

**Lesson 23**  
**Christ Is Better than the Levitical Priesthood**  
**Hebrews 8:1-13**

One of the basic purposes for the Book of Hebrews is to show how Jesus Christ is superior to the whole Mosaic system, including the Old Testament priesthood, law, sacrifices, tabernacle, and so forth. These Hebrew professing Christians were not so sure Christ was superior to the Mosaic system and some were thinking about leaving Christianity and going back into Judaism. Therefore, the author of the Book of Hebrews sets out to show that Christ is “better” than the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices, and Christ is superior to the Mosaic Law from which the Levitical priesthood derived its authority.

In chapter seven, it has been proven that Christ as an eternal person has an eternal priesthood and that Christ is constantly and forever praying for His people. ***“Hence also He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”*** (Heb. 7:25). He is pleading His blood before the Father when we sin and He is praying that our faith as God’s children will not fail and we shall persevere unto the end. But now the author must prove to these doubting Hebrew-Christians that Christ has a better place of worship and a better authority for His priesthood than the Old Testament priests. The author’s line of argument will be that Christ’s ministry takes place in a heavenly sanctuary and His heavenly priesthood has its authority from the New Covenant, not the old. Mosaic Covenant.

A BETTER POSITION - Hebrews 8:1

***“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”*** -- Christ’s priesthood is in heaven and not in any earthly tabernacle, for Christ, through His resurrection and ascension, sits on the right hand of the Father on His throne. Christ has a better position than any earthly priests of the Old Testament.

Christ is a high priest who sits on a heavenly throne. Notice that Christ sits on His throne. The Old Testament, Levitical priests always stood and never sat down because their work for sin was never finished, but Christ sat down, proving He had once and for all and forever solved the sin problem through His death.

Christ is on His throne. He is the King-Priest, and the Exalted One who is high and lifted up, and He alone is deserving of our worship.

Queen Victoria of England was attending a church service and the choir was singing The Messiah. It was a very moving performance and when they came to the place where they sang: “King of kings and Lord of lords! And He shall reign forever and ever!” the Queen stood to her feet, removed the crown of England from her head and bowed in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one King of kings who reigns forever in heaven.

A BETTER SANCTUARY - Hebrews 8:2

**“... a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.”**

-- Christ does not minister in an earthly tabernacle but He ministers in a heavenly tabernacle, which has the backing of God and not man.

A BETTER SACRIFICE - Hebrews 8:3-5

**“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer gifts according to the Law ...”** -- On earth, Christ could never have offered animal sacrifices because the Mosaic Law said a person had to be a priest in the order of Levi to offer up sacrifices. But Christ was from the order of Melchizedek and He offered Himself as His own sacrifice, and this sacrifice is being pleaded before the Father in heaven.

**“... who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses is warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle for, ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.’”** -- The whole Levitical priesthood was but a copy or shadow which anticipated the reality, Christ, who was to come. The Old Testament priesthood, as a type, pointed forward to Messiah and now that He has come there is no need for the Mosaic Law or the Levitical priesthood. Exodus 25:40 is quoted to show how Moses was given specific instructions on the erection of the tabernacle. Why? It was a type of Christ's heavenly sanctuary. This proves that the Levitical building and its service were not the final reality but an earthly replica of a higher and better reality.

A BETTER COVENANT - Hebrews 8:6-13

**“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted upon better promises.”** -- Jesus Christ receives His authority for His priesthood, not from the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Law) but from the New Covenant. Jesus Christ, through His death, has become the guarantee of a better covenant. **“So much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant”** (Heb. 7:22). This covenant is now in operation because His priesthood is now in operation. Jesus Christ is the one mediator of this new covenant, (1 Tim. 2:5), and Christ is better than Moses who was the human mediator of the Old Covenant of Mosaic Law. The New Covenant has all of the promises of salvation guaranteed by Jesus Christ, the mediator for those He represented in His death.

How does the New Covenant have better promises? We know that the Old Testament saints had the promise of eternal life but this promise was connected with the Abrahamic Covenant and not with the Mosaic Covenant. The promises of the Mosaic Law pertained mainly to earthly things as related to national blessings, but in the New Covenant the promise of spiritual blessing becomes the principal idea. In the New Covenant the mind is directed to heaven; the heart cheered with hopes of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

The Mosaic Law could never give the forgiveness of sins or eternal life. Many Jews, filled with

pride, thought that the Law could give life and forgiveness but they were mistaken. Even the sacrifices of the Old Testament only covered one's sin until Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, would come and die for their sins.

***“And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance”*** (Heb. 9:15).

But now the Old Covenant has been done away with since the New Covenant has come.

***“For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them ...”*** -- The Mosaic Covenant was holy, just and good. The weakness of the Law was not in the Law but in man. ***“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin. He condemned sin in the flesh”*** (Rom. 8:3). The fault was that the Law did not have the power to work on the inside of a person. The Law only condemned men but never saved them or sanctified them. The very fact that there was a second covenant given shows that the first covenant was temporary and would be supplanted by the New Covenant. If the Mosaic Law (first covenant) had accomplished all things necessary for our redemption, then Jeremiah would have never mentioned another covenant.

***“... He says, ‘Behold days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah ...’”*** -- This is the beginning of a quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34 where the New Covenant is first mentioned as a prophecy yet to be filled. The purpose for quoting Jeremiah 31 is to show there is a New Covenant, which makes the Old Covenant obsolete and ineffective.

It is clear that this New Covenant was to be made with Israel and Judah. The New Covenant primarily deals with the forgiveness of sins for sinners based on the blood atonement of Christ's sacrifice, so in the context of Jeremiah 31 it deals with the forgiveness of Israel. However, the Book of Hebrews, especially Hebrews 8, tells us that the New Covenant is not only for believing Israel but for the Church. There may well be a future and total fulfillment of the New Covenant to national Israel in or around the second advent of Christ but right now the Church is partaking of the spiritual blessings and power of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31 but it found its official enactment at the death of Christ. The first mention of the New Covenant in the New Testament was the night of the Passover Supper before Christ was put to death the next day. Christ told His disciples that His shed blood was the official enactment of the New Covenant, and Christians are to remember the New Covenant by partaking of wine in the Lord's Table.

***“And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood’”*** (Luke 22:20).

***“For this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for***

*forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).*

The Lord’s disciples were all Jews and knew the Old Testament well, and they would have immediately connected our Lord’s teaching with Jeremiah 31. They were told that the New Covenant was to provide the forgiveness of sins for “you” (the disciples -- Luke 22:20) and for “many” (all who trust Christ -- Matt. 26:28). The blessings of the New Covenant are for all who believe in Christ and His death for them, even the Old Testament saints (Heb. 9:15). The New Covenant is definitely applied to the Church and without it we would have no forgiveness of sins.

***“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us (the Church); for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them.’ He then says, ‘And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb. 10:15-18).***

How could the New Covenant be for both Israel and the Church? Remember, the disciples were all Jews, Israelite members of the Old Covenant people of God. These disciples were believing Jews and were soon to become part of the Church which officially began on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples clearly understood that the New Covenant was for them. The great majority of the Jewish nation had rejected the Messiah and they forfeited their citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel, but the disciples and all the Jews who accepted Messiah considered themselves to be the true Jewish, elect remnant, and all the privileges and promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, and now the New Covenant, belonged to them. As the believing remnant in Israel, the disciples were the true spiritual Israel and Judah. As the true spiritual seed of Abraham, they claimed the promises of the New Covenant for themselves, for they were convinced that they were true Israel and Judah. All believers in the Church age, whether Jew or Gentile, are the true spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs of the covenants as God’s elect. Today the Church is spiritual Israel, partaking of the salvation blessings of the New Covenant.

Just because the Church is spiritual Israel does not mean that God is finished with national Israel. The Church as spiritual Israel does not preclude the fact that there will yet be a future application of the New Covenant to national Israel. In Romans chapter 11, it seems that “all Israel shall be saved,” and the context seems to indicate physical Israelites living at that time. The New Covenant will be applied to literal Israel and Judah at the second advent of Christ.

The New Covenant is for the Church and this promise in Hebrews 8 is to be applied to the Church. It is also clearly taught that Christians in the Church are ministers or servants of the New Covenant. ***“Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).*** Christians are to preach Christ and His death for sin and sinners which is the basis of the New Covenant from which God forgives sin.

***“Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord.” -- The New Covenant is not in any way like the Old Covenant.***

The New Covenant is not the reformation of the old, nor the rejuvenation of the old nor the amplification of the old. The New Covenant completely supplants or takes the place of the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law). It is impossible to mix the Law of the Old Covenant with the grace of the New Covenant.

In Christ, we have a new heavenly tabernacle, a better sacrifice, a new priesthood, a new ministry, a new covenant, a new mediator and better promises. It is at this point that Seventh Day Adventists go astray. They fail to recognize the total change of all things brought in by Christ. All of the Mosaic Law has been fulfilled in Christ and has been supplanted by the New Covenant.

***“For this is the covenant which I made with the House of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts.”*** -- The New Covenant is the basis for regeneration. Through the new birth, God implants His truth in the hearts and minds of all true believers. In Judaism the Mosaic Law was written on tablets of stone and remained on the outside of the Jew, and he gave external obedience but was powerless to save or sanctify. But in the gospel, which is based on the New Covenant, the law of God is written by the Holy Spirit upon the believer’s heart (2 Cor. 3:2-6). The New Covenant makes God’s truth internal and powerful. The external law, which ministered death, is replaced by the internal gospel of grace, which brings life.

God will also regenerate the nation of Israel around or at the second advent of Christ.

***“And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*** -- The New Covenant is the basis for a new relationship. Believing Israel in the Old Testament did know God and they were God’s people. But the New Covenant has brought a new intimacy not known in the Old Testament. Jehovah of the Old Testament is now referred to by believers in the Church as “Father,” and true believers are no longer called “children of Israel” but “sons of God,” “heirs of God,” “co-heirs with Christ,” “friends” and “children.”

The New Covenant is the answer for man’s search for identification and hunger to belong to someone. The New Covenant gives man the answer to the aching question of the human heart: Who am I and what can I identify with? God says that through Christ and His death, all people who trust Christ will belong to God and be identified with Him forever.

One day physical Israel as a nation shall also again have a restored relationship to Christ at the second advent.

***“And they shall not teach every one his fellow citizen, and every one his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.”*** -- The New Covenant is the basis for a new priesthood of believers. In the Old Testament only the priests could approach God in the tabernacle, but in the New Covenant now all true Christians are believer-priests and can approach God and know Him on an intimate basis.

***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people, for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of***

***darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy”*** (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

Through their Great High Priest, each believer-priest has immediate access to God.

Have you ever thought about this? One thing a true Christian can never say to another true Christian is, “Know the Lord.” All Christians everywhere know the Lord for that is part of the New Covenant.

There is also a day coming when all Israel shall also know the Lord when that last generation of Jews before the second advent are converted to Christ.

***“For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”*** -- The New Covenant is the basis for all forgiveness of sins, and all who have appropriated the death of Christ for sins shall be saved. The main purpose of the New Covenant is to forgive sins. ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”*** (Eph. 1:7). The true Church is founded upon the New Covenant and the redemption that is found in Christ Jesus.

When God saves a person in Christ on the basis of the New Covenant, He not only forgives his sins but forgets the sins done. God does not remember the sins of the sinner who comes to Christ for forgiveness. So marvelous, so wonderful, so glorious and so mysterious is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin and sinners that God forgets about our sins. God will never remind you of any wrong thing you ever did before you were saved because He alone has the power to blot this sin out of His memory. If God has forgotten your sins, you too must forget them and push on for Christ.

There is a day coming when the nation of Israel shall have its sins forgiven when God converts them at the Second Advent of Christ.

The New Covenant is grounded on the blood of Christ and we can sing as did the hymn writer:

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.”*

***“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”*** -- The New Covenant made the first covenant (Mosaic Law) obsolete. God declared the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood defunct and inoperative in A.D. 33 at the moment of Christ’s death. However, the temple in Jerusalem still stood for 37 years more, but the temple was finally destroyed in A.D. 70. This was the final blow to the Levitical system.

The Old Covenant and its priesthood was earthly, temporal and temporary, but the new covenant

and its priesthood is heavenly, eternal and permanent. Christ's priesthood is based on a better covenant with better promises.

## CONCLUSION

Do you recognize yourself as a sinner in great need of the forgiveness of sins? Do you realize that if your sins are not forgiven and you die in this state that you shall face a wrathful God and be thrown into an eternal hell?

You can have the forgiveness of sins. God has sent a Savior into this world to save every person who trusts Christ for salvation. You can be saved. You can know God and have God's law written on your heart! How can this be yours? Believe that Christ died for your sins. Accept Him as your Savior. Christ will quench your spiritual thirst and give you a new life. Trust Christ and you can say as Horatius Bonar:

*"I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
'Behold, I freely give  
The living water; thirsty one,  
Stoop down and drink, and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in Him."*