

Week Fifty-one: The High Priest of the Kingdom - Hebrews 7:22; 1:3-14; 4:14-5:10; 9:23-10:14



Overview

On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the pattern from which he built the Tent of Meeting in Exodus. Leviticus detailed the sacrificial system — the shedding of the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty—and organized the priesthood to serve the Tent according to God’s design. The high priest entered into the Most Holy Place once a year with an offering for himself and a second offering on behalf of the nation. The blood sprinkled on the mercy seat covered the sins of Israel for yet another year.

During the later Divided Kingdom Era, Jeremiah prophesied of a New Covenant that would replace the failed covenant that Israel did not and could not keep. This covenant would be built on better promises with better forgiveness—“I will forgive their sins, and I will remember their iniquities no more” (Jer. 31:34b). While the Captivity and the Return Era saw an end to idolatry, the promised covenant was not inaugurated. The Silent Era witnessed the establishment of the synagogue system and the development of multivolume commentaries on the Scriptures, but only in the Gospel Era did the Lord begin to inaugurate this wonderful New Covenant, “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). His death and resurrection literally tore down the veil of the Old Covenant and established a better Way, with a better Mediator, based on better Promises.

The joy of this better way was tempered during the Missions Era as the apostles and their followers began to experience persecution. The letters of Peter, Jude, and Hebrews actually call believers to stand firm in the New Covenant of Jesus the Messiah. The Letter to the Hebrews was written specifically to Jewish Christians (but applies to all ages and all believers) to urge steadfastness in Christ during trials. The letter details the superiority of Christ’s Person, His Sacrifice, and His Salvation over every other way and calls believers to steadfastness in the faith—because Jesus is better.

No one knows who wrote the letter to the Hebrews; speculation includes Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, and even Priscilla. Origen (184-253 AD) wrote, “Who wrote the epistle only God knows certainly.” It may not actually have begun as a letter, for it does not begin as other first-century correspondence, and actually unfolds as a sermon. It does end, however, as an epistle, with greetings from the writer and a call to be read.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will grasp the superiority of Jesus over the provisions of every prior era; they will learn to value His person, recognize the greatness of His sacrifice, and see the sufficiency of His salvation.

Key Truths

Jesus is superior to prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, the Levitical priesthood, and the Law.

Jesus' sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices made under the Law.

Jesus' salvation is superior to anything any other way might offer.

Faith in Jesus shows up in walking with God, worshiping God, waiting on God, and working for God to accomplish His kingdom purposes. True faith perseveres and even shines in trials.

Lesson Outline

1. The Superiority of Christ's Person

The author of Hebrews makes much of Christ, declaring that “by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (7:22). Christ's preeminence, declared by Paul in Colossians 1:18, shines through this letter in chapter after chapter. Jesus' superiority is proclaimed over five major areas: prophets, angels, Moses and Joshua, the Levitical priesthood, and the Law. • Jesus is Superior to Prophets (Heb. 1:1-3)

Jesus' superiority over the prophets is stated plainly at the outset of the epistle: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (1:1-2a). Jesus is the final revelation of the Father, the final Prophet to speak, and the final Word from God—the last One the Father sends (Mk. 12:6). His superiority flows from His exalted personhood; the writer tell us that Jesus is the heir of all things, the agency of creation, the “brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3), and the upholder of all things by the word of His power. He procured our forgiveness by Himself and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3).

Many prophets spoke in the name of the LORD; some, such as Elijah and Elisha, performed miracles, while others, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, wrote oracles. Jesus is greater than the prophets because He invokes no other name for His miracles and speaks with His own authority in His teaching. He says with authority, “You have heard that it was said by those of old . . . but I say to you” (Mt. 5:21-48).

- Jesus is Superior to Angels (Heb. 1:4-14)

Because Jesus is the final Word from the Father, the “express image” of the person of God (1:3), He stands in a position superior to the angels. The writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls Him “Son” (1:5), says He is “God” (1:8), and even

affirms that He is “LORD”—the OT word for the covenant Name (1:10).

The angels demonstrate His superiority by their worship of Him (1:6) and by their service to Him and His followers (1:14). As the God-man, Jesus becomes man so that He can willingly submit to the Father and suffer death on behalf of every person (2:9, 14); in so doing, He rescues humans and not angels (2:16).

- Jesus is Superior to Moses and the Law, and to Aaron and the Priesthood (3:5-6; 4:14-5:10)

Jesus is superior to Moses, as a Son in the house is superior to a servant in the house (3:5-6), for Moses failed to lead Israel into the Promised Land, while Christ has succeeded in providing a rest for the people of God (3:16-4:1). Jesus is better than the Law because the Law cannot make people perfect before God (7:19; 10:1). The Law's sacrifices are annual and continual, while Christ's sacrifice is once for all (9:24-26).

Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because He has passed through the heavens, can sympathize with God's people, and yet has no sin (4:14-15). Earthly priests are subject to weakness, sinners who also need a sacrifice (5:2-3). Jesus is called to be a priest, as was Aaron; His calling is after the order of Melchizedek, a better priesthood (5:5-10; 7:9-10).

2. The Superiority of Christ's Work - Hebrews 9:23-10:14

Just as the Person of Christ stands far above every great Old Testament saint or angel, so the work of Christ towers over all the sacrifices offered under the Levitical law. His sacrifice surpasses the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood in these ways: He is a better Priest offering a better offering (Himself), on a better altar, with a better outcome.

- Jesus is a better Priest because He entered the true tabernacle (8:2; 9:11) behind the veil (6:19). He did not offer His sacrifice on the copy of the mercy seat but on the original in heaven (9:24), and He offered only one offering, one time, before He sat down at the right hand of God (10:12).
- Jesus Himself is a better Offering. Jesus did not offer the blood of bulls and goats, but offered His own body in order to do the will of God (10:5-9). His blood, offered from His own spotless self through the eternal Spirit (9:14), cleanses the conscience because He is the substitute who bears the sin of many (9:27-28). His death as Testator of the covenant enforces the covenant and fulfills it (9:16-17). His work as Mediator establishes the "better covenant" on "better promises" (8:6). He inaugurates this "new covenant by means of death" (9:15).
- Jesus' altar is a heavenly altar. The world sees the cross, but the writer of Hebrews sees the heavenly scene. Jesus as High Priest enters into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly places and offers the once-for-all sacrifice that ends the entire sacrificial system and puts away sin forever (9:24-28). Through death He pays the price of sin for everyone (2:9). The outcome of Jesus' sacrifice surpasses the Levitical sacrifices in every way; His once-for-all sacrifice takes away sins completely, sanctifies those who trust in that sacrifice (10:10), perfects forever those being sanctified by that sacrifice (10:14), and saves them to the uttermost (7:25) with an eternal salvation (5:9). Their sins are forgiven (8:12), their consciences are cleansed (9:14), and they are granted entrance into the Holiest "by the blood of Jesus" (10:19). This salvation pays the full price for sin and offers complete forgiveness (10:17-18) because sin is "put away" (9:26). This salvation

provides full access into the Holiest at all times and gives all who trust in Him full assurance of faith (10:22).

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *The writer of Hebrews builds his major arguments from the book of Leviticus; we who know Jesus understand the fulfillment that Moses saw on Mt. Sinai.*

Those who revert to legalism minimize the work of Christ and shame the person of Christ.

Jesus is the centrality of the Christian faith; Christians are not called to a system but to a Person; they do not come to a "place" as much as they come into the Holiest.

Summary

God speaks partially through the Old Testament but finally and completely in the person of Jesus Christ.

God acts through the cross to provide full atonement for any sinner and to inaugurate His promised New Covenant.

God reveals that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

Discussion Questions

How does Jesus perfect us in ways the Law cannot?

Why does the writer emphasize the finality of Christ's work? With what does he compare Christ's finished work?