



Class 1 - Introduction - The Covenant Kingdom, Hebrews

New Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Introduction: The Covenant Kingdom

In Luke 4:14-19, the gospel writer describes Jesus returning from his temptation in the desert and announcing the dawning of a new age in history. The dawning of a new kingdom. Turn with me to Luke 4:14, as I read:

Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity. He was teaching in their synagogues, being praised by everyone. He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: [18] ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.’

Now, imagine you’re a faithful Jew in the synagogue that day, following along. You know this passage of Isaiah 61 by heart. You know that this passage points to the coming of a messianic king who will, when he comes, proclaim freedom to the prisoners, open the eyes of the blind, and release the oppressed. And, suddenly, you see this man standing in front of you, reading the words: “The Spirit of the Lord is on *me*, because he has anointed *me* to preach good news to the poor. He has sent *me* to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And just as you are starting to say, “Wait, is he saying that he is the coming Messiah?,” he rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the attendant, sits down, and then announces “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”

In that one sentence, your concept of the entire Old Testament is blown apart and the New Testament has been inaugurated. The carpenter’s son is reading prophecy about the Messiah, and ascribing it to himself! There is no neutral response to this moment; Christ says he is the end of thousands of years of waiting.

Welcome

Welcome to the New Testament Overview Core Seminar class. This week is the first of a 15 week overview of the New Testament. You can see what each of these weeks will cover in your handout. Some of you have attended the Old Testament overview class, which takes as its theme “The Kingdom of God” and the Promises God made to His People. The New Testament overview picks up that theme by studying both “The King and the Kingdom” and the Promises God has Kept to His people. Our hope is to demonstrate the continuity of themes across the span of scripture, just as we saw in Luke 4, the continuity from the Prophet Isaiah to Jesus Christ.

Today we will discuss the structure and purpose of the New Testament Overview class, and then I’ll run through the whole New Testament twice: once to overview the types of literature we’ll encounter in this course, and a second time to paint a picture of the message of the entire New Testament. Finally, we’ll jump into Hebrews as it provides one of the clearest links between the Old and New testaments.

Purpose and Summary of Course

1. To understand the big picture of each book of the New Testament. [More like a flight across the country than a family cross-country road trip]. We will avoid getting caught up in the minor details, but we’ll see the scenery change as we fly over different books.
2. To understand the continuity between the books in the NT
3. To realize the Promises God has kept to His People from the OT
4. To hear God speak to us today through His Word and so to be challenged in our lives.

Like the Old Testament class, our course is structured to discuss different aspects of the King and the Kingdom. We will not be looking at every detail of every book and will not be covering all parts of the books we are studying. But we’ll profit from a better understanding of the broader picture.

We’ll begin with a basic introduction to the New Testament:

Authorship of the New Testament

The New Testament has 27 books with 8 or 9 human authors that can be grouped in 3 major prophetic circles.

Petrine Circle

Matthew, Mark, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, and James

- Matthew is one of the apostles, but remained in Jerusalem.
- Mark is not an apostle, but was a close companion of Peter. Thus Mark's gospel is largely thought to be Peter's account of Jesus' life.
- Peter himself wrote 1 & 2 Peter
- Jude & James are both half-brothers of Jesus, and key figures in the Jerusalem church.
 - Jude picks up many themes from 2 Peter
 - James is rich in his use of Matthew's gospel, particularly the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7)

Pauline Circle

Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Timothy, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Titus, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Hebrews

- 13 letters of Paul
- Hebrews (unknown authorship but "Timothy our brother" 13:23 places him within the Pauline Circle),
- Luke / Acts (It is clear that Luke is part of Paul's circle: note the "we" passages)

Johannine Circle

John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation

- Written by the Apostle John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved.

And yet with a number of human authors, we see a unity in both the NT and OT Scriptures, because as Peter says, "Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men

spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Pet. 1:20-21) Regardless of a particular human instrument, God is the One true author of Scripture.

Genre

So, what exactly did God inspire? Not a single style or a single genre, but a diversity of writing and perspective that contains the unity of his word. I’m going to run through the three genres of the New Testament—taking us from Matthew to Revelation—as we do so. Those would be the Gospels (including Acts as a continuation of Luke), the Epistles (or letters), and the apocalyptic literature (Revelation, which is also a letter). We’ll start with the Gospels.

Gospel / Acts

- The word ‘gospel’ is not used of literature at all before the 2nd century, when the 4 accounts of Jesus’ life started to be known as ‘Gospels’ (Probably due to the use of ‘gospel’ in Mark 1:1)
- As in all Bible histories, the focus is theological, not chronological. So no attention is given to describing a “balanced” account of Jesus’ life—as you would find reading a year’s worth of newspapers. Instead, these books zero in on the events that really matter from a theological perspective: the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- In that sense, the Gospels do not give the same attention to providing temporal markers as a modern biography would. They are more concerned with the significance of what happened than with the date of what happened. So the order is always logical but not necessarily always chronological.
- What the Gospel writers find significant about Jesus, and what they intend for us to find significant about Jesus, is that he is the promised Messiah. This promised Messiah would bring his people freedom not by conquering the Roman occupiers (again, the day of God’s vengeance is not yet here), but by shedding his blood, and being raised from the dead. They want their readers to understand that Jesus was the King and had come to inaugurate the Kingdom, but not in the way many of the people and disciples had anticipated.

Acts

This book is really a continuation of Luke's Gospel. The recipient is the same, Theophilus, and Luke begins Acts with a recounting of where he had left off from his previous book. In the same way that the Gospels do not provide a "balanced" account of Jesus' life, Acts does not provide a "balanced" history of the church's growth. For example, we see only hints of the spread of the gospel east or south (eg. Ch. 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch). Rather, geographically speaking, the focus is on the ever-closer approach of the gospel to Rome, the heart of the known world. The focus shifts from Jerusalem to Rome to show the shift that there is from Old to New Testaments. No longer is the world to come to Jerusalem to hear of God (like those in Acts 2). Rather the gospel is to be taken to the world.

Of course, all through the book, the "hero," so to speak is clear. This is not so much the "Acts of the Apostles" as it is the "Acts of the Holy Spirit," working through the word of God. In fact, there are repeated summary statements about the triumph of the Word throughout Acts. We see its climax in Acts 28 as the gospel is preached in the heart of the known world. Paul, we learn, is imprisoned in Rome under house arrest, but the gospel is free: "Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Epistles

Those histories take us through the first five books of the New Testament. Of course, for many Christians in America, outside of the Psalms and Proverbs, the Epistles (or letters) of the New Testament tend to be the most read books of the Bible. The reasons are obvious: they are direct, usually have stated purpose and applications, and most dangerously, we tend to think we can understand and apply them apart from their original context. We tend to approach the Epistles like Cliffs notes to the Bible...just explain to me how Christians should live today and don't bore me with all the other details. If that approach characterizes your view of the Epistles (as it has mine in times past), you will not only disregard the value of significant portions of Scripture, but you will also undermine your ability to truly understand the teaching of the Epistles themselves.

So more about this genre. Epistles tend to be either occasional or general. Occasional epistles are letters written at a particular time to a particular church in a particular situation for a particular purpose. General Epistles are letters written broadly to a group of churches, rather than just one or two. They are addressed to Christians in general.

Of course, many letters have both occasional and general features—but understanding how much of a letter was addressed to a very specific context (like 1 Corinthians) vs. addressed to a fairly general context (like Romans) can be quite helpful.

Revelation

Well, there is one final genre we find in the New Testament, and it is confined to the book of Revelation. This is a letter addressed to 7 particular churches; it is prophecy; and it is apocalyptic. The book itself conveys many important elements of New Testament theology, including, the elements of God's sovereignty, God's holiness, and God's worthiness to be praised, while also illuminating Christ as the sovereign judge over all of creation and the divine, redeemer-king. Revelation also give us the fullest picture in Scripture of the Kingdom in its final expression, as John describes the new heaven and earth, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

The Message of the New Testament

Well, those are the types of books you can expect to find in the New Testament. But what is the message that they communicate all together? In short, if we can summarize the message of the Old Testament as Promises Made, the New Testament is about how God has kept those promises.

It would be a tragedy for us to spend 15 weeks studying the New Testament, gaining the ability to understand the different genres, the occasion and audience of each Epistle, why the Gospels are not modern biographies, and yet miss the entire point of the New Testament which is to understand that God has kept his promises of the Old Testament in Christ and therefore we can trust him. As Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church put it:

“The point of the New Testament, indeed, the point of the whole Bible, is that God has made promises to us, he has kept those promises to us, and we are called to trust him because he is the keeper of promises! God has revealed himself to humanity through his promises. And that is why faith is so important. At the end of the day, the Bible does not lie on the shelf like a passive object for us to investigate. At the end of the day, it turns and looks at us and says, will you believe and trust?”

As we study the New Testament we will see through whom God fulfilled His promises (**Christ**), to whom He has fulfilled His promises (**the New Covenant People**), and what ultimate fulfillment

of those promises will entail (**the New Creation**). So we will spend the next bit of our time today going back through the sections of the NT we have just considered, but this time around we are going to think about the NT through the lens of promises God has made, has kept, and will continue to keep.

Christ

So, to recap, what is the message of the New Testament? Promises Kept. And we'll begin by asking, "through whom were they kept?" Obviously, Christ. As we consider the New Testament, we see from the outset that God has fulfilled His most important promise—sending a Savior for His people. Ever since Genesis 3:15, all of Creation has waited for this One, this seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent's head. Throughout the Old Testament, from the giving of the law to the prophets, the way to Christ was being paved, predicted, and anticipated.

In the Gospels, we see the plans and promises of God from the Old Testament being fulfilled in the person of Christ. Jesus was everything Israel had hoped for and needed. He was faithful where Adam and Israel were not; He lived without sin; He fulfilled every prophecy from the Old Testament that was written about Him. He was the coming prophet promised to Moses in Deut. 18 (v.15, 18-19). He was the coming King foreshadowed by and promised to David in 2 Sam. 7 (v. 12-13). He was the Divine Son of Man spoken of in Daniel 7:13-14. He was the suffering servant that Isaiah said would be pierced for our transgressions (Is. 53:5). He is the Messiah that Zechariah predicted would be rejected, later to return again and be received by His people and reign over them.

All these prophecies and many more allow us to read the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with Technicolor. What had once been seen in fuzzy black and white has now come to life in full color. And as we continue reading into Luke's account of the early church in Acts, we see that God's promises fulfilled through Christ were not meant merely for those who were part of Israel by birth. Rather, He had come to establish a people that were not identified by national, geographic, or ethnic heritage but by a common future which is established forever in Heaven. In Acts, we see that Christ's church is being expanded through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

While we can read any one of the Gospel accounts and learn everything we need to understand about why Jesus came and what our response to Him must be, we see that God provided for multiple Gospels to emphasize different aspects of the glorious Christ and each to be aimed at particular audiences. So, Matthew places emphasis on Jesus' fulfillment of prophecies in the Old Testament, which would have been important to Jewish readers. Read Matthew to understand

who Jesus is in light of all that we have studied in the Old Testament. Mark seems to be recording Peter's account of Christ for Roman Christians at a time when Apostles were being killed and it was vital for the early church to have a recorded Gospel. Read Mark and watch as the scenery flashes from one event to the next, pulling away from the details and helping you understand what is most important. Luke, in both the Gospel of Luke and Acts seems to have a more Gentile audience in mind and emphasizes that Christ came not just for the Jews but for all who would repent and believe. He then goes on to record the spread of that Gospel in the first century church. Read these two together—the Gospel of Luke and Acts—to understand the power of God at work in Jesus Christ, first in his earthly ministry and then in his body, the church. And then read John, with his laser-like focus on the deity of Christ, to marvel at the person and work of Jesus while on this earth in human flesh.

The New Covenant People

So what is the New Testament about? First of all, Christ—through whom the Old Testament promises were kept. But it is also about the people of God—to whom has God fulfilled his promises.

Up until the coming of Christ, a relationship with God was mediated through the sacrificial system established in the Old Testament law. An individual did not approach God on his or her own, but went through the Priests. Furthermore, God's presence was associated first and foremost with the tabernacle and later the temple in Jerusalem.

But Christ's coming inaugurated a very different way of communicating with God the Father. Jesus hints very early on in His ministry that things were about to change. In John 2:19-22, He teaches that the means of mediation between God and Man would no longer be a through animal sacrifices at a physical temple located in Jerusalem, but through Christ Himself. The writer of Hebrews helps us understand how this would work when writing in Hebrews 9:11-15:

But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God? Therefore, he

is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

It is this work of Christ applied to all those who repent of their sins and place their faith in Him that establishes His new covenant people, the people of His blood. These people are distinct from the rest of humanity not because of their ethnic or socioeconomic similarity, but because they have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb and are now living out what it means to have the guilt of sins permanently removed.

The Epistles of the New Testament are all about understanding what it looks like to be this new covenant people: on the one hand, understanding the truth of this radical gospel news—and on the other, learning how to live as a gospel-transformed people. In Romans, we see God’s people instructed in the nature of saving faith. In 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Paul teaches a troubled church how to live holy lives in a very secular culture. In Galatians, Paul is very clear about what Christianity is about in contrast to legalism. Ephesians provides a beautiful and succinct theology of the nature and purpose of the church. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul encourages Christians to rejoice in Christ and learn from Christ’s humble example. Colossians, while similar to Ephesians, teaches the implications of the supremacy of Christ. Paul teaches the Thesalonians how to prepare for the second coming. Paul’s letters to Timothy are the most personal correspondence of the Epistles, as Paul encourages Timothy and gives instruction in what to look for in elders and deacons. Paul wrote to another partner in the ministry on Crete named Titus, and a short letter to Philemon, the owner of an escaped slave, instructing on the Christian life and Christ’s church. The writer of Hebrews helps us understand how the old covenant relates to the new covenant. James acts as the Proverbs of the New Testament, giving very practical instruction on living as a Christian. Peter, who would be crucified for following Christ, writes to early Christians about enduring suffering and persecutions. John writes 3 letters in addition to his Gospel, helping Christians battle early heresy concerning the nature of Christ and helping them understand what it means to obediently follow Christ. And Jude, while brief, sharply warns believers about the dangers of following false teachers.

All of these letters are the manual of life for God’s new covenant people. They answer the question “who are we?”—not an ethically consistent, morally superior class of people, but instead people who have been saved by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. And then they help us understand what it looks like to live life corporately, as the church, out of gratitude for that salvation in a way that proclaims God’s character to the watching world.

The New Creation

So the New Testament is about Christ, about his new covenant people, and about the final fulfillment of his promises. Christ instructs His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Since the dawn of Creation, God has been about having creatures, made in His Image, worshipping Him as they properly image Him. Sin, and God’s right wrath against sin, broke this perfection. Yet the story of the Bible, the story of this Creation we see coming to a conclusion through Christ, is God establishing a new Kingdom which doesn’t just replace Eden but surpasses it. And so the New Testament concludes with a vision of this future.

John’s vision of the future New Creation in Revelation sees God’s people living in God’s city for eternity. To again quote Dever, “The end will be like the beginning, only better. The Garden of Eden, in some sense, will be restored. God will dwell with his people. The whole heavenly city is presented in Revelation as a perfect cube, which recalls the Most Holy Place in the Old Testament temple. The Most Holy Place, which represented the presence of God on earth, was also in the shape of a cube. Only now, this heavenly cube is not restricted to the high priests once a year, as in ancient Israel. Rather, all the children of God will enter his presence, and we will live there with him forever!” (Message of the New Testament, 32)

The New Testament and the entire Bible helps us to understand the past, ourselves and the lives we live today, the future, and how we are to relate to God. If you have thought of Scripture as only addressing one of those categories, I hope you will continue attending this class as we unpack the inestimable riches of God’s promises made and kept in the Scriptures.

Hebrews

Hebrews acts as God’s commentary on the Old Testament as it beautifully casts the scripture and history of Israel in the light of Christ. Christ is the main point of the Old Testament; it is to him that the entire sacrificial system points. And there are few places in Scripture that make this point better than the book of Hebrews. If you want to understand the rich backdrop that the Old Testament provides for the life and work of Christ, if you want in fact to understand your Old Testament, Hebrews is a great place to start. And, here is where we will take our first look at the coming of God’s kingdom.

Purpose and Background

Written prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, the letter was likely written in the mid-60s. Identifying the writer is a more difficult task, but not necessary for understanding the book. The letter's primary purpose does not seem to be merely an interpretive guide to the Old Testament, but is written to a Hebrew community that appears to be mostly Christian, but is now in crisis. Although they were persecuted when they became Christians and had gained a reputation for sacrificial service, the author is now deeply concerned for them. He calls them slow to learn (6:12) and repeatedly urges them not to "turn away from the living God" (3:12) but to go on toward maturity (6:1).

"Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (3:12)

It appears that in the midst of mounting difficulties, the Jewish recipients of this letter were considering abandoning Christianity and returning to Judaism. In 2:3 the author asks: "How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Even as we see these Christians tempted to turn away from following Christ as the call to follow Christ became more difficult, so we can be encouraged and warned ourselves when we may be tempted to consider other less difficult options than following Christ.

Theme and Key Points

The overarching theme of the book of Hebrews leaps out at us from almost every page, and it is the supremacy and finality of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the preeminent of all God's servants, has, as we read in chapter 9, "appeared **one time**, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself." (9:26), and in that sacrifice he has brought us eternal salvation (5:9; 12:22-24; 1:2). Because of Jesus' sacrificial death we see that we now have direct access to God through Jesus (4:16, 10:22). And given this, we also see major emphasis on the need to continue in the faith (12:1-2).

The writer of Hebrews focuses on three things as he addresses an audience that is considering whether or not it is better to go back to their former religion, he focuses on the Superiority of Who Jesus is, the Supremacy of What Jesus has done in establishing the New Covenant, and the Hope we have because of these truths and how this should change our lives. Along the way, he also gives several warnings to these struggling Christians, which we will consider in conclusion.

- i. Superiority of Who Jesus is (Chapters 1-7)
- ii. Supremacy of Christ's Work (Chapters 8-10:18)
- iii. A Life Transforming Hope (Chapters 10:19-13)

Superiority of Who Jesus is (Chapters 1-7)

In Message of the New Testament Dever says, "There were other religious leaders these Christians were tempted to follow. And these other leaders were very impressive. Maybe it would be less morally demanding to follow them; or if it were more morally demanding to follow them, maybe it would be less socially awkward and make for less persecution. Either way, these leaders were hardly false teachers."

The writer of Hebrews makes the case of the superiority of Christ to individuals who were not being led astray by false teachers like the Gnostics we'll come across in our later study of I John. They were being tempted to go back to a "Christless" Judaism, to follow the Old Testament prophets, angels that were messengers of God, and Moses. So, in making his arguments, the writer of Hebrews recognizes it is critical to not only state positively that Jesus is superior to all others, but to use the Old Testament Scriptures to demonstrate that these "teachers" the Hebrews were considering going back to would tell them to look to Jesus not to them.

From the opening of the letter, the author begins to establish the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ: "Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs." (1:1-1:4)

Supremacy Over Angels

By the time we get to verse 4b, the writer has selected his first point of comparison to establish Jesus' supremacy: angels (1:4-2:18). **Read verse 5.**

For to which of the angels did he ever say, You are my Son; today I have become your Father, or again, I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?

We see the author's exposition of several verses from the Psalms, 2 Samuel, and Deuteronomy. And, in these verses the writer emphasizes Jesus' Sonship (v. 5), His worthiness of worship (v. 6), His rule (v. 8-9, 13), and eternity (v. 10-12) over the angels' status/role as "ministering spirits" and messengers (v. 7, 14).

The point of this comparison becomes clear at the beginning of chapter 2: "For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (2:2-3a) In the Old Testament, angels were instrumental in delivering God's Word to God's people. This messenger (Jesus) is greater than these angelic messengers, and the corollary is also true that His message is of utmost importance.

Jesus' superiority over the angels is found in His identification with man, with us, "For it is clear that he does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people." (2:16-17) Jesus functions as more than an errand boy or messenger like the angels; He becomes the satisfaction of God's wrath for "those who are tempted." The angels announce God's Word, He is God's final word. He is the gospel, and it is imperative that we hear this gospel and not drift away (2:2-3).

Superiority to Moses and the Levitical Priests—Jesus is Eternal and Jesus is Perfect

While both Moses and Jesus are lauded for their faithfulness, Christ's superlative attribute is seen in the fact that while Moses was faithful as a servant, Jesus is "Son over His own house".

"Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household, as a testimony to what would be said in the future. [6] But Christ was faithful as a Son over his household. And we are that household if we hold on to our confidence and the hope in which we boast." (3:5-6)

The argument is similar to what we just saw with the angels. If the people of Israel were judged for rebelling against Moses, how much more ought we be careful to follow Christ, who is in fact greater than Moses? The urgency of following Christ alone is becoming more clear. We see an example of this urgent exhortation in verses 12-13 of chapter 3. He pleads that we not "be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" toward the gospel and Christ. He warns us to beware of "an unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" and to daily encourage one another so that we might avoid this deception. What are ways we can do this? Do you pray for other

members of this church and for other Christians you know? Do you encourage other Christians? The writer of Hebrews is telling us that we need other Christians in our lives to hold up a mirror to our lives, unbelief is a very real threat that we must be on guard against together.

From 4:14-7:28, the writer demonstrates that Jesus is a greater high priest than the Levitical Priesthood. But Christ is not in the Aaronic line of the Levitical priests. He is eternal, in line with Melchizedek, “After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, and he was declared by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” (5:9-10) The writer goes on to describe Melchizedek in 7:3, “Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus was this kind of Priest. Dever says, “Jesus is an eternal Son of God and therefore an eternal priest. The old priests died. But death could not hold Jesus, so he can continue to intercede on our behalf.” Truly, Jesus is a greater high priest, through Him we have a mediator before God. Furthermore, he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he has been tempted in every way that we have been – except without sinning. Unlike former priests, and even more important, unlike us, He is perfect. This is the kind of priest we need!

Jesus a greater ruler than the angels, he a greater prophet of God than Moses, and he is in fact a greater high priest than any descended from Abraham. Having seen who he is as Prophet, Priest, and King – it is now time to look at what he has done.

Supremacy of Christ’s Work (Chapters 8-10:18)

From the Superiority of Christ’s person we move to the Supremacy of Christ’s work. The author makes a transition from the person of Christ to the work of Christ in the first two verses of chapter 8, though in one sense he continues this great theme of the superiority of Christ. *“The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”*

The Nature of the New Covenant

The writer of Hebrews is getting to the climax of the book. He wants us to know that this high priest, just as the old priests gave gifts and sacrifices, so now does this new high priest. What he gives is different from what the old priests gave. The author calls this a new covenant.

The Old Covenant was meant to direct man to God and to illuminate our sinful state. The law was the shadow of things to come and was symbolic (see 10:1-4). In contrast, the point of the New Covenant is to transform the mind and heart (see 8:8-13 and Jeremiah 31:33). This, the writer says, is a fulfillment and discontinuity with the kingdom the Jews had known and the kingdom that has now come (v. 13).

The author makes the point that the New Covenant is superior to the Old with three examples/arguments:

- **Human Illustration- A Will:** The new covenant (or will/testament in Greek and Hebrew) only came into force after Jesus died (9:15-17)
- **Biblical Analogy – Sacrifice and Blood:** First Covenant ratified with the blood of animals; the second covenant inaugurated with Christ’s blood. Why the importance of blood? Hebrews 9:22 - *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*
- **Argument from Experience:** One sacrifice made perfect everyone who is being made holy (see 10:14). Once forgiveness has been provided there is no longer any need for further sacrifice (10:17-18).

The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to know that we are privileged to have a better covenant than that given through Moses.

The Sacrifice of Christ

At the core of the new covenant is Christ’s sacrifice. Christ has offered an effective and permanent sacrifice that atones for sins.

The past sacrifices were ceremonial, temporary, and only serve as a reminder of sins. What was needed was a sacrifice that would clear the conscience of the worshipper forever (9:9; 10:3). That is what Christ’s sacrifice finally accomplished. According to the writer of Hebrews, Christ’s sacrifice changes the way we relate to God, and most fundamentally this happens because through Christ our sins have been forgiven forever. Quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-33, the writer of Hebrews says,

See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. I showed no concern for them, says the Lord, because they did not continue

in my covenant. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother or sister, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins. (8:8-12)

The sacrifice in the Old Covenant is ceremonial – it is symbolic and intended to point us to Christ. As we read in 10:3-4: "in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The sacrifice in the New Covenant, however, is moral. It has the power to actually change our hearts. The writer goes on to say in 10:12,14, "But this man, after offering **one** sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God... For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified."

The sacrifice Jesus offered was not only effective it was permanent. It happened once and for all (9:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:10). It is a single action that is not repeated. This is contrasted with the daily rituals and the annual day of atonement. **Read 9:23-28 if time.**

Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves to be purified with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us. He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another. Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

As the author of Hebrews points out, whereas the priests of the Old Testament are continually standing at their work, Christ has sat down at the right hand of God.

Why was Christ's work able to be permanent? Because He was the perfect sacrifice, imperfect priests could only offer temporary sacrifices, the perfect Christ could offer a sacrifice once for all.

In view of the supremacy of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, we are admonished and exhorted to "hold on to our profession" because God is faithful, and to not draw back but to continue in

faith unto salvation (10:23-39). This we are able to do through the person and work of Christ.

A Life Transforming Hope (Chapters 10:19-13)

After summing up this section on the work of Christ with another exhortation, the author now turns to encourage his listeners to continue in their faith, hope, and love. Why is it that we had to work through all of this discussion about the person and work of Christ first? It is because as Christians our faith is centered on a person, not on a list of commands. The purpose of life for a Christian is not to obey a list of rules but to serve the risen Christ. And the best way to accomplish that is not just to remind each other of rules, but to learn more about the person and work of Christ. How is it that we can best learn about who Jesus is? Certainly, we can read the gospels and understand his teaching. But as the author of Hebrews makes clear, looking just at that ignores thousands of years of God's revelation pointing to Christ. If we want to persevere in our faith, then we must learn more about Jesus. And to learn more about Jesus, we must understand the Old Testament. That is precisely the purpose of the book of Hebrews.

Throughout, the author gives us points of application, inferences drawn from the exposition of OT scripture. In the last four chapters, those applications are lifted up for us. He presents aspects of Gospel based, grace inspired Christian living: faith, perseverance, hope and love.

Faith (10:39 and Chapter 11) We begin this section on faith with what many have called the "Faith Hall of Fame" in chapter 11. We are to emulate these great saints by showing the same confidence in the promises of God. Incidentally, this section emphasizes that the way of salvation has always been about faith and trust in God. This is the great unifying truth that we see throughout God's Word. So, in Hebrews 11:1 we find:

"Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen."

Perseverance (12:1-12) With this magnificent heritage of faith, the author calls us to follow the examples of these witnesses. It is in suffering that we see the intersection of faith and perseverance. "Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons." (12:7). **Read 12:1-3.**

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him

who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up.

What does it mean to have persevering faith? It means to trust that God is in control and that God is at work accomplishing good purposes, even in the midst of great hardship.

Hope (12:18-24) With this look at our present circumstances, the author turns our minds toward the future. We begin with a reminder of the day the law was given to Israel at Mount Sinai.

Read 12:18-24.

For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, for they could not bear what was commanded: If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned. The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

Since we have been made part of this new covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem, there is much to hope in. Perseverance is fueled by meditating on God's sovereign goodness to us through Christ, and in the hope we have before us in Heaven. Hope comes from faith in future grace.

Love (13:1) As he turns to love, the author exhorts us to follow the example of Christ and love our brothers. With this great foundation of hope established, the author turns in the final chapter to implore and remind his readers to love and serve others and ultimately to be like Christ who suffered "outside the gate" (to be banished from the city) for the sake of others (13:12-13).

Hebrews is all about perseverance in faith, hope and love through our knowledge of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

What's Next Week?

We will be looking at the 5 depictions of the king in the Gospels & Acts, and what the Gospels say to God's people as a whole. We will then dive into the book of Matthew.

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/new-testament-overview/>.

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