

Sample Response to Hebrews 8 | Mary Hannah

Whole-Book Literary Context: With Heb 8, the pastor initiates a major, and final, movement (Heb 8:1–10:18) in his larger argument concerning Jesus’s superiority as high priest, relative to the Levitical order (Heb 5:1–10:18 [4:14–10:25]). The focus on Jesus’s offering in 8:1–6 and 10:1–18 frame this section of the argument, including references to Jer 31 (Heb 8:8–12; 10:16, 17).

Immediate Literary Context: The pastor continues developing his focus on the nature of Christ’s priesthood, including with the expression “such a high priest” (7:26 and 8:1). Having established the Melchizedekian order of Jesus’s priesthood in Heb 7, the pastor now focuses on the “tent” in which the priests perform their ministry and the respective “covenants.”

In Heb 7:22 the pastor identifies Jesus as “the guarantor of a better covenant,” but does not develop this element until Heb 8:6ff.

STRUCTURE

8:1–6 Better ministry: Jesus ministers as high priest in heaven

- v. 1 Jesus’s superior position: the high priest we have is seated at God’s right hand
- v. 2 Jesus ministers (that is, offers gifts) in the true tent that the Lord set up
- vv. 3–4 Priests on earth offer gifts according to law
- vv. 5–6 Priests on earth serve copy/shadow of heavenly tent

8:7–13 Better covenant: Jesus mediates the promised second covenant

- v. 7 Claim: Anticipation of second covenant shows first covenant’s incompleteness.
- vv. 8–12 Scriptural support for claim: Quotation of Jer 31:31–34
- v. 13 Application of quotation: “new” covenant renders first obsolete

UNIFYING THEME

The Lord Jesus reigns as heaven’s high priest who has obtained a more excellent ministry than priests on earth and mediates a better covenant enacted on God’s promises, *which introduces a better hope through which we draw near to God.*

AUTHOR’S AIM

The pastor aims to strengthen his hearers’ confidence in Jesus Christ, particularly regarding his high-priestly ministry in heaven and mediation of a better covenant according to Scripture, **so that** his hearers will not drift *from* their Christian confession *to* what God has made obsolete.

Better ministry: Jesus, heaven’s Priest-King, has obtained a better ministry than the ministry of the Levitical priests.

- Better Position
- Better Place of ministry (pattern)

Better covenant: Jesus’s better ministry fulfills the better promises of the better covenant that he mediates.

- Proven Fault
- Promises
- (Im)permanence [*provisional; passing away*]

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