

HEBREWS CHAPTER EIGHT

“Genuine faux leather.” Those were the real words on the tag. The jacket was made from real, fake leather. According to my minimal research, the fabrics used to make genuine fake leather receive special treatment to achieve a close resemblance to actual animal hide. Faux leather, which has a much lower cost than genuine leather, can look and feel very much like the real thing. And that’s by design.

God gave Moses detailed plans for the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the Levitical priesthood. They each served an important purpose, but were merely shadows of real, heavenly things. God designed them to point His people to greater spiritual realities. And when the time was right, He replaced these temporary, earthly institutions with the permanent and eternal.

As we move into chapter eight of Hebrews, the author highlights the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. At the beginning of the chapter, he sums up where his sermon has been and where it is going. Our high priest is not an earthbound priest of the Old Covenant. Jesus, our high priest, is at the right hand of the Father, serving in the true heavenly tabernacle. Then the author proceeds to show the superiority of the New Covenant that comes through Jesus over to the old, earth-bound covenant.

The True Tabernacle

Read Hebrews 8:1-8a

Where does Jesus, our High Priest, serve?

What sacrifice does the High Priest Jesus offer (vs 3)? (See Hebrews 9:13-14 to help with your answer. We will explore this in more detail in the next lesson.)

The author of Hebrews has established the superior nature of Jesus’ ministry over the angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood. He has pointed out Jesus’ superior position of power and authority at the right hand of the Father. And now he introduces the superior place of Jesus’ ministry – the true tabernacle.

Using verse 2-5, circle all the words and phrases below that describe the tabernacle where our eternal High Priest now serves:

true set up by God copy shadow heavenly built by men earthly

God's people built the earthly tabernacle from God's detailed plans. The instructions God gave Moses concerning the earthly tabernacle are recorded in Exodus, chapters 25, 26, & 27. Read or skim through these chapters to get a picture of this tabernacle.

Read Exodus 25:8-9.

Why did God want Moses to build a tabernacle precisely according to His instructions?

The tabernacle and its furnishings provided a place for God to dwell or "tabernacle" among His people. Although no earthly dwelling could really contain God (see Acts 7:48-50), the tabernacle symbolized God's presence among His people. The tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the ministry of the priests pointed the people to the greater, true reality. The tabernacle reminded them that God is the eternal King who deserved their submission and worship.

Now read Revelation 4:1-11.

God granted the apostle John a glimpse of heaven. The fourth chapter of revelation records John's vision of the very throne of God and what transpires around it. In the earthly tabernacle, God's throne is represented by the Ark of the Covenant. God's instructions to Moses, regarding the building of the Ark, is recorded in Exodus 25:10-22.

How does the earthly representative of God's throne compare to the throne John saw?

Use Revelation 4:1-11 to write a description of God's throne.

Earthly, man-made items – no matter how elaborate and beautiful – can never compare to the true heavenly reality. I'm sure that even John's description falls far short of what heaven is really like. Human words and human understanding are inadequate. Therefore, when the author of Hebrews says that the earthly sanctuary is a "copy" of the heavenly one, he does not mean a carbon copy. The earthly tabernacle, sacrificial system, and priesthood are but mere shadows of the spiritual. God established them to hint at and point to that which is much greater.

The author uses the comparison of the earthly and heavenly tabernacles to begin His presentation about the new covenant. If the heavenly tabernacle is superior to the earthly tabernacle and Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, how much more is the new covenant superior to the old covenant?

The word "covenant" in 8:6 is the Greek word *diatheke*, which means "contract." It carries the idea of a binding agreement. The use of *diatheke* and its Hebrew equivalent, *baryth*, indicate that God is the covenant initiator. In grace, God offers a pledge to His people for the purpose of establishing relationship.

The Need for a New Covenant

Read Exodus 19:1-8 to see the establishment of God's original covenant with His people.

What promises did God make to His people?

What did God expect from them in return?

God called the nation of Israel into a relationship with Himself through the Old Covenant. He pledged to make them His treasured possession. They would continue to enjoy this intimate relationship with God as long as they obeyed the law He gave them through Moses.

Reread Hebrews 8:6-8a. Why was a new covenant needed?

What makes the new covenant superior to the old?

God found fault with the people, not the Old Covenant (vs. 8). The Old Covenant – or Law – did exactly what God designed it to do. It revealed the sinful nature of mankind. Like the Israelites, we are unable to keep God's law. We cannot be righteous on our own. Thus the Old Covenant fulfilled its purpose. It clearly shows our need for the New Covenant established and mediated

by Jesus. Since we cannot be righteous, we need Christ’s righteousness. The New Covenant provides righteousness for God’s people through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Read Hebrews 8:8-13.

Hebrews 8:8b-13 quotes directly from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Centuries earlier, God announced the coming of His new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah. A superior covenant founded on better promises.

Jeremiah preached and ministered in Jerusalem from 626 BC all the way until the nation’s fall to Babylon in 586. In fact, he even continued for a time after that among the survivors in Judah and then to the refugees in Egypt. For decades Jeremiah had called God’s people to repentance, but generations of Israelites had refused to obey God’s covenant with them. The time had come for discipline. This dramatic and heart-breaking event demonstrated the need for the superior covenant about which Jeremiah prophesied.

Based on verses 8-12, in what ways is the new covenant superior to the old?

Continue to compare the Old Covenant to the New by filling out the table below.

SCRIPTURE	OLD COVENANT CHARACTERISTICS	NEW COVENANT CHARACTERISTICS
Ezekiel 11:19-20		
Ezekiel 36:24-29		
Isaiah 54:10		
2 Corinthians 3:6-9		

Based on your findings in the table above, summarize what you learned about the superior nature of the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant, which was imposed from the outside, revealed our sin nature but did not have the power to change it. We needed a covenant that works from the inside. One that has the power to change our hearts. Under the New Covenant, God's law is internalized. God's New Covenant radically changed the way He relates to His people. It created an intimacy that was not possible under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, everyone can know God through a personal relationship with His Son.

Read John 17:3 and compare to Hebrews 8:11-12. Based on John 17:3, how would you define "eternal life?"

When does "eternal life" begin? When do we begin to experience the benefits of the New Covenant?

Remembering the Covenant

Sacrifices were often offered in connection with the establishment of a covenant. In fact, the Hebrew word for covenant derives from a verb meaning "to cut or divide." In Genesis 15, Abraham offered a sacrifice when God established His covenant with Him. The Passover feast commemorates God's Old Covenant with His people. The New Covenant was also established with a sacrifice. That sacrifice is remembered through the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Read Luke 22:14-20.

What do the elements of the Lord's Supper represent?

What sacrifice was given to establish the New Covenant?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

What is the purpose of partaking in the Lord's Supper?

What should our attitude be when we partake? How should we prepare?

The observance of the Lord's Supper - or Communion – is a celebration of the New Covenant. When we partake, we should take the opportunity to reflect on everything God has provided for us through the sacrifice of Christ. Like the Israelites who observed the Passover, a better understanding of its significance should help us worship God as we observe this commemorative meal.

The New Covenant is superior to the Old. Because Jesus, our perfect High Priest, died to pay the penalty for our sins, we can receive His righteousness. God's law is written on our hearts. We can know Him intimately. We need no other mediator than Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant could not accomplish this. So does that mean the Old Covenant is null and void?

Application

Read Matthew 5:17-22

If the New Covenant is superior to the Old, why did Jesus say He did not come to abolish the Law?

Based on what you've learned in this lesson, how can our righteousness surpass the Pharisees?

The law or Old Covenant still reflects God's nature and character. It still shows us the expectations God has for His people. The Old Covenant was not sufficient because people could never perfectly keep it; it could never be our means to have a relationship with God. The Old Covenant certainly showed us our need for a Savior- our need for an intercessor that would make a way for us to know God.

Jesus Christ is our perfect intercessor. He alone perfectly kept the Law and fulfilled all the prophecy. When we trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. Through Christ we receive the righteousness the Law requires.

As we close this lesson ask God to help you reflect the righteousness of Christ through your daily life.