

Better Priesthood, Better Covenant (Part 2)

Dr. David A. deSilva — Session 7b (Hebrews 7:1-8:13)

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Keywords

Priesthood, Covenant, Tabernacle, Jeremiah, Sanctuary, Melchizedek, Sacrifice, Shadow

Abstract

This lecture by Dr. David A. deSilva examines Hebrews 7:1–8:13, focusing on Jesus' superior heavenly priesthood and the establishment of a new, better covenant. By analyzing key Old Testament texts such as Psalm 110 and Exodus 25, deSilva highlights how Jesus serves in a true, divinely constructed sanctuary that exposes the secondary nature of earthly temples. He explores the recitation of Jeremiah 31:31–34 to demonstrate the divine obsolescence of the old covenant in favor of one offering internalized laws and complete forgiveness of sins. Ultimately, deSilva addresses the pastoral implications of these theological truths, urging believers to cherish their unique access to God and remain faithful to eternal, invisible realities over the passing material world.

Outline

I. Introduction to Hebrews Chapter 8 and the Main Point (Hebrews 8:1-2)

- A. The main point (cephalon) of the priestly exposition
- B. Jesus as the great high priest at the right hand of God
- C. Service in the true tabernacle pitched by God, not by humans
- D. Refocusing the argument on Jesus' better sacrifice and place of mediation
- E. Motivating hope and endurance among the community (Hebrews 4:14-16, 10:19-25)

II. The Heavenly Venue of Jesus' Priesthood (Hebrews 8:3-5)

- A. Scriptural foundation in Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 110:4
 - 1. Sequence of events: invitation to sit at God's right hand followed by priestly appointment
 - 2. Priesthood exercised from the right side of God's throne in the invisible realm
- B. The necessity of a priestly sacrifice (Hebrews 8:3)
 - 1. General priestly role of offering gifts and sacrifices (recalling Hebrews 5:1)
 - 2. The requirement for Jesus to have something to offer (developed in chapters 9 and 10)
- C. The argument from the contrary for Jesus' heavenly location (Hebrews 8:4)
 - 1. Jesus could not be a priest on earth due to existing Levites
 - 2. Jesus is descended from Judah, placing him outside Torah qualifications
 - 3. Since he is a priest, he must minister in the heavenly sanctuary

D. The Earthly Temple as a Copy of the Heavenly Prototype (Hebrews 8:5)

1. Earthly service as a pattern and shadow of heavenly realities
2. Proof from Exodus 25:40: Moses instructed to build according to the pattern shown on the mountain
3. Prevalence of heavenly temple motifs in Hellenistic Judaism (1 Enoch, Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Baruch, Revelation)
4. Clarification on Platonism vs. Jewish cosmology: contrasting visible creation with the eternal heavenly realm in an eschatological framework

III. The Mediator of a Better Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13)

A. Transition to a more distinguished ministry (Hebrews 8:6)

1. Jesus as mediator of a better covenant based on better promises
2. The covenant and ministry backed by a divine oath

B. Scriptural evidence from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:7-12)

1. Argument from the contrary: a flawless first covenant would leave no room for a second (Hebrews 8:7)
2. Chronological significance of God's oracle setting aside the first covenant after centuries of Levites
3. Censure of the wilderness generation for failing to remain in the covenant (Hebrews 8:8-9, recalling Hebrews 3:7-4:11)
4. The better promises of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10-12)
 - a. Internalization of God's laws in the mind and heart
 - b. Direct, intimate knowledge of God for all without need for external teachers
 - c. Decisive removal and complete forgiveness of sins (the ultimate goal in Hebrews 9-10)

C. The obsolescence of the first covenant (Hebrews 8:13)

1. The use of the term "new" renders the first covenant "old" and annulled
2. Growing obsolete and aging is close to disappearing
3. Attaching the old covenant to the passing material creation, while the new is eternal

IV. Pastoral and Theological Implications

A. Reinforcing the incomparable honor and value of Jesus

1. Jesus' priesthood stands on a plane above the Levites and Aaron
2. Visualizing the invisible, immaterial realm of God as solid and real

B. Addressing the modern theological debate (Two-Covenant Theology)

1. Post-Holocaust rise of two-covenant theology (Mosaic for Jews, New for non-Jews)
2. Rejection of this view by the author of Hebrews and Apostle Paul

C. Exhorting perseverance and a salvific historical perspective

1. Overcoming circumstantial hardships through the long-term view of privilege
2. Warning against taking direct access to God in worship for granted

3. Treating worship as an astonishing privilege, not a chore or obligation

D. Confronting materialism and empiricism

1. Valuing the invisible, eternal realm over the visible, unreliable creation

2. Cultivating singleness of heart to empower Christian discipleship