

# Study 8: The New Covenant

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He now follows through on the implications of the New Priesthood, that there must also be a New Covenant. This is one of the two key themes running through Hebrews: That Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that there has been a change of Covenant.

*What is the main point that the writer wants us to understand?*

*Where is Jesus fulfilling the role of High Priest?*

*What does the writer mean “of the true tabernacle”?*

*If Jesus is a Priest, then what does He have to offer?*

*Why has there been a change of Covenant?*

*What are the characteristics of the New Covenant?*

*Why does he say that the Old Covenant is ready to vanish away, when it was nailed to the cross years before?*

## ***Homework:***

Read the notes, and reflect on how the Hebrew Christians would have regarded the change to the Covenant, and the end to the Jewish system.

- What are the applications for us?
- What can we expect from God, when we confess our sins to Him?
- Meditate of you personal sins, and God’s forgiveness of these. How would you compare your situation under Christ, compared to those under the Old Covenant?

Read Chapter 9 in preparation for next week.

## Study Notes for: Study 8: The New Covenant

The Hebrew writer has made some very strong allusions in the previous chapter on the implications of a new High Priest, and what that would naturally mean to the Jewish readers. He now drives home the points that he has been alluding to.

His introduction: *“This is the summation (main point NKJV) of what we are saying....”*  
Pulls together all of the things that he has lead the readers towards.

### *What is the main point that the writer wants us to understand?*

Jesus is the High Priest. Note that it is not that Jesus *will be* the High Priest, but that He *now is* the High Priest – **“We have such a High Priest...”**.

The writer has outlined a great deal of the characteristics of Jesus as the High Priest after the order (type) of Melchisedek, who was both King and Priest at the same time. This should not be something totally new to the readers, since the Old Testament predicted that this would be the way:

PS 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: **“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”**

PS 110:2 The LORD will extend **your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule** in the midst of your enemies.

PS 110:3 Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.

PS 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

PS 110:5 **The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings** on the day of his wrath.

PS 110:6 He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

PS 110:7 He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head .(NIV)

I have **bolded** the parts of this Psalm (above) that refer to Jesus reigning as King, and underlined the parts that refer to Jesus at High Priest. But Zechariah’s prophecy is even more explicit. (The Messiah is the one he is talking about who is THE BRANCH):

ZEC 6: 12 Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. 13 It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and **will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne.** And there will be harmony between the two.’  
(NIV)

Notice that Jesus was going to *sit and rule on His throne* (reigning as King), and (at the same time) He will be Priest on His throne (ie He will be a Priest **AND** King at the same time).

### *Where is Jesus fulfilling the role of High Priest?*

*“...who is seated at the right hand of God in the heavens,”*

Jesus' role as High Priest is clarified here. The Jews might have expected Jesus to come and replace the current High Priest in Jerusalem. But that is **NOT** what God had in mind!

Whenever Jesus is described as "*seated at the right hand of God*" it is describing His reign as King. (Compare Ps 110 quoted earlier). The letter to the Hebrews does not deal extensively with Jesus' Kingship, but rather with His Priesthood – although the writer does touch on it in quite a few places (eg 2:7-9 "*crowned with glory*").

Some might think that the Messiah was going to come and establish His Kingdom based in Jerusalem, and literally sit and rule from there just as David did. But the Hebrew writer clarifies this for us – Jesus "*seated at the right hand of God*" (= reigning as King) "***in the heavens***".

We must note that according to the type of priesthood that Melchisedek had (both King and Priest together), that if Jesus is **now** sitting at God's right hand as High Priest, then He must also be there **now** as King, since the Priesthood and the Kingdom go hand in hand.

### ***What does the writer mean "of the true tabernacle"?***

The Jews were thinking of the physical nature of their religion in the Temple, and before that in the tabernacle. The tabernacle in the wilderness is an excellent example, because firstly it was not in a permanent place – it moved around. When it was put up ("pitched" – it was a big tent), it was done by men, although they had to do it exactly as God had told them to.

Eventually when the Temple was built and sanctified, the Shekinah presence of God moved from the tabernacle to the Temple. (It left the Temple too, when Jesus died on the cross and the Veil was torn from the top to the bottom (Mt 27:51)).

But all of these things were temporary. This was not the permanent and lasting place where God was to dwell. That place is the true tabernacle (heaven itself – the true dwelling place of God – the place built by God himself and not by man).

### ***If Jesus is a Priest, then what does He have to offer?***

One of the specific duties of the High Priest was to offer sacrifices to God – specifically at the Day of Atonement, where the High Priest would enter the Holiest Place in the Temple. He would make a sacrifice for the sins of the people, but not before he had made a sacrifice for his own sins.

As a High Priest, Jesus also offered sacrifices, and the writer will explore this in a lot more detail in the next two chapters. Jesus of course, offered himself as the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for sins. But before the writer addresses this, he wants to make the point that there has been a change of Law and Covenant.

### ***Why has there been a change of Covenant?***

This is one of the core issues in the Hebrew letter. Perhaps the two major issues are:

- 1 Jesus **is** the Messiah
- 2 The Covenant has changed.

The writer argues that it was always God's intention that there should be a change of Covenant. It was for such a reason that Jesus was foreshadowed as the High Priest after Melchisedek, and not after Aaron.

It would have been very easy for Jesus to have been in the position to become High Priest in the Levitical Priesthood – but that would not have resulted in the *permanent* priesthood that He now occupies.

Beyond that, the Mosaical Covenant was not perfect. If it were perfect, then there would be no need for it to change (vs 7). But the problem was that the sacrifices under the Old Covenant could *never* take away sin. They had to be repeated year after year *for the same sins*, until the *perfect sacrifice* was made that took the sins away forever. God was never satisfied with animal sacrifices as being worthy to remove sins, and it needed the sacrifice of a man (not an animal or a bird) to atone for the sins of a man. But not just any man. It had to be a man who was free from sins – and the problem is that there is not one man who has ever lived who can be worthy (Rom 3:10-12; quoting several passages from the OT).

The implications are that it should be no surprise that there was a need for a perfect sacrifice, and that there should be a change of Covenant. The Old Testament foreshadowed both. The writer quotes from Jer 31:31-34. Clearly, Jeremiah prophesied that the time was coming that a New Covenant would be made – and the New Covenant would be different from the Old Covenant.

Notice the implications of a “New” Covenant. It implies that there was first an “Old” Covenant, and moreover it has replaced the “Old one” with a “New one” (vs 13).

### ***What are the characteristics of the New Covenant?***

- It was different than the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God “led his people by the hand”, and was very prescriptive in how the people were to obey God. They ended up doing what He said, but their heart was not in what they were doing “...*the people worship me with their lips, but their heart is far from me...*” (Mt 15:8-9). Under the New Covenant, God wants us to worship Him with our hearts, as well as our lips!
- God's laws are written in our hearts and minds. It does not take a great deal of study to work out the differences between what God has said in Deuteronomy or Leviticus, compared to the teachings of Christ. The Old Laws are prescriptive: Do not touch, Do not taste, Do this, Do that (Col2:20-21). Jesus' teaching take a lot more working out! We need to think out the implications of what He says, and work out how to apply it to our lives. We need to focus our hearts on serving God, and do what He says because our hearts and minds are in tune with God – rather than following “a set of rules”.
- Our knowledge of God will be complete. Most people in our society know about God, but not all believe (and our task is to ensure that we reach out into society to those who don't know God). But the writer is not talking about society, he is talking about those who are “*God's people*”. This is in stark contrast to the Old Covenant, where the people of God were those who were of *the Hebrew nation*. The Hebrews needed to teach their children and encourage their families to be faithful to God. But under

the New Covenant, the people of God are those who do know God. And if we don't know God, then we are not part of His family.

- God is merciful to our sins, and our unrighteousness. It is true that such mercy was also shown under the Old Covenant, for the same sins were forgiven over and over again – and also the new ones every year. But under the New Covenant, the sins are *blotted out*. Wiped away. Forgiven. Remembered no more. The mercy that God shows to our unrighteousness is in sending Jesus to be the sacrifice that was to take away sins FOREVER. His mercy is in not implementing the punishment that we deserve, because he sent Jesus to pay the price for us. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice.

***Why does he say that the Old Covenant is ready to vanish away, when it was nailed to the cross years before?***

It is true that the Old Covenant ended at the cross. However it is said that after the curtain of the Temple was torn in two when Jesus died, that the Jews sewed it up again. But the Shekinah presence of God had left the Temple.

But to the Jews, they continued in their practice of Temple worship as if nothing had changed. The church had been established just a few weeks after Jesus died, and the apostles were preaching that people should leave the Jewish religion. This is not to be confused with their Jewish Nationality – they were not teaching that people should stop being Jews – but rather that the pattern of Jewish worship had ceased.

God allowed a period of transition. This is not to say that if you lived in AD34, and you wanted to become right with God that you had a choice of being a Jew or being a christian. It is saying that God allowed a period of time for the Jews (who wanted to be right with God) to become christians before He forced the issue by ensuring that the Jewish religion would effectively cease.

The major trigger for this was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the destruction of the Temple. Not only was the place destroyed, but it was also burned – destroying the records. As a result, the Jews were no longer able to prove their tribal lineage. The location of the Temple has now been overtaken by the Moslems who have built a Mosque on the site, making it impossible to rebuild the Temple.

In discussing the destruction of Jerusalem with the disciples, Jesus said that the reason that it would be destroyed was because the Jews would not turn to God (in becoming christians). (Lk 19:44 NIV). Had the Jews turned to God, and accepted Christ as the Messiah, then they would have ceased the Temple worship, and there would have been no need for the Temple to be destroyed.

The Hebrew writer foresaw the time – not very far away – when Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, and the continuation of the Old Law would become a practical impossibility. This also helps us to identify the time of the writing as being before AD 68 when the events of the destruction of Jerusalem began (it took three years from AD 68 to AD 70).