

Hebrews 8:1-7 – Better Priest and Better Covenant

Jesus is a priest but not an Aaronic priest. He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus represents a change in priesthood. He did not need to be descended from Aaron to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The Aaronic priests continually needed to be replaced because they eventually died. Jesus is a priest forever and therefore there is no need for another priest to replace Jesus. Jesus' priesthood was declared by God with an unchangeable oath. Unlike the priests who offered daily sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice once for all. He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him since his priesthood remains forever.

Read Hebrews 8:1-7.

According to verse 1, what is the main point of chapter 7? What is the advantage of having a priest represent us who is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven? Jesus did live on earth in the flesh and can sympathize with our weaknesses, but now he is seated at God's right hand in heaven. We have the advantages of both experiences of Jesus. The Aaronic priests could sympathize with us but they eventually died and their service as priests ended. Their benefit was temporary and inferior. (8:1)

In verse 2, ESV has "holy places". KJV, NASB and NIV have "sanctuary". The translation could also be "saints" (Wycliffe Bible) but the context is clear that a "thing" or "things" is indicated and not people. It is literally "the holies". This word along with tent (or tabernacle) are an allusion to the tabernacle in the wilderness. Where does Jesus now minister as high priest? (8:2)

The first part of verse 3 is a reminder of what was said in 5:1, 3. Priests are appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins for themselves and others. The second part of the verse refers to "this one" (NIV). ESV has "this priest". KJV has "this man". NASB has "this *high priest*". NKJV has "this One". The second half of the verse is talking about Jesus. As a priest, what was Jesus required to do? (8:3)

Based on verse 4, why would Jesus not be a priest if he was not in heaven? ESV, KJV, and NIV have "there are priests". NASB has "there are those". NASB is a literal translation but it is clear that "those" are "priests". How would you paraphrase this verse? (8:4)

In verse 5, who or what served as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things? Concerning the word “copy” BDAG says the meaning is “an indication of something that appears at a subsequent time, outline, sketch, symbol”. What are the “heavenly things”? What did God tell Moses when he was about to build the tabernacle? This is another Old Testament quote. Where is this quote found? See Exodus 25:40. Why was it important for Moses to construct the tabernacle and furnishings exactly as God directed? For “pattern” BDAG says it means “an archetype serving as a model, type, pattern, model”. (8:5)

In verse 6, how does Christ’s priestly service compare with that of the Aaronic priests? How does the covenant that Christ mediates compare to the old covenant? Why is the covenant that Christ mediates better? BDAG says that the word “enacted” means “to enact on the basis of legal sanction, ordain, found by law”. (8:6)

In verse 7, it literally talks about “that first one”. ESV, KJV, NASB and NIV all have “that first covenant”. It is obvious that what is being discussed is the first covenant compared to the second covenant. What was the first covenant? See verse 8:9. What was the second covenant? Why was there a second covenant? What was wrong with the first covenant? BDAG translates the second half of the verse: “there would have been no occasion sought for a second (covenant)”. Paul Ellingworth translates the verse: “If the first covenant had not been defective, God would not have sought an occasion to establish a second.” (8:7)

The very first covenant that God made with humanity was the covenant that he made with Adam. It was a covenant of works. If Adam disobeyed God he would receive the punishment of death. When Adam disobeyed God, all humanity came under the curse of sin which was physical and spiritual death. Any covenant with humanity based on our human works was now doomed to fail since humanity was exposed as being sinful. God’s second covenant with humanity was a covenant of grace which was not conditioned on human works. In chapter 7, the “first covenant” refers to the covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Sinai. It contained blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. This is sometimes referred to as the Sinai Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, or just “the law”. There is much debate about the Sinai Covenant with relation to the current age. Some say that the Sinai Covenant was only for people in Old Testament times. Some say that it is now entirely null and void. It is obvious that there are many laws in the Sinai Covenant that we do not follow today. Hebrews makes it clear that there is no longer a need for sacrifices to be offered according to the Sinai Covenant. More than not being needed, they would be blasphemous and indicate that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was not sufficient to fully atone for sin. For those who do not totally throw out the Sinai Covenant, they typically agree that God’s moral code expressed in the Sinai Covenant is still valid. The moral code is based on God’s unchanging standard of holiness. The Mosaic law which involved the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priests and the feasts are no longer in effect but they are important in that they were shadows and patterns of Christ and his priestly service. The rest of chapter eight focuses on a passage from Jeremiah which talks about the old and new covenants.