

The writer of Hebrews shows that the priestly ministry of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood because Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that is based on better promises than the Mosaic Law. This new covenant is the covenant of grace and the new birth, which was promised by God in the passage that the writer quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

**Verses 1-2:** The writer of Hebrews summarizes what he has said over the last couple of chapters by stating what kind of high priest that Jesus Christ is. He is the kind of high priest that is seated in heaven at the right hand of God's throne and that he ministers on our behalf in the true tabernacle that is in heaven, the tabernacle that has been built by God and not man. The writer will then contrast the covenant that the Levitical priests served under with the new covenant that Jesus Christ ministers to us.

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3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore *it is* of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

**“For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices”** – The job of a high priest is to offer gifts and sacrifices to God in behalf of the people. The people would bring their gifts and sacrifices to the high priest and he would offer them to God in their behalf. If he did not do so then there would be no reason for him to be the high priest.

**“wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer”** – Because Christ is also a high priest, He must also have something to offer in behalf of the people. However, we cannot bring the earthly gifts and sacrifices that were prescribed under the Mosaic Law to Christ for our redemption. The writer has made the point that these things could never take away our sins (Heb. 7:18-19). Instead, Christ offered something in our behalf that would eternally atone for our sins: His own blood.

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4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: 5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.*

**“For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law”** – The Levitical priests are able to offer gifts in behalf of the people in accordance with the law because they come from the tribe of Levi. However, Jesus would not have been allowed to serve in the earthly temple because he did not come from the tribe of Levi.

**“Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things”** – The Levitical priests served in the earthly tabernacle and temple and these were only an imperfect reflection of the realities that are in heaven. The earthly temple, its furniture and the rituals were merely “examples” and “shadows” of what is in heaven where Christ ministers as high priest.

**“as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount”** – When Moses was on Mt. Sinai with God for 40 days and God gave Moses directions to build the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, the altars, etc., showing Moses the “plans” for constructing all these things, where they should be placed and how they should be used once they were constructed. The final product was a limited approximation of the true temple in heaven (a “shadow”) where Christ would eventually offer His blood as an eternal atonement for our sins.

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6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

**“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry”** – Jesus would not have been allowed to serve as a Levitical priest on earth, but He has obtained “a more excellent ministry” than the Levitical priests. This ministry is more excellent in its glory as well as in its effectiveness in dealing with sin. All of the OT rituals and sacrifices were only shadows of the true ministry that Jesus Christ would accomplish through the cross and His true atonement for our sins. The OT sacrifices were only temporarily effective so far as they pointed to the true atonement that would be accomplished by Christ on the cross. Thus His ministry was more excellent because it accomplished what the ministry of the Levitical priests could not.

**“by how much also he is the mediator [arbitrator; a go-between] of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises”** – The writer measures the excellency of Jesus' ministry by how much better is the covenant which He mediates. Jesus stands between both God and us to unite us and He does this on the basis of a new covenant which is better than the one mediated through the Levitical priesthood. This covenant was between the LORD and Israel in which they agreed to obey all that the LORD had commanded and He agreed that He would be their God (Ex. 24:1-8). This covenant was based on Israel's ability and willingness to obey and thus was flawed with our human weakness (**Rom. 8:3** “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*”). However, the new covenant is established on better promises because it depends, not on our flawed ability to obey, but on Christ's atonement for our sins through His blood and the presence of the Spirit of God within us to enable us to obey. The writer will give us an example of these promises by quoting an OT passage from Jeremiah in vs. 8-12.

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7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

The Greek word for “faultless” means “free from defects or blame.” If the covenant God made with Israel through Moses had been sufficient to accomplish our salvation then there would be no reason for God to promise a new covenant. Of course, God knew that the first covenant would fail and so its purpose was only to show us our need of Christ as Savior. **Gal. 3:24** “*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*”

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: 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 continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

**“For finding fault [to blame or find a defect] with them”** – Israel did not keep their side of the covenant and therefore God was able to find fault with “them.” The covenant of the law was unable to produce righteousness in people and permanently atone for their sin. Because the people’s sin was not being permanently dealt with, God has promised a new covenant to replace the old which could properly deal with sin.

**“he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”** – The writer of Hebrews then quotes Jer. 31:31-34 in the following verses where God explicitly promises a new covenant. The quotation begins with a promise that in the future the Lord would make a new covenant His people, Israel and Judah (this is after the kingdom split in the days of Solomon’s son Rehoboam).

**“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”** – This new covenant will be separate and distinct from the old covenant made in the days of Moses between God and Israel (Ex. 24:1-8).

**“because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not [neglected], saith the Lord”** – Israel broke the covenant and so God did not keep His side of it. Israel did not obey God’s commandments and as a result of their breaking of the covenant, He neglected them and did not bless and protect them as required by the covenant. **Ex. 23:25** “*And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.*”

10 For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

**“For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord”** – The new covenant is the covenant of the new birth, which is why Jesus criticized Nicodemus for not already knowing about it (John 3:9-10). “After those days” refers to a point in the future. Likely it refers to the Millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, but we have gotten a sample of it today. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 to explain the meaning of the outpouring of the Spirit of God that the people were witnessing that day. The same Spirit would indwell God’s people in Christ’s kingdom.

**“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts”** – The writer is quoting from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT), so it varies slightly from the OT translation which says “I will put my law in their inward parts.” The line basically refers to the new covenant being one that works inwardly instead of externally the way the law did. The law specified the standard of righteousness and required people with sinful natures to comply. The new covenant changes people on the inside, giving them a new nature, and allows the Spirit of God to lead them into obedience to God’s righteousness. Someone who is born again will have a persistent desire to obey God.

**“and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people”** – This relationship with God under the old covenant was dependent upon the people’s obedience to the law. The relationship was broken once the people rebelled against God and broke the covenant (v. 9). This relationship between God and His people under the new covenant is dependent upon God putting His law in their minds and hearts. Disobedience does not break this covenant because a person who is truly born again will not persistently rebel against God’s will. A Christian who rebels against God will be eventually brought to repentance by the Holy Spirit.

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

The promise refers to a time when evangelism will no longer be necessary because in that day everyone will understand Who God is and how to please Him. The only time that this can occur is Christ’s millennial kingdom, since the world today is in dire need of evangelism and sound Biblical teaching.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Because there will still be unrighteousness and sin, the prophet Jeremiah could not have been speaking of heaven. This statement is another clue that the ultimate fulfillment of this promise will be during Christ’s millennial kingdom. Men will still be living on the earth in mortal human bodies and will still be capable of sin. God promises to show mercy and forgiveness when men sin in that day because Christ’s blood will continue to atone for their sin.

13 In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away.

**“In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old”** – The writer has ended the quotation from Jeremiah and now makes a comment. He points out that when God’s promise speaks of “a new covenant,” it means that the first covenant (the Mosaic Law) has now become old.

**“Now that which decayeth [to become old and worn out] and waxeth old [to become obsolete] is ready to vanish away [disappear; be destroyed]”** – The original covenant God made with Israel at the institution of the Mosaic Law has been replaced by the covenant of grace through Jesus Christ. Since the old covenant has become obsolete, it is ready to be retired and taken away.