

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Letter to the Hebrews

Readings: *Hebrews 6:13-10:18*

Reflections:

- Christ superior to priesthood – Christ's sacrifice: The writer now wants to zero in on the security we have in Christ, in his role as our perfect priest and in the promises God has made to us. First, we are encouraged that God's promises are secure and we can trust them completely because God in his nature can not lie. As Abraham discovered, God gave two things to Abraham that were unchangeable, his promise and his oath that he would keep his promise. Our hope is just as secure, like an anchor, because it is established in Christ, our priest.
- Priest like Melchizedek: This is a quick recap of everything we know about this mysterious king and priest Melchizedek. The parallels to Christ are obvious.
- Melchizedek's superiority: Melchizedek was the only pre-Torah priest in Scripture and Abraham paying a tithe demonstrated his submission to Melchizedek. The writer suggests that because Levi was a descendent of Abraham that he was also submitted to Melchizedek as Abraham's seed.
- Christ's priesthood: So the writer asks a good question. If we could achieve spiritual perfection through the Levitical priesthood, why did another Priest need to come in the order of Melchizedek and not of the order of Aaron? The Messiah was of the line of Judah and so this change of priesthoods obviously means the whole order of things is changing. And what can we note is different between Melchizedek and Aaron. One was rooted in law and regulation. The other is rooted in an indestructible life. Jesus is from the priesthood of Melchizedek and therefore the weak and powerless system of the law (the story of what doesn't work) is set aside for a whole new way we can draw near to God in intimate friendship.
- Guarantee of covenant: This promise of a new priest in the line of Melchizedek is backed up with God's own oath. Therefore it is completely secure like the promise to Abraham.
- Christ a permanent priest: Jesus rose from the dead and will live eternally. Therefore we always have Jesus interceding for us, twenty-four seven.

- Christ a perfect priest: He is also perfect in this role because he offered the last and final sacrifice and in his triumph was revealed as perfect in authority, purity and holiness. Over and over again we see how the first Christ-followers saw in Jesus every spiritual need met and the doorway opened for complete intimate relationship with God with no need for any religious system or go between.
- Superiority of Christ's covenant and sacrifice – Tabernacle a pattern: The writer now suggests that the tabernacle of Israel was simply a shadow or a poor replica of what exists in heaven. We should not think of this in strict literal terms but rather that the spiritual realities of heaven were in some limited way revealed in the tabernacle.
- Christ's covenant greater: If something is not broken, you don't fix it. If God gave us a new covenant than the logic follows that the earlier one wasn't working. Again we see the clear understanding that the story of Israel is the story of what doesn't work.
- Covenant needed replacing: The writer quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 to make it explicit that God was not looking to change us from the outside in but rather from the inside out. And once the new way was revealed, the old way (the way of religion) is now completed its purpose, fulfilled its function and totally obsolete.
- Old covenant's tabernacle: This is a simple description of the tabernacle.
- Sacrifices only temporary: This is a brief description of the religious ritual of the tabernacle and how it only dealt with the externals.
- Christ is perfect sacrifice: Christ's sacrifice accomplished in the spiritual realm all that we needed to be restored to God. Through the Spirit his death cleanses our hearts or consciences before God so that we can be free to serve him. Again we see the superiority of the internal and spiritual over the external and physical.
- Death validates covenant: There is a direct connection between death and blood being spilled and the forgiveness of sins. We can ask if this clear association in Scripture was for God's benefit (if God doesn't see blood, he can't or won't forgive people) or if it is for our benefit (we need to make a close connection between our sin and its ultimate consequence it brings to our lives, that being death, to really get the significance of God's forgiveness). Most theologians wrestle with the idea of God needing something to die in order to forgive. Yet, it is equally valid that God created this association simply as a way for humanity to get the truth of sin. When you sin, you die. Forgiveness is something that saves you from death. Therefore when you are forgiven be grateful and don't sin again and set in motion the whole death cycle again.
- Sanctuary entered once: This is a summary of what Jesus accomplished for us and will still yet bring us at his return. Jesus is our sole source of salvation.
- Sacrifices were ineffectual: Again religion at best can be a shadow and a reminder of spiritual truths. It offers nothing of substance to free us spiritually. Religion can point to a relationship with God but it can't get us there.

- Christ replaced sacrifices: Psalm 40:6-8 (from the Septuagint) is used as an illustration. We see here how even though the translation from the Septuagint is slightly different from the Hebrew, it is still useful as an illustration that God isn't into our religion but into being restored to relationship where we can do his will from a changed heart.
- Christ both priest and sacrifice: The single obedient act of Christ is contrasted to the repetitive ritual of religion. We should remember that the slain enemies who become the footstool of Jesus are the spiritual forces who have rebelled. Consistently in the Christian writers the enemies of Christ are not people but rather the spiritual forces that rebelled.
- Great sacrifice foreseen: What a great conclusion! The Holy Spirit is the one that declares and reveals that God's new covenant through Christ is to change everyone from the inside out. God wants to change both our hearts and our minds as he releases us from the power and consequence of sin. We are truly free in Christ!