

Sent: Wednesday, 16 November 2016 1420
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Hebrews 8

The book of Hebrews is unique among all the books in the Bible in that it zeros in on the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ! Which just happens to define the very purpose for which He left heaven's glories to take on the form of a man and come down into our world!

Hebrews 8 begins with the author stating that the "main point" in all that has been said so far (i.e., in the first seven chapters, I suppose), is that we, in fact, do "have such a high priest"! Jesus! Our great high priest, far superior to the priests of the Levitical system, for which He wouldn't even qualify, being born as a man of the kingly tribe of Judah--in the line of David! However, One "attested" by God the Father as being a "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (about whom we discussed in last week's lesson)! Jesus! The One who has become the "guarantee of a better covenant." The One who, "because He holds His priesthood permanently...is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them!" The One "exalted above the heavens, who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself!"

Now, the author continues, He has "taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens..." where He "ministers" (for us!) in the heavenly sanctuary! Unlike the priests who "stand daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:11), He can "sit" because His atoning work is "finished" and He rules as our sovereign Lord!

The author sums it all up by writing that He has "obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises" (Heb. 8:6) And then draws on the prophetic words of God Himself to the "weeping" prophet, Jeremiah (in Jeremiah 31:33-34), declaring that "days are coming" when God would "make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah"! Words given during some of the darkest days of Israel--the time of the Babylonian captivity--when the failure of the old covenant was clear and hope for God's people all but lost! But now, hope made possible not only for Israel but for all people of the world!

One of the commentators I read (from Gracepoint Berkeley Church) described Hebrews 8 as a "synopsis of the new covenant in prophetic form"--and as the "essence" of what Christianity is all about: (1) grounded in Judaism (since any adequate understanding of Christianity must grasp its Jewish roots and the implications of those roots for Christian belief); (2) the internalization of religion, not merely the external practice of religion (God's laws are written on the minds and hearts of true Christians and, as such, transformation and intrinsic motivation form powerful, foundational elements of Christian life and living); (3) relationship with God, not merely service for God; and (4) the forgiveness of sins!

Hagner puts it this way: "With the establishment of the new covenant through the death of Christ, the universal purposes of God--already expressed in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3)--and the election of Israel to be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6) come to their realization. The church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, depends for its existence upon the reality of the new covenant!"

Hebrews 8 closes with the note that the new covenant has made the old covenant obsolete and "ready to disappear"! How ironic that the writing of Hebrews apparently took place just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the beautiful temple (built by Herod!), by Titus, in 70 A.D.

Well, this great lesson should be eye opening to believers and unbelievers alike! And particularly for the hope that we have--or that's available--for all eternity because of the priestly ministry of Christ in offering Himself as the supreme sacrifice for our sin--and for His continuing ministry of intercession for us at the right hand of God!

More of this to come! Hebrews 9 on November 29!

Have a great Thanksgiving time, men!

Lowell