people. They did not remain faithful. They didn’t keep it. But let’s not jump to wrong conclusions. God said nothing about changing His righteous standards. Much less did He imply that His New Covenant would be for a different people. For clearly

B. God promised it to His nation Israel

His promise does not allow us to redefine who Israel is. He knows how to speak plainly, and could hardly have been more specific. It is the same Israel that in times past was composed of two parts called “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” (v. 8). The same Israel whose forefathers were unfaithful. And I quote again,

“I will make a new covenant *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*, not like the covenant I made *with their forefathers* when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt...*because they did not remain faithful....*” (NIV 2010)

It’s the same rebellious nation whose story fills the Old Testament. The same people to whom He sent the King, and who rejected and crucified Him. And became the chief enemies of His church in its early years. Who stoned Stephen and often tried to kill Paul. Whose present punishment and predicament the King Himself predicted. He foresaw their wickedness but did not finally reject them. “You will not see me again,” He said, “*until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’*” (Matt. 23:39). So Israel will say that; they will repent. The apostle Paul later wrote in agreement: “All Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins’” (Rom. 11:26-27).

So God let Israel be scattered all over the world but kept them from disappearing. After centuries He brought them back to their Promised Land and revived their ancient language. He has miraculously kept their bitter enemies that surround them from sweeping them into the sea. They are wicked, but He will preserve them. And when they finally repent, He will make the New Covenant with them. When they finally recognize that Jesus is their Messiah.

What will He do for them? He will put His laws—many will be the same laws as before—in their minds and their hearts. In hearts instead of stone tablets. And He will be their God and they will be His people. But meanwhile, make no mistake about the New Covenant,

C. It is much greater than Israel

Our Priest is already administering it. Praise God, He has extended it to us! In the next lesson we will see that this covenant affects the whole universe. For the present I remind you that under the New Covenant we are being transformed. Those changes in us are the main evidence that we are included. God is putting His laws in our minds and writing them on our hearts. This process of transforming us is called sanctification. It all began for us when we confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and were baptized in His name. On that day our sins were forgiven. On that day the blood of the New Covenant was sprinkled on us and its blessings began. On that day we were granted an eternal priest who intercedes for us in God's presence and His Spirit who guides us in the light of His Word. On that day we joined a family of love and mutual ministry. From that day He makes all our sufferings and discipline work together for our good.

Before we review and draw some conclusions, answer these:

Q4.10 God will make the New Covenant with the same nation that rebelled over the centuries.

List the four Scriptural arguments (two from Jeremiah 31, one from the Gospels, one from the Epistles) I gave for that fact.

Q4.11 The New Covenant is greater than Israel or us. Yet, it has already been extended to us.

What evidence will there be if we are under it?

Now let us review and draw some

Conclusions

1. Yom Kippur was a reminder how “weak and unprofitable” was the law, the Old Covenant. In spite of innumerable sacrifices all year, the people of Israel still had guilty consciences. And even the scapegoat did not take away sins but bore them into the desert. All that cried out for a sacrifice that could truly cleanse our hearts, the sacrifice provided by our Lord Jesus. On its basis God has made a New Covenant. Has the blood of that covenant been sprinkled on you? Are your sins forgiven?

2. Under the Old Covenant, Levitical priests ministered in a manmade tabernacle. It was not God's true dwelling or throne in the heavens but merely pictured it. Under that arrangement, no one truly had access to God. But our priest under the New Covenant ministers in heaven itself. He serves from God's throne and gives us access to it. Now we can draw near to God and offer our own sacrifice. But our main sacrifice is praise. God does not depend on our tribute to support His throne; His throne supports us. Do you make a practice of coming to that throne?

3. God's promise of a New Covenant implied that the earthly sanctuary and priesthood were vanishing (8:13). Those who try to perpetuate that kind of priesthood misunderstand the New Covenant and mislead mankind. Are you counting on Jesus as your heavenly priest instead of some earthly usurper?

4. Our priest constantly administers the New Covenant to us. His ministry will never stop. He is eternal as pictured by Melchizedek. Since He always lives to make intercession for us, He can

secure complete salvation. The main things about His priesthood are summarized in Hebrews 4:14-16. As usual, close the lesson by reading those verses aloud, or quote them if you can.

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Lesson 5

Messiah's New Covenant Ministry B

Can you recite Hebrews 4:14-16 by memory without mistakes? List three ways Jesus' priestly sacrifice is superior to that of Levitical priests? Four ways the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant? Five means by which we can help it work?

Begin this lesson by reading Hebrews 10:11-18 and 19-25. First, read verses 11-18 and tell why our priest does not presently offer a sacrifice for sins.

Hebrews 10:11-18, NIV 1984

¹¹Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶“This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”

¹⁷Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more.”

¹⁸And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Now read verses 19-25. I have printed them in the New American Standard Bible because the sentence structure more closely reflects the Greek.¹⁶ As you read, copy five means by which we should cooperate with the New Covenant. I have shown them by format and bolding. Two are

¹⁶ For comparison, here is the NIV 1984 version of Hebrews 10:19-25:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

things to remember that “we have” (such as, “confidence to enter...”). Three are things we should do, each starting with “let us.” The last one has several aspects.

Hebrews 10:19-25, NASB. Changes in brackets are from NIV 1984.

19 Therefore, brethren,

since **we have** confidence to enter the holy place [Most Holy Place] by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated [opened] for us through the veil [curtain],
that is, His flesh [body],

21 and since **we have** a great priest over the house of God,

22 **let us draw near** [add “to God”] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean [to cleanse us] from an evil [guilty] conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 **Let us hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering [unswervingly to the hope we profess], for He who promised is faithful;

24 and **let us consider** how to stimulate one another [spur one another on] to love and good deeds,

25 not forsaking our own assembling [Let us not give up meeting] together, as is the habit of some [some are in the habit of doing],

but encouraging [let us encourage] one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near [Day approaching].

Introduction

All true Christians have pledged allegiance to a new Lord and Master. He is Jesus, whom God has *anointed to rule* forever, thus giving Him the title *Christ*, for which we can substitute *Messiah*.¹⁷ That kingship was Peter's main point on the Day of Pentecost: “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). “Messiah crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Indeed, Messiah did not begin to reign as predicted; instead, He died for our sins. Yet, He repeatedly promised to come back again and rule in glory (e.g., Luke 19:12, 15, 27). The good news continues to be that “Jesus is the Messiah” (e.g., Acts 5:41-42).

The proper response to the good news is to be baptized in Jesus' name. We call baptism an ordinance. It pictures our union with the Lord Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection to new life. God gave us another ordinance, one to celebrate repeatedly. It is the Lord's Supper, in which we all eat from the same bread and drink the same wine. This pictures our being sustained by Him on the basis of His sacrifice. He Himself said that in it we celebrate the New Covenant ratified by His death. This is our fifth and final study of the New Covenant. In it we will continue to look at the ministry of our high priest who administers it.

The Book of Hebrews says a lot about the New Covenant, contrasting it to the Old Covenant, that is, the law given at Mt. Sinai. Each of them, Old and New, was ratified with death—the death of animals for the Old and of Jesus for the New. Each is administered by a priesthood

¹⁷ As explained in “How to Study This Course,” I often use the equivalent form *Messiah* because it retains some of the royal meaning *Christ* has lost.

chosen by God: Levitical priests for the Old, King Jesus for the New. We have seen in Hebrews chapters 5-7 how Jesus is a far better priest, because of His indestructible life. His priesthood is eternal, as pictured by Melchizedek, the king/priest who blessed Abraham.

In the fourth and fifth lessons we are looking at Messiah's priestly work, that is, His present ministry. Hebrews discusses this in chapters 8-10, contrasting Him to Old Covenant priests. In Lesson 4 we prepared by using our imagination. We went back in history to the original tabernacle where Levitical priests worked—to see what they did. We watched some rituals of the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. We saw the high priest carry the blood of animal sacrifices for sin through the Holy Place and into the Holy of Holies. There he sprinkled the blood to “make atonement.” With that blood he purified the two holy places and their furnishings and the altar of burnt offering. But he had no way to make anyone's conscience clean. So once more he confessed the people's sins, this time on the head of another goat we call the scapegoat. That goat was not even sacrificed but was released in the desert to the east. Thus, Yom Kippur teaches us that Levitical priests even at their best could not arrange for sin to be blotted out. They could only put it aside until a better priest would come with a better sacrifice.

That better priest is King Messiah Himself. Hebrews 8 shows two of the ways in which His ministry is better: namely, (a) where He does it, and (b) what He does. He is not like Levitical priests, who ministered in the earthly sanctuary that was “a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.” Instead, He ministers in heaven itself, in the highest heaven, God's real sanctuary. And from there He mediates the New Covenant, which is better than the one made at Mt. Sinai. In this last lesson we will consider the third way His ministry is superior, namely, His sacrifice that ratified the covenant. We will close by listing ways the covenant itself is better and how it operates. This study selects mostly from Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, which contrast the Old and New Covenants in these aspects.

First, let us look at

I. How the New Covenant Sacrifice Is Better

A. It gives access to God

1. Old Covenant sacrifices could never give that access. Why not? Hebrews 9:1-10 explains. First, it describes the two parts of the tabernacle (vv. 1-5) and the best the priests could do (vv. 6-7). Then it concludes that “the Holy Spirit was showing...that *the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed*” (v. 8).¹⁸ It explains why not: “The gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.”¹⁹ They could not do so because they were “only...external regulations” (vv. 9-10). So those external regulations could not give access to God because they could not cleanse the conscience.

Did they really do sinners any good? Yes, as verse 13 tells us: “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean *sanctify them so that*

¹⁸ In my discussion here, I avoid an ambiguity in Hebrews dealt with in Lesson 4. Hebrews 9:1-5 calls the two parts (rooms) “the first tabernacle” and “the second tabernacle.” Those terms are the background for verse 8, which says that the way was not disclosed into God's presence “as long as *the first tabernacle* was still standing.” “*First tabernacle*” refers to that first **part** (room), which seems to have represented the lower heavens.

¹⁹ Godly Israelites were aware that animal sacrifices did not cleanse their conscience (Ps. 51:16). Nevertheless, they had remarkable familiarity with God. For examples, see some of David's psalms (e.g., Pss. 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1). In spite of not knowing about Messiah's future sacrifice, they participated in its benefits by faith in God.

they are outwardly clean.” They sanctified the people, which means, made them separated to God so that He could remain among them. (The same thing was true about the tabernacle and its furnishings.) But even that cleansing was only outward and temporary.

2. In contrast, the New Covenant sacrifice does give that access. It goes beneath the surface to “cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (9:14). If my conscience is clean, then I am truly forgiven for my sins. If God has truly forgiven me, then I have access to Him and can serve Him. There is “nothing between my soul and the Savior.” William Cowper said it right:

There is a fountain filled with blood
drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
and sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.

B. It cleanses heavenly things

The New Covenant sacrifice not only descends deeper; it also mounts higher. Levitical sacrifices did not rise above earth. They could cleanse only the earthly copies of heavenly things. After the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on them, those copies were acceptable. But Messiah's sacrifice was not designed to perpetuate the tabernacle or temple. It did not cleanse the copies but the heavenly things themselves. Read 9:23-24:

²³It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the *heavenly things themselves* with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

These verses show that even heaven needed to be cleansed. It was polluted when Satan first rebelled there. Yet, it will descend to earth to take full part in the eternal kingdom that is coming. Heaven will come down. So Messiah's sacrifice has mounted up there along with Messiah Himself, and has cleansed it.

We have seen that the New Covenant sacrifice descends deeper, cleansing the conscience and giving access to God. It also mounts higher, cleansing heaven itself. Furthermore,

C. It is once-for-all

It lasts longer, needs no recharging, has no expiration date. It cleanses sins of the past but loses no strength. It can also cover all sins of the present and the future. This is seen in 9:25-26:

²⁵Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared *once for all* at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

“Once for all...to do away with sin.” That fact has two main implications: (1) that the sacrifice itself is completely past, and (2) that believers are forever right with God.

Consider the first implication, that

1. The sacrifice itself is completely past. Messiah does not repeat it now; nor will He ever. As 9:26 says, there is no need for Him “to suffer many times since the creation of the world.” That

is what He meant when He cried out from the cross, “It is finished.” “It is finished” meant His sacrifice was complete. Hebrews 10 compares the frequency of sacrifices under the Old and New covenants. First, the Old in verse 11:

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Then the New in verses 12-13, referring to Jesus:

¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

He “offered for all time one sacrifice for sins,” then “sat down.” Yet the Roman Catholic Church teaches that He continues to be sacrificed in the sacrament they call the Eucharist. They claim that their priests convert the bread and wine to Jesus’ body and blood—and offer them.²⁰ Through that and other sacraments controlled by their priests, the Roman church retains its power over its people. But their system differs little from the Old Covenant system, which has been superseded. To renew it now is a farce and a cheat.

Instead, Messiah’s sacrifice never needs repeating. It lasts longer than all Old Covenant sacrifices. He suffered once for all.

Cowper said it in another hymn:

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
shall never lose its power
till all the ransomed church of God
be saved, to sin no more.

Now consider the other implication of “once for all”:

2. Believers are forever right with God. They do not save themselves by confessing their sins, or by taking the Eucharist, or by any other sacrament or good works. Messiah’s single sacrifice has made them perfect through all eternity. That is exactly what Hebrews 10:14 says: “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

“Perfect forever” seems too good to be true. So Hebrews proceeds to restate it in chapter 10 verses 17-18. Verse 17 quotes God’s promise from Jeremiah 31: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” Then verse 18 draws this conclusion about our sins: “where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.” Here is a question for believers in

²⁰ The Roman Church argues that the Eucharist is not an *additional* sacrifice but simply presents the *same* sacrifice again and constantly. But it still considers it a necessary part of obtaining redemption—and under church control. A good source for reading current RC official doctrine is the paperback *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Image Book (NYC: Doubleday, 1995). Nearly thirty pages are dedicated to “The Sacrament of the Eucharist.” A fairly typical claim (emphasis theirs) is “*we offer to the Father...bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ*” (par. 1357). Another includes two of its many quotations from the Council of Trent:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: “The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross, only the manner of offering is different.” “In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.” (par. 1367)

Messiah: Which of our sins have been forgiven and will be remembered no more: Past sins? Present sins? Or future sins? The answer is all of them, not only past but also present and future. This does not mean that I am sinless. As I walk in God's light I often become aware of sins. So I must often seek forgiveness from God and from others. But none of those sins day-by-day can break my union with God. In that sense they are all forgiven; I am perfect forever.

Free from the law—oh, happy condition!
 Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
 Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
 Christ hath redeemed us once for all.
 Once for all—oh, sinner, receive it;
 Once for all—oh, doubter, believe it;
 Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,
 Christ hath redeemed us once for all.
 (Philip Paul Bliss, 1838-1876)

This discussion of how the New Covenant sacrifice is better has merely sampled from Hebrews 10:1-18. I challenge you to meditate on that passage in much more detail.²¹ But now, answer these.

- Q5.1** Look again at Hebrews 10:11-14. Our priest has “sat down” because His priestly offering for sin is completed. Why does He need to offer no more such sacrifice?
- Q5.2** Hebrews 10:19-25 mentions several factors that make the New Covenant work. Can you remember two things “we have,” then three exhortations beginning “let us”?
- Q5.3** The last exhortation beginning “let us” in this list is “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24). Verse 25 adds a negative thought and a positive emphasis. Say each of the two in your own words.
- Q5.4** Why could the regulations of the law not give access to God? What did they accomplish?
- Q5.5** List the three ways Messiah's sacrifice is better than Old Covenant sacrifices. Explain each aspect.
- Q5.6** What two things are implied by His sacrifice lasting longer? Give some Scriptural words that indicate each.

Let us return to the covenant ratified by Messiah's sacrifice. From various chapters of Hebrews I will select

II. Four Ways the New Covenant Is Better than the Law

The first way is the continuation of what you just saw about the sacrifice,

A. It keeps giving us access to God

Notice how that wonderful fact is emphasized in and around the heart of the Book of Hebrews, 4:14 to 10:18. That section deals with the priesthood.

²¹ Here are summaries of the paragraphs in Hebrews 10:1-18:

- 1-4 Old Covenant sacrifices could only remind of sins and point forward to better sacrifices. If they had actually cleansed people, they would have ceased on their own.
- 5-10 Messiah accepted a body not in order to perpetuate the making of sacrifices but to accomplish God's will.
- 11-14 By offering His body once for all, He made all of God's chosen ones perfect (that is, acceptable).
- 15-18 This complete cleansing under the New Covenant makes further sin offerings unnecessary.

- “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence” (4:14).
- “A better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (7:19).
- “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” (10:19).
- “Let us draw near to God” (10:22).

So when do we draw near to God? Every time we pray with faith. Every time we do that, the Creator and Owner of the universe hears us. He wants us to approach Him as His little children, weak and ignorant as we are. If we humble ourselves before Him and listen to Him, He prompts the prayers we should pray. And He delights in answering such prayers. That is the access the New Covenant gives us.

Another way this covenant is better is that

B. It transforms us

This process was promised in Jeremiah 31:33, quoted in both Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16: “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” On hearts and minds instead of on stones. God does this through His Spirit, who now lives within us. The Spirit leads us to keep the righteous requirements of the law—and empowers us to do so (Rom. 8:3-4). Believers become “a letter from Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). As we look at God face to face, we “are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).²² We are being made like God and Christ! Is that process going on in you? If so, you have evidence that God’s Spirit is applying the New Covenant to you.

A third advantage of this covenant is that

C. It binds us to God

The relationship between us and Him is permanent. “I will be their God,” He said, “and they will be my people.” How do we achieve that relationship? Must we learn and follow a secret set of rules? By no means! It is achieved for every guilty and helpless sinner who turns from idols to the living God. When the Son shed His blood to inaugurate the Covenant, His main goal was to make us God’s children. And “if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God” (Rom. 8:17), the God of the universe.

That leads us to the fourth advantage, which you can study in detail in Appendix B (p. 53):

D. It frees us to inherit from God

Hebrews 9:15 presents our inheriting as a main goal:

¹⁵ For this reason Messiah is the mediator of a new covenant, **that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance**—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

²² Transformation means we change what we think and do. These changes describe “the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5). Such obedience is one of the three evidences 1 John cites to give us assurance. “We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands” (1 John 2:3). Our obedience earns nothing to save us; we are saved by grace and not by works. Nevertheless, all true believers, however weak, are obedient. As 1 John 1:5-7 says, we “walk in the light” (cf. John 8:12). We all have “hunger and thirst for righteousness” and “will be filled” with it (Matt. 5:6). We all build on the “foundation” about Christ that includes “repentance from acts that lead to death” (Heb. 6:1). Every true believer eventually “practices and teaches” all God’s commands that are still in force (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 8:4).

He mediates the New Covenant so “that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.” What eternal inheritance will we receive? No need to guess; Hebrews refers to it often. The first clear mention is in 1:14: we “**will inherit salvation.**” *Will inherit*, so it is future. Future salvation. But doesn't Ephesians 2:8 say that already we “**have been saved, through faith**”? Of course, but what we got when we began to believe was just the first installment of a far greater salvation.²³ Three verses later, Hebrews 2:3 calls it “such a great salvation.” And two verses later, in 2:5, it identifies it as “the world to come, about which we are speaking.” It proceeds to quote from Psalm 8 to describe that glorious world to come. In it we will rule over all creation, along with our great leader, just as God planned from the beginning. This clarifies the reference in Hebrews 1:9 to the “companions” of God's royal Son. It refers to us believers, who will all share in His coming inheritance (“co-heirs with Messiah,” Rom. 8:17). He “will shake not only the earth but also the heavens...so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore...we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:26-28). This will happen when our king

comes in his glory [to] sit on his throne in heavenly glory.... Then the king will say...“take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you.” (Matt. 25:31, 34)

Hebrews continues to speak of future salvation and future inheritance (e.g., 3:14; 4:9; 6:17-20; 9:28; 10:36; 12:28). So do other New Testament books (e.g., Acts 20:32; Rom. 8:17-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; James 2:5; Rev. 3:21; 11:15-18; 22:5). See Appendix B and my writings on Hebrews. As James says, “God [has] chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.” That kingdom will unite heaven with earth. Heaven has already been cleansed with the blood of the covenant. The law could never give us that inheritance. Only the New Covenant can do so.

Finally, let me summarize from Hebrews 10:19-25

III. Five Means by which the New Covenant Works

You read Hebrews 10:19-25 at the beginning of this lesson. I will now quote that section little by little, selecting five means by which the New Covenant works. (The text is again from the NASB, with words in brackets from NIV 1984.)

I will not include in this list the most important means of all, because it is not actually stated in this passage. However, it underlies all the others and is implied by the first word, “therefore.” That word shows that the whole exhortation is based on what we have learned from God.²⁴ This Book of Hebrews is about His ultimate word through His Son. That's what it announces in its first four verses, then expounds until it reaches these conclusions with the word *therefore*. Our greatest need is to pay attention when God speaks. Not just to an extracted list but to “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). By truly listening, we get increasing light to walk in (see 1 John 1:5-7) and growing confidence. Listen to what Hebrews has chosen here.

²³ Ephesians 1:13-14 says we were “marked ...with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit **guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession....”

²⁴ “Therefore” in 10:19 refers us not to what God has made but what He has said. Of course, we can learn His power and grandeur from the things He has made: “The heavens declare the glory of God.” But it is God's words that uncover His ways and unlock the meaning of history past, present, and future.

The Covenant works

A. By confident prayer (vv. 19-20)

19 Therefore, brethren,
since **we have** confidence to enter the holy place [Most Holy Place] by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated [opened] for us through the veil [curtain],
that is, His flesh [body],

We “enter the Most Holy Place” in heaven by believing prayer. There, of course, God is seated on His throne of the universe, with all wisdom and all power and uncountable angels who worship and serve Him. He is the source of all good and enduring gifts. “Let us then approach the throne of grace,” we read in Hebrews 4. The way to that throne was opened by Jesus when He died. Therefore, we go through the curtain that is His body, which was torn for us.

The covenant also works

B. By trusting Messiah's intercession (v. 21)

21 and since **we have** a great priest over the house of God,

Romans 5 alludes to this in a “much more” argument. It says that when Jesus died for us, we were lost sinners and God's enemies. But now that we are His friends, justified through His death, how much more will He save us completely “through his life” (5:10)! He is our high priest, actively representing us before God. Romans 8 argues the same point. “If God is for us,” it says, “who can be against us?” Who dares to condemn us? Certainly, it says, not Messiah, “who is interceding for us” (Rom. 8:31, 34). He does not pray for us as we will some day become, but as we are right now, with all our flaws.

Next in Hebrews 10 follow three verbs saying “let us.” They involve faith, hope, and love.

C. By drawing near with genuine faith that God has acquired us (v. 22)

22 **let us draw near** [add “to God”] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean [to cleanse us] from an evil [guilty] conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This exhortation refers to us as both spiritual and material, both heart and body. The New Covenant involves our every aspect. The *heart* includes our intellect, sensibilities, and will. A *sincere* heart truly seeks God and His righteousness; it does not feign devotion like an actor while pursuing selfish ends. *Full assurance* is our rock-solid conviction. We know that God's good designs include every part of us. That certainly includes our body, which belongs to Him and was consecrated in pure water (referring to His Word or baptism or both). As the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”

This also leads to the next way the New Covenant works,

D. By never abandoning our hope (v. 23)

23 **Let us hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering [unswervingly to the hope we profess], for He who promised is faithful;

The hope we should hold to is our confidence that Jesus will bring us the glorious final salvation He promised. All believers begin with that confidence. Hebrews often urges us to maintain it to the end so that we will inherit the promises.²⁵ Hope keeps looking for Jesus to come. He will raise us from the dead in glorious bodies like His own. Listen to Romans 8:23: “we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Hebrews 10:25 calls that occasion “the Day,” the Day of triumph. Looking for it enables us to endure all present difficulties and discipline.

Yet, the New Covenant does not work by passive and self-centered stoicism. The last exhortation has three parts and reminds us that we are members of one body.

E. By considering how to stimulate one another to love (vv. 24-25)

24 and **let us consider** how to stimulate one another [spur one another on] to love and good deeds,

25 not forsaking our own assembling [Let us not give up meeting] together, as is the habit of some [some are in the habit of doing],

but encouraging [let us encourage] one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near [Day approaching].

Obedient Christians cannot just “live and let live.” In the body of Messiah, “each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:5). Therefore, we seek the spiritual health of one another. We must meet with other believers, to worship God and to strengthen one another. Not as passive spectators but as active participants. Not to gloat over the weak and wayward, nor gossip about them, but to find ways to encourage each other. Each of us has one or more spiritual gifts given us precisely for those purposes (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 26).

How amazing is this New Covenant Jesus inaugurated with His blood! How wonderful that He would offer Himself for such poor, wayward sinners—and that He ever lives to intercede for us! And that He gives us His Holy Spirit to transform us through the Word. And a spiritual family that loves us. Let each of us counsel his own soul as Charles Wesley did (1742):

Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above, for me to intercede;
His all redeeming love, His precious blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

²⁵ Saving faith is not just momentary but endures; see Hebrews 3:6, 14; 6:11-12; 10:35-39. Our Lord warned that some would hear the Word and “believe for a while but...fall away” (Luke 8:13). Those who bear no fruit are not justified (James 2:20, 24, 26).

Five bleeding wounds He bears; received on Calvary;
 They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me:
 "Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
 "Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
 "Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One;
 He cannot turn away, the presence of His Son;
 His Spirit answers to the blood,
 His Spirit answers to the blood,
 And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear;
 He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear:
 With confidence I now draw nigh,
 With confidence I now draw nigh,
 And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

- Q5.7** List the four ways I have discussed that the New Covenant is better than the law. Give a brief explanation of each.
- Q5.8** Copy the five means I selected by which the New Covenant works. Give a brief explanation of each means—and determine to use it faithfully.

Conclusions

1. The New Covenant is a marvelous arrangement that accomplishes God's purposes for the world and for mankind. But its blessings are only for those who accept God's Word. Let me say the same thing in priestly symbols: For that covenant to be effective for you, the blood of the covenant must be sprinkled on you. (See Heb. 9:19-23.)
2. How can we get that blood sprinkled on us? What does God require? Simply that we believe the gospel, the good news. There are four Gospel books that present that good news. All of them have the same basic message: that Jesus is God's Christ (Messiah), that is, His anointed king. He died a terrible death but God raised Him from the dead. The Book of Acts is a divine record of important events and sermons after Jesus ascended to heaven. It constantly summarizes the apostolic message the same way: Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). Whatever else we learn about Him, we should begin with His Messiahship and His lordship. Have you done that?
3. The New Covenant is not only based on Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice and His priestly intercession. It also counts on the Holy Spirit working in us as we interact with God's Word and with each other. The Book of Hebrews repeatedly flashes a red warning light to those who are not learning and are hard to teach. It warns them not to fall away from God's final revelations and return to the law. Instead, they should proceed to the maturity that only the New Covenant gives.

Appendix A
Some Passages about Priestly Concerns
(Bolding is to emphasize concerns.)

1. 1 Chronicles 23:13b. Notice four priestly concerns I have bolded.
Aaron was set apart, he and his descendants forever, **to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the Lord, to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in his name forever.**

2. Leviticus 3:6-11. This is a typical passage including a priest's responsibility in regard to animal sacrifices. The sacrifice in this passage was a fellowship offering. Part of it went to God, part to the priests, and the rest was eaten by the worshipers. Notice that the priest had to complete the sacrifice by applying the blood to the altar.
⁶ If you offer an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the Lord, you are to offer a male or female without defect. ⁷ If you offer a lamb, you are to present it before the Lord, ⁸ lay your hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the tent of meeting. Then **Aaron's sons shall splash its blood** against the sides of the altar. ⁹ From the fellowship offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, the internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them....
¹¹ **The priest shall burn them on the altar** as a food offering presented to the Lord.

3. Numbers 6:22-27. Here God instructed priests to pronounce divine blessings on the people. The Lord said to Moses, ²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how you are to **bless the Israelites. Say to them:** ²⁴ "The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' ²⁷ So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

4. Leviticus 10:8-11. This required priests to stay absolutely sober when on service, so they could do what I have bolded.
⁸ Then the Lord said to Aaron, ⁹ "You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, ¹⁰ so that you can **distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean,** ¹¹ and so you can **teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them** through Moses."

5. Ezra 7:6, 10. This was written centuries later, about the priest Ezra, another descendant of Aaron. Ezra dedicated himself to know, obey, and teach God's laws and purposes. That means that his biggest concern in life was God's covenant. Can you think of any higher priority for him or for us?
⁶ This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given.... ¹⁰ For Ezra had devoted himself to **the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws** in Israel.

6. Leviticus 23:10-11. An example of the priest completing other kinds of offerings in the temple. This one was the sheaf of first grain that began the spring barley harvest each year. A priest had to know and follow the rules about making and completing every sacrifice and offering. In a sense, he oversaw all worship in the temple.
 - 10 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.’
 - 11 **He is to wave the sheaf** before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it **on the day after the Sabbath.**”
7. Leviticus 6:12-13. An example of the priest making sure that worship was not interrupted. The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. **Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings** on it. ¹³ The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.
8. Deuteronomy 24:8. An example how the priest had to know and teach the law. In this case he instructed people what procedures to follow when they had infectious diseases that might disqualify them from public worship.

“In cases of defiling skin diseases, be very careful to **do exactly as the Levitical priests instruct you.** You must follow carefully what I have commanded them.”
9. Numbers 5:16 (see 14-31). When a husband suspected his wife of infidelity, the priest could test her.
 - ¹⁶“The priest shall **bring her and have her stand before the Lord.**”
10. Numbers 10:2-10. He sounded trumpets for assembly or battle.
 - ²“Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out....⁸ The sons of Aaron, **the priests, are to blow the trumpets....**”

Appendix B

The New Covenant Inheritance according to Hebrews

(For more on this subject, see my other writings, such as,

[“A Survey of Romans,”](#) [“The Four Gospels: the Kingdom Offered & Postponed,”](#) [“Hebrews Study Guide & Commentary”](#))

*For this reason Messiah is the mediator of a new covenant, **that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance**—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Heb. 9:15)*

Messiah mediates the New Covenant so “that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). What eternal inheritance will we receive? No need to guess; Hebrews refers to it often. The first clear mention in Hebrews is in 1:14: we “**will inherit salvation.**” *Will inherit*, so it is future. Future salvation! But doesn’t Ephesians 2:8 speak of salvation as past? We “**have been saved**, through faith.” Of course, but what we got when we began to believe was just the pledge of a far, far greater salvation. Ephesians 1:13-14 says we were “marked...with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit **guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption** of those who are God’s possession....”

So Hebrews says we “will inherit salvation,” and Ephesians says the Spirit is our guarantee of it. This appendix will identify what “promised eternal inheritance” we will get then. To understand, we must lay a careful foundation in Hebrews 1 and 2. Parts of the explanation will be somewhat technical but important. Those chapters contrast Jesus to the angels, but the theme of inheritance is essential to the discussion there.

God has designated a “Son” to inherit all creation. That fact is stated at the first mention of His “Son, whom he *appointed heir* of all things” (1:2). Sonship always implies heirship in the Bible: “since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Gal. 4:7). In Hebrews (as usually elsewhere) Jesus’ title *Son* belongs to Him as a human being.²⁶ It is a royal “name He *has inherited*” (Heb. 1:4), not one He always had. The Greek verb here translated “has inherited” always implies acquisition, getting something one didn’t have.²⁷ So to repeat, He was not Son in this sense before but after He became a man. The next verse (1:5) confirms that. It quotes two Old Testament texts in which God **makes Him Son**. The first is Psalm 2:7: “You are my son; *today I have become your father.*” The second is 2 Samuel 7:14, which in context even referred to Solomon: “*I will be his father, and he will be my Son.*” In both texts Jesus’ sonship is not a previous relationship but a new one. And in both texts His sonship is royal; God is making Him king. Immediately after the Psalm 2 text, for example, God tells Him, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps. 2:8). So becoming Son makes Him God’s heir (cf. Matt. 21:37, 38). But it does not mean that He is already ruling but that He will rule after He “asks” to. (That asking is dramatically presented in Revelation 5

²⁶ This human aspect of Messiah’s sonship, though dominant, is largely overlooked in current preaching. In this appendix I simply sketch it. See my study [“The Title *Son of God.*”](#)

²⁷ In the New Testament the Greek word for *inherit* and its cognates always refer to acquisition. You can verify that by looking up their many occurrences. For example, in Hebrews alone, “inherit” is in 1:4, 14; 6:12; and 12:17; “inheritance” is in 9:15 and 11:8; and “heir(s)” is in 1:2; 6:17; and 11:7.

by the Lamb coming to take the scroll and open it.) All godly Hebrews, such as the original recipients of Hebrews, knew all those Old Testament verses.

Hebrews 1 next describes the Son's inheritance. We saw that the first two texts quoted (v. 5) show God making Jesus His Son and heir. The next ones quoted show important aspects of His coming inheritance. They begin at His Second Coming, as the NASB correctly indicates: "And when He *again brings the firstborn into the world*, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him'" (v. 6). As in the Greek, the adverb "again" goes with the verb "brings."²⁸ God brings Him into the world again. So this worship by angels refers to His glory in His coming kingdom. His title "firstborn" used here does not refer to His birth order but to His supremacy. That is how it was used for King David, the youngest of his own family. "I will also appoint him my firstborn," said God, then explained, "the most exalted of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27; see vv. 20-29).

As I said, the Old Testament passages quoted in Hebrews 1:6-12 emphasize several elements of the Son's kingdom when He comes back to rule. These include His being worshiped by angels, His everlasting throne, His pursuit of righteousness, His shared joy, and His making all things new. His royal "companions" mentioned in verse 9 are those who *share* with Him (Greek *metochous* from *metecho*, to share). After describing the Son's coming kingdom in verses 6-12, Hebrews returns to the present. The Son is now waiting at God's right hand, far above all angels, until the time comes for Him to rule (v. 13). Meanwhile, the angels are "sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (v. 14). Again we ask, What is this future salvation?

The salvation we will inherit was the Lord Jesus' theme. In the next verses (2:1-4) Hebrews calls it "such a great salvation... which was first announced by the Lord" (2:3). That can only refer to the promised kingdom which, according to the Lord's constant message, had "drawn near" (Matt. 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11). No one disputes how the Jews understood this message: that the new world described by the prophets (and in Heb. 1) was ready to begin. For evidence read the angelic announcements and the Spirit-inspired prophecies of godly Jews in Luke 1-2. Furthermore, Jesus' actions confirmed that message. He was doing miraculous works that could bring such a world (Heb. 2:4; 6:5; Matthew chapters 8-9; 11:2-6). Yet, He did not bring it.²⁹ He kept insisting that Israel must repent, but "they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). Instead, the great majority of them were rejecting Him (Matt. chapters 11-12). So He changed His ministry and began teaching in parables that He explained to His disciples but not to the rest (Matt. 13). In them He revealed that the glorious kingdom would come only at the end of a process. (That seemed to "postpone" it.³⁰)

²⁸ In Hebrews 1:6 the NASB assumes that the adverb "again" (Greek *palin*) modifies the verb "brings." So it translates "And when He *again brings*..." The NIV translation, however, assumes that "again" introduces the third text, in the same way as it introduced the second text (in the middle of v. 5). So it translates "And *again*, when God brings..." However, the position of *palin* is different in the two verses. In verse 6 it is just before the verb, which justifies the NASB translation. It does not refer to another text but to another coming. It locates the third quotation at Messiah's Second Coming, the same time as for the following quotations in verses 8-9 and 10-12.

²⁹ Nowadays, teachers commonly assert that Jesus did inaugurate His kingdom. (They misunderstand and misuse their main proof texts: Matt. 12:28, Luke 17:21, John 18:36, Col. 1:12-13.) They think He meant a "spiritual" kingdom without the material and political aspects prophets had predicted. If that were so, He would be guilty of misleading the Jews, because He knew how they would understand, yet did not redefine.

³⁰ For a brief explanation of why God waited to reveal this, see my "[Kingdom Studies Digest](#)."

In spite of popular disbelief, Jesus' disciples came to confess that He is the King, God's heir (Matt. 16:13-20). On that occasion He began predicting a cross instead of a crown (16:21-26). But at the same time He promised that He would later "come in his Father's glory with his angels" to rule (16:27). "Some who are standing here will not taste death," He added, "before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (16:28). This meant (a) that His glorious kingdom had not come yet but (b) would still come, when He Himself returns, and (c) that some of them would see Him "coming in His kingdom." That final promise was fulfilled when Peter, James, and John saw a preview of the kingdom on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). The first three Gospels all recorded it, and Peter later related the "majesty" they saw there to Jesus' "power and coming" (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

The same three Gospels recorded an even later incident that combines these ideas. The rich young ruler wanted to "get eternal life" (Matt. 19:16). Jesus equated this with "to enter life" (v. 17), "to enter the kingdom of heaven (or, God)" (vv. 23, 24) and "to be saved" (v. 25). A future kingdom and future salvation! He then assured His disciples that at "the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne," they "will also sit on twelve thrones..." (v. 28). At that time, He said, all disciples "will inherit eternal life" (v. 29; cf. 25:46). These were some of His teachings about "the great salvation...first announced by the Lord." The renewed world described by the prophets, Messiah's eternal kingdom, had drawn near. But it had been "postponed" until Jesus comes back "in His kingdom." Those who enter it "will inherit eternal life."

The salvation we will inherit is "the world to come." The next verses in Hebrews (2:5-10) fully confirm what you just saw in 2:1-4. They call that salvation "*the world to come, about which we are speaking*" (v. 5). They describe that glorious "world to come" (vv. 6-8) by quoting from Psalm 8. In it we will rule over all creation, along with our great leader, just as God has planned from the beginning. Genesis 1 revealed that God created mankind to have dominion over all creation (as His agents). Psalm 8 marveled that God would so exalt lowly man, putting everything under his control. Now Hebrews observes that the purpose of Genesis and Psalm 8 *has not been fulfilled yet*. But it will be fulfilled through our leader Jesus. He suffered precisely to equip Him to take us to that glory (Heb. 2:10).

Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 2 describe the same inheritance. Much of chapter 1 describes Messiah's inheritance/kingdom when He comes again. Chapter 2 speaks of "the great salvation" and identifies it as "the world to come." Here are some reasons (each supported by quoted phrases) we know they are the same.

- In both chapters salvation is future.
God "again brings the firstborn into the world" to rule (1:6). "will inherit salvation" (1:14). "the world to come" (2:5).
- In both chapters there will be rule over "all things."
"heir of all things" (1:2). "earth...heaven...You will roll them up" (1:10, 12). "everything under his feet...nothing that is not subject to him" (2:8).
- In both chapters there will be major changes.
"righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom" (1:8). "earth...heaven...they will all be

changed” (1:10, 12).

“glory and honor” (2:7). “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10).

- In both chapters angels will be subordinate.
“Let all God’s angels worship him” (1:6). “angels...sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (1:14).
“It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come...But...man...the son of man” (2:5-6).
- In both chapters there is a main ruler and companion rulers, all sharing in humanity.
“He will be my Son” (1:5). “your throne, O God...your companions” (1:8, 9).
“the author of their salvation...bringing many sons to glory...Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers” (2:10, 11).
- In both chapters Messiah is waiting to rule.
“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (1:13).
“the world to come” (2:5). “Jesus...now crowned with glory and honor”; yet, “at present we do not see everything subject to him” (2:9, 8).

To repeat, the “great salvation” and “the world to come” of Hebrews 2 are identical to the Son’s coming inheritance/kingdom in Hebrews 1. Presently He is waiting at God’s right hand. But when the time comes, He will ask for His inheritance (Ps. 2:8; Rev. 5). Then God will “again bring the firstborn into the world” to rule forever. He will not reign alone; we will inherit with Him as His companions (1:9). As foreseen in Psalm 8, God is “bringing many sons to glory” in that “world to come” (Heb. 2:10).

The rest of Hebrews shows the same hope as Hebrews 1-2. The New Covenant inheritance is to share the glory of the world to come with the main heir, Messiah. For example,

- Hebrews 3:14: We “share in Messiah if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” “Share in Messiah” (Gr. *metochoi tou Cristou*) could be translated “are companions with Messiah,” since it uses the same word as in 1:9. Obviously, the sharing does not refer to what we have now but after “we hold firmly *till the end*.”
- Hebrews 3-4 announce the certainty that “we who have believed *enter that rest*” (4:3).³¹ “That rest” is God’s rest, which was on the original Sabbath but foreshadowed the coming kingdom. Not a rest from useless or harmful works but from such as God did in creation (“from his own work,” 4:10). When Israel was in the desert, God offered them that rest in connection with entering the Promised Land. But “they were not able to enter because of their unbelief” (3:16-19). “Angry with that generation,” God **withdrew His offer** until the day called Today (3:7-13). He did not withdraw the offer to a personal relationship to Himself but to enter the land under certain conditions. So when they finally did enter, it was not into God’s rest as previously possible. “If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day [of invitation]” (4:8). “A long time later” David foresaw that God would revive the invitation in “the day called Today” (4:7). As in the earlier case, the invitation did not mean the “rest” had actually begun but had drawn near. “There remains [that is, awaits], then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (4:9). It will start when Messiah comes to restore all things and rule in His kingdom.

³¹ The identification of God’s rest in Hebrews 3-4 is difficult from the current perspectives of western Christianity. See my writing “[What is God’s ‘Rest’ to Which He Invites Us?: Hebrews 3-4.](#)”

- Hebrews 6:12 tells us “to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” That inheritance, promised on oath to Abraham, is here twice called our “hope” for the future. We are connected to it by Jesus, who “on our behalf” entered “the inner sanctuary behind the curtain” (6:18-20). But our hope is not pictured as our going there. Instead, see 9:28.
- Hebrews 9:28: “Messiah...will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” As elsewhere in Hebrews, this is clearly future salvation, future, full, and on earth.
- Hebrews 10:34 says that they accepted “the confiscation of [their] property” because they knew they had “better and lasting possessions” and a rich reward awaiting them. All professing believers “need to persevere,” it continues, “so that [we] will receive what He has promised” (10:36).
- Hebrews 12:26-28: God “will shake not only the earth but also the heavens...so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore...we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.” The easiest way to understand this is that God will shake everything in connection with Messiah’s coming, as Peter says (2 Pet. 3:10-13). That will leave only the unshakable kingdom for us to receive.

Other New Testament books show the same hope as Hebrews. I will not comment on these examples but mostly just cite them.

- Matthew 25:31, 34: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory....Then the king will say...“take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you.”
- Acts 20:32: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
- Romans 8:17-23: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah” (8:17). Just as surely as “we share in his sufferings,” we will share in His coming inheritance. At present we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons” (8:23).
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
- Revelation 3:21: “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.”
11:15-18: “¹⁵The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:
‘The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever.’
¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying:
‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,

because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.

¹⁸The nations were angry,
and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your people who revere your name,
both great and small—
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

22:5: “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” This will be true after the heavenly Jerusalem comes down from heaven to the renewed earth (21:2, 10).

- James 2:5: “God [has] chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.”

Answers

- Q1.1 God's solemn promises and agreements that He emphasized. They provide a framework of the Bible's aspects by showing the plans God will achieve.
- Q1.2 the death of the one(s) who made the covenant. They pledged their lives to keep it.
- Q1.3 "the blood of the covenant"
- Q1.4 His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation
- Q1.5 the gold-covered ark in the Holiest Place
- Q1.6 Perhaps your summaries are similar to these:
1. God would actually change people's lives instead of just making requirements.
 2. He would really make them His children and His heirs.
 3. He would take away their guilt so they could always approach Him.
- Q1.7 Each person must "eat the bread and drink the wine" of the Lord's Supper.
- Q2.1 He administers a divine covenant.
- Q2.2 The Lord's Supper
- Q2.3 for us to rule in the coming world, the eternal kingdom
- Q2.4 Exodus chapters 28 and 29
- Q2.5 their special garments
- Q2.6 Two of them offered unauthorized fire and God slew them.
- Q2.7 (1) He must be a man. (2) God must choose him.
- Q2.8 King: "You are My Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7)
Priest: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4)
- Q2.9 after He became a man
- Q2.10 Hebrews 5:8 says "he learned obedience from what he suffered, and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation..." "Made perfect" means fully qualified to be our priest, which happened after His final lesson—the sufferings of death.
- Q2.11 He became fully qualified to be our priest.
- Q2.12 4:¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- Q3.1 They represented the people before God and God before the people; led the people in worship; completed the offerings; blessed the people in God's name; taught them God's laws.
- Q3.2 See answer to Q2.12.
- Q3.3 See answer to Q2.8.
- Q3.4 falling away from the light of the New Covenant and going back to the shadows of the Old Covenant, where they would be destroyed
- Q3.5 Melchizedek was both (1) king of Jerusalem and (2) priest for God Most High. (3) He brought out food for Abraham and (4) blessed him, and (5) Abraham gave him a tithe of the spoils of war.
- Q3.6 Subject: This Melchizedek." Predicate with main verb: "remains a priest forever."

- Q3.7 simply that he was presented that way, in order to picture Messiah in advance
- Q3.8
1. He was king as well as priest.
 2. His priesthood depended on his personal qualities and not on his family.
 3. His priestly ministry was pictured as endless.
 4. He was superior to Abraham and to the Levitical priests that were still in Abraham.
- Q3.9
1. He is king as well as priest.
 2. His priesthood depends on His personal qualities, not His family.
 3. His priesthood will never end.
 4. He is superior to Levitical priests (as evidenced by God's oath).
- Q3.10 by "the power of an indestructible life" (which includes His deity)
- Q3.11 It makes us perfect, that is, able to draw near to God.
- Q4.1
1. God would put His law into His people's minds and write it on their hearts, instead of on stones.
 2. There would be a real relationship between Him and them, not just symbolic.
 3. God would forgive their sins.
- Q4.2 Hebrews chapters 8 to 10
- Q4.3 Day of Atonement, each year early in the fall. Its purpose was to make atonement, that is, cleanse God's earthly dwelling so that He could continue with Israel.
- Q4.4 the Holy Place, with the lampstand, table of holy bread, and the incense altar
the Holy of Holies, with the ark (God's golden throne)
- Q4.5 the veil
- Q4.6 He sprinkled the blood of the slain sin offerings in the Most Holy Place and elsewhere but sent the scapegoat into the desert to be released.
- Q4.7 that they could not really take away sin (not cleanse the conscience)
- Q4.8 He serves not in a copy and shadow of heavenly things but in (the highest) heaven itself.
- Q4.9 They are not valid.
- Q4.10
1. Its two parts were "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah."
 2. Its forefathers were unfaithful.
 3. Jesus predicted both their punishment and their repentance.
 4. The apostle Paul predicted their restoration in Romans 11.
- Q4.11 the process called sanctification, in which God is transforming us
- Q5.1 "because by [that] one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." In other words, sins have truly been forgiven.
- Q5.2 "We have"
1. "confidence to enter the holy place"
 2. "a great priest over the house of God"
- "Let us"
3. "draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith"
 4. "hold fast the confession of our hope"
 5. "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds"
- Q5.3 Do not give up meeting together.
Encourage one another in view of the Lord's soon coming
- Q5.4 because they could not cleanse the conscience. They did keep the people and objects separated to God (outwardly clean) so that He could remain among them.

Q5.5 How His Sacrifice Is Better

1. Gives us access to God.
2. Cleanses heavenly things.
3. It is once-for-all.

Explanation

Cleanses our conscience (forgiving us).
Prepares them for the eternal kingdom.
Never needs to be repeated or reapplied.

- Q5.6**
1. The sacrifice itself is completely past. "It is finished."
 2. Believers are forever right with God. "perfect forever"

Q5.7 How New Covenant Is Better

1. Gives us access to God.
2. Transforms us.
3. Binds us to God.
4. Frees us to inherit from God.

Explanation

Makes us confident that we have His attention.
Leads & empowers us to keep God's standards.
Makes our relationship to Him permanent.
Makes certain we will share in the world to come.

Q5.8 Means for New Covenant

1. Pray with confidence.
2. Trust Jesus' intercession.
3. Draw near with genuine faith.
4. Never abandon our hope.
5. Stimulate to mutual love.

Meaning

Go to God through the open door Jesus provided.
Count on His praying for us whatever happens.
Truly recognize that God owns us body and soul.
Keep looking for Jesus to come with full salvation.
Seek each other's spiritual health; meet; encourage.