

HEBREWS

8:1-13

Introduction

When I was in college I discovered the Cliff's Notes Study Guides. They are condensed and abbreviated summaries of literary classics and other subjects.

The writer to the Hebrews gives you a Cliff's Notes version of the Book of Hebrews in chapter eight. He says, in verse one,

Hebrews 8:1 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Some of your Bible's may say "this is the sum" or "summary" instead of "main point." While the word can be translated that way, it really means the *principle thing* or *main point*. The principle thing he is getting at, the main point of the book, is that you have "such a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens."

A priest always has two functions. These two functions are highlighted in the text by the use of two important words: "Minister" and "Mediator."

1. You see the word "Minister" in verse two. It describes the priest's function of representing you to God.
2. You see the word "Mediator" in verse six. It describes the priest's function of representing God to you.

Jesus is your Minister and Mediator. His heavenly priesthood is your assurance of power to persevere with patience through the problems of your life.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Is The Minister Who Presents Your Gifts To God, and #2 Jesus Is The Mediator Who Gives God's Promises To You.

#1 Jesus Is The Minister
Who Presents Your Gifts To God
(v1-5)

The Hebrew Christians were being severely persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. They were considering returning to the Temple rituals in order to relieve some of the persecution they were suffering at the hands of their Jewish families and friends.

The Temple rituals involved the priests. In 5:1 the writer summarized their ministry when he said,

Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, **that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.**

“Gifts and sacrifices for sins” describes two separate categories. “Gifts” were voluntary offerings of things like money or jewelry or grain; they represented your praise and thanksgiving to God. “Sacrifices for sins” were required offerings when you sinned, or because you were a sinner. They involved blood sacrifice.

Because Jesus was Himself the final sacrifice for sin, there is no need to ever have a priest on earth offer a sacrifice for you. And, because Jesus is in heaven, He is always able to immediately offer your gifts to God.

Hebrews 8:1 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

We should take a cue from the writer and make it **our** “main point” to remind each other about the priesthood of Jesus in heaven. How does this help when I am struggling? Or suffering? Two words describe His help: “Such” and “seated.”

First of all, Jesus is “such a High Priest.” The word “such” looks back to what the writer just said in the closing verses of chapter seven.

Hebrews 7:24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.
Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
Hebrews 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

We saw in these verses that Jesus is *perfect* and is *perfecting* you. Such a priest! Such help is available to you in your season of need.

Second of all, Jesus is “seated.” This was revolutionary to the Jew. In the Temple, in the holy of holies where the high priest ministered before God, there were no seats of any kind. It symbolized that the priest could never rest; his work of offering sacrifices for his own sins and the sins of the people was never done. But Jesus is described as “seated.” **His work of offering sacrifice is done!**

Jesus is seated in heaven “at the right hand of the throne.” The “right hand” was the place of authority and power. It is where we get our saying, “right hand man.” The throne is “the Majesty.” It is the one place of the sovereign oversight of every detail of the universe – *including your life.*

The ministry of “such” a High Priest “seated” in heaven assures you of power to persevere with patience through the problems of your life. It would be foolish to trade all this for an earthly priest in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Hebrews 8:2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

The writer reminds his readers that the Temple on earth was only a model or a representation of what was in heaven. Look at verse five:

Hebrews 8:5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*”

Do you remember the scene in *The Ten Commandments* when Charlton Heston came down the mountain carrying the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments under his arm? Under his other arm he should have had a set of blueprints! The tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the Temple, were patterned after what actually exists in heaven. It was a “copy” of the original.

In chapter nine we will go into more detail about the tabernacle. His point here is to say, “Why ask a Jewish priest to go into the holy of

holies in the Temple at Jerusalem when you have a great High Priest who is already in heaven?”

This is all background to get to verses three and four:

Hebrews 8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer.

Sacrifices were made for sin. They involved blood. If Jesus is a priest, “it is necessary that [He] also have something to offer.” In other words, to be a priest He must bring a blood sacrifice on behalf of those He represents.

In Jesus case, **He was the blood sacrifice!** He offered **Himself** the “Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world.” The writer will go on to describe how His sacrifice of Himself was the fulfillment of all previous sacrifices; he will go on to describe how His sacrifice of Himself was the final, once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. There is **no more** sacrifice for sins. It is finished; it is a completed work; it is why Jesus can be described as “seated” in heaven.

The priest also offered gifts:

Hebrews 8:4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law;

The Jewish priests “offer the gifts according to the law.” The Law of Moses prescribed certain material gifts to be brought at certain times in certain ways to a certain place in a certain manner. As glorious as that might be, would it not be better if you had a Priest Who offered your gifts to God at any time? That’s the distinction the writer is trying to make! Jesus is not a Levitical priest serving “on earth”; He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek serving in heaven. You don’t go back to an *outward ritual* when you have the *inward reality*.

What “gifts” of yours does Jesus offer to God? In Colossians 3:17 you read,

Colossians 3:17 And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

All of your “words” and all of your “deeds” can become gifts to God as they are offered “through” Jesus. Everything you think, say, and do “in the name of the Lord Jesus” are brought before the throne of God in heaven by your great High Priest. The *material* gifts you could offer under the Law were only shadows and representations of this greater opportunity to offer your *spiritual* gifts to God. And you don’t have to go to a certain place on earth to have them offered... Or through a certain ritual... Or on a certain day... Having a priest in heaven is far superior to anything on earth.

Jesus is the Minister Who presents your gifts to God. And,

#2 Jesus Is The Mediator Who Gives God’s Promises To You (v6-13)

Look at verse six:

Hebrews 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also **Mediator of a better covenant**, which was established on better promises.

A “Mediator” represents God to you. A “covenant” is an agreement between persons. The Jewish priests were the mediators who represented God to the people through the covenant God gave Moses. We sometimes call it the Law of Moses. As Gentiles we call it “the Old Testament” but that’s not quite accurate. What we understand as the Old Testament, the books from Genesis to Malachi, contains the old covenant and the Law of Moses. But there are other covenants as well. Here in Hebrews we are focusing on the Law of Moses.

As glorious as the Law of Moses was in representing God to the people, God Himself spoke of something better – a “better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

Hebrews 8:7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

Hebrews 8:8 Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah –

The quote in verse eight is from the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah. The writer is presenting a simple argument: If the Law of Moses “had

been faultless” and final then God would **not** have spoken prophetically of a “new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

The writer will describe the “better covenant” in a minute. First we need to notice why it was not “faultless.” In verse eight you read, “finding fault **with them**,” meaning the Jews to whom the Law was given. Then, in verse nine you read,

Hebrews 8:9 *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; **because they did not continue in My covenant**, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

The fault was with the Jews “because they did not continue in” the covenant God made with them. From the time of Moses leading them out of Egypt... Then Joshua leading them into the Promised Land... Through the time of the united kingdom under David and Solomon... Through the time of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah... Through the time of the single kingdom of Judah... For over nine hundred years, the Jews “did not continue in [God’s] covenant.”

Why did the Jews fail? *Because the old covenant required perfect obedience and **no one** – neither Jew nor Gentile - can perfectly obey it!*

These words of Jesus put the requirements of the old covenant into perspective.

Matthew 5:20 *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds **the righteousness** of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 5:21 *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘**You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.**’*

Matthew 5:22 *But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘**Raca!**’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘**You fool!**’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

In summary Jesus said, “**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect**” (Matthew 5:48).

Think of the Ten Commandments. What words characterized it? “Thou shalt not.” The old covenant depended upon **you**. The new covenant depends upon God. In verses eight through twelve **six**

times God says, “**I will.**” God accomplishes in you what you could not do by keeping the law.

The distinction is between law and grace. The person who obeys the law shall live; but **no one can obey it**, so all are condemned by it. Grace tells you that the work of obeying the law was done for you by Jesus; you simply believe in Him and you are given life.

I should pause to point out that this new covenant is first a future promise to the nation of Israel. In verse ten it is described as being made “with Israel after those days.” The “days” are what Jeremiah calls “the day of Jacob’s trouble.” We call it the Great Tribulation. After the Great Tribulation, Jesus will return to earth and all Israel will be saved. Then, *at that time*, He will make this new covenant with the Jews.

Is there nothing here for us? **There is everything here for us!** God will keep His promise of the new covenant with the literal descendants of Abraham. In the mean time anyone who believes in Jesus – Jew or Gentile – are given the promises of the new covenant when they are born-again.

The promises of the new covenant are the subject of verses ten through twelve. You are promised *transformation, illumination, and absolution.*

You see the promise of transformation in verse ten:

Hebrews 8:10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

The Ten Commandments were *external*, written on stone tablets. The new covenant is *internal*, written in your “mind” and on your “heart.” God is describing the indwelling of His Holy Spirit Who transforms you from within. What you could never do by trying to keep outward rules, rites, regulations and rituals, God is able to do **in** you by the power of His Spirit.

When I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior I was radically transformed from within. So are all those who trust in Him.

You see the promise of illumination in verse eleven:

Hebrews 8:11 *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

These verses look forward beyond the Great Tribulation to the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus will be ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. All of Israel shall be saved. For our part today we have the promise that believers have divine illumination from God through His indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit within us guides our mind and guards our heart. He testifies of Jesus. He is gentle, and we can grieve or quench Him; but He is nevertheless instructing us in the things of God.

You see the promise of absolution in verse twelve:

Hebrews 8:12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

Again I remind you that this is first a future promise to fully regather and restore Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. Those who are experiencing the blessings of the new covenant now are here promised absolution. Absolution is defined as "the formal remission of sin by a priest." When I was in the Roman Catholic church I sought absolution from the priest. He would give me prayers to recite by which I performed the sacrament of penance. But each week, on Saturday, *I had to return and do it all over again!* My sins were never truly *remitted* by my outward ritual.

The new covenant is the promise of the full and complete remission of my sins! Jesus has dealt with my sins once-and-for-all at the Cross. God now promises "to remember no more" my sins. He does not hold them against me; they do not condemn me.

I still have the flesh to contend with; I still sin. I can be out of fellowship with my Father in heaven. When I sin I am to confess my sins to Him that I might be restored to fellowship. But I always experience full and complete forgiveness of my sins and am forever set free from the guilt they bring and the condemnation they deserve.

Although these promises find their ultimate fulfillment in the future, after the Second Coming of Jesus, the writer is presenting them to his readers as a present experience. These are the promises you have now under the new covenant.

Conclusion

The writer ends,

Hebrews 8:13 In that He says, “*A new covenant*,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

God mentioned the new covenant all the way back in the Book of Jeremiah, in about the sixth century BC. The Law of Moses was already old way back then! By mentioning that there would be a new covenant, God was indicating that the old would become “obsolete” and “vanish away.”

The Hebrew Christians were suffering. Despite the persecution, they should not return to the old covenant rules, rituals, rites, and regulations. They had the promises of the new covenant.

You and I, and anyone who is born-again by the Spirit of God, has these and all the other promises of the new covenant. Still, we are tempted to return to or turn to systems of rules, rituals, rites, and regulations.

We are not under law, but under grace. God says to you, “**I will!**” Don’t overrule Him and say, “No thanks, God, I can do this myself.” **You cannot live the Christian life.** But Jesus can live it *in* you and *through* you by His indwelling Spirit.

Let me close with these words from the Book of Romans:

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

Romans 8:4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.