

THE COVENANTS AND TABERNACLES

BIBLE TEXT : Hebrews 8:1-13; 9:1-5.

LESSON 439 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Hebrews 8:1-13

¹ Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

² A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

³ For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore *it is* of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

⁴ For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

⁵ Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

⁶ But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

⁷ For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

⁸ For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

⁹ Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Our High Priest

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

"And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory, of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

Christ is exalted above the Levitical priesthood -- not in any earthly position which He held, but in the heavenly position He holds at the right hand of the Majesty on High, the highest place of honour in all Heaven.

It seems that the Priesthood of Christ in a large part of Christendom is not given the place it deserves. It is not preached sufficiently. Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives into Heaven was for the express purpose of entering upon this Priesthood.

A large part of this Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to His Priesthood. It seems to be only alluded to in other portions of Scripture. It embraces his whole mediatorial office for mankind. It is through His Priesthood that He becomes a mediator, just exactly as the Levitical priests were mediators. The office of a priest is to represent the people before God. You can see then how essential His incarnation was, that He should take on the form of a man and be made like unto His brethren, if in His priestly office up there He was to be the representative of men here upon earth -- which He is. We see that He stands there with His glorified body at the right hand of the Throne; and for these nineteen centuries He has been fulfilling that priestly capacity or office.

Heaven was the true Tabernacle into which Jesus entered. The Tabernacle in the wilderness was not the true Tabernacle, but only a type.

His Offering and Gifts

The high priests in their functioning as priests brought the sacrifices and presented them before the Lord, and also the gifts of the people. So Jesus must also have gifts and sacrifices to offer: not bulls or goats or oxen or any of these sacrifices, which constituted the offerings under the Levitical priesthood, but the offering of Himself as a sacrifice. Then as far as gifts are concerned, we have it presented in Revelation 8:3, 4.

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; . . ."

This identifies this angel as Christ Himself because the high

of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.
¹⁰ For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

¹¹ And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

¹³ In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away.

Hebrews 9:1-5

¹ Then verily the first *covenant* had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

² For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein *was* the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.

³ And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

⁴ Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein *was* the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

⁵ And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

priest alone had a golden censer; the others had brazen censers. Jesus is the High Priest in Heaven.

" . . . and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

Here is the gift which He offers: it is the prayers of the saints offered up unto the Lord. That gives us an understanding of the incense, which was kept burning continuously upon the golden altar: the prayers of the saints ascending unto the Lord.

The Tabernacle

You will read in the description of the Tabernacle, of its furnishings and the compartments, the most specific directions. The dimensions are given of not only the Tabernacle itself, but of the altars and tables of shewbread, of the Ark of the Covenant and all the other appointments of the Tabernacle in detail.

The Tabernacle was a shadow of the heavenly Tabernacle, with another Priest. That would mean that the Levitical priesthood was also a shadow of the true priesthood. The Tabernacle itself was subordinate to the real Tabernacle; the Levitical priesthood was subordinate to the real Priesthood.

The Covenants

And if the Tabernacle and its service were only shadows, what are we going to make out of the priesthood itself? That was just a shadow of the true Covenant which God had made. We find here that this "better covenant" of which He speaks is as much better as was the priesthood. We see the exalted place to which Jesus was raised in entering upon His priesthood. He was exalted far above all principalities and powers. And if that is the case, the Covenant of which He was priest is exalted just as much, just as high above the Old Covenant; for it says:

" . . . by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, . . ."
(Hebrews 8:6, 7).

Let us get it definitely fixed in our minds what is meant by this First Covenant. It is the Law given by Moses.

"The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb [or Sinai]."

"The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deuteronomy 5:2, 3).

Moses is speaking of the covenant that was made specifically with the Israelites at Sinai. It embraces the Ten Commandments upon two tables of stone; the ceremonial law (all that is found in Leviticus and much that is found in Exodus); and their civil laws, their relations one with another when they should come into the Promised Land. They were like the statutes, which are upon law books of any country for governing the relation of man with man. The mode of worship was embraced in the ceremonial law. The Law embraced all that was given them when they came to Mount Sinai.

That implies that that covenant made at Sinai was for the Israelites and for them exclusively. It was so momentous to the Jewish nation that a new calendar was issued at that time. One of the provisions of this Law, the Passover, dated the beginning of their religious year. This month, Abib, "shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:2). And even their commandments, the Decalogue, were given on the basis of their deliverance out of Egypt. That deliverance was the great theme of the nation.

All God's dealings with the Israelites took their orientation from that great event of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. More than that, many of their laws were of such a nature as to be applicable only to the Jews or nations dwelling in that particular area, because their feasts and sabbaths were all governed by the seasons peculiar to Palestine. For instance: at the Passover were the offerings made of the firstfruits. That meant that the season was such that the barley harvest came at that time, and the offering was made unto the Lord. Therefore, if the Law were intended for other nations they would either have to live in the northern hemisphere where the seasons are the same as provided here by the Law, or move into areas where the climatic conditions were the same as in Palestine; or they could not have observed the Law.

The promise to the Israelites was that they would be brought into the Promised Land, that they would be victors over their enemies; that that land should be theirs (and the bounds of it were given); that the Lord would bless and increase them, and they would become a great nation -- which for a limited time they were. In what respect then is the New Covenant based upon "better promises"?

The promises under the Old Covenant were largely material blessings that would be theirs in the land of Canaan. The blessings, which accrued under the promises of the New Covenant were spiritual and heavenly. We may say that the promises of the New Covenant are as much better as the Covenant itself is better than the Old Covenant.

You can see what the promises of God are in this Dispensation. The priesthood under Christ was exalted far above everything that was found in the Levitical order. The Tabernacle itself was a very small shadow of the true Tabernacle in Heaven. The "first covenant" was mostly material in its blessings while the New Covenant is spiritual; and there is just as much difference in the promises, which were made. That is how much better the promises are in the Covenant into which you and I are brought.

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."

Are we to understand by that that the Law, here called the "first covenant," had flaws in it? No. We cannot reconcile that with what the Psalmist said; for he said, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul." It was perfect for the mission that it was to fulfil; but it was not the limit of God's plan. It was not embrative or comprehensive enough. Therefore it was, as it were, a little circle within a great circle.

Theoretically a circle is absolutely perfect -- there is not a flaw in it. Every point on the circumference of that circle is an equal distance from the centre. But here we have a very little circle within a great circle. They are both circular, but the little circle is smaller than the great circle. The Law was perfect but inadequate in that it had reached the limit of God's plan. If it had been adequate, there would have been no place for the second circle.

When the Lord laid down the Ten Commandments and the entire moral code which goes with it, it was to reveal to the Israelites the impossibility of their measuring up to it in their own strength. Therefore the Levitical priesthood ordained sacrifices and offerings to make provision for them, because of what the Law could not do. The Levitical priesthood only pointed on to the great provision, which God had made: Jesus and His plan of salvation.

Israel's Failure

Did not Israel fail in the thing because they did not let God write the Law on their hearts? That was the final reason. We will see that from what Jeremiah has to say. We are not to understand that there was no such thing as real salvation under the Old Covenant. Even before the Law was ever given they had it. Abraham had real salvation. It says that he believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. But at the same time, Abraham did not come without an offering.

But the thing was this: Instead of the Israelites as a whole conforming to the plan that God had laid down, they failed completely, and did not have those experiences within their hearts. They disobeyed His laws, went into idolatry, forsook His Covenant; and therefore God was released from keeping His part of the promises.

If one party to a covenant breaks his promise, that releases the other party. If I go into a contract with a brother to build a house for me and I fail in making my payment at the time the contract calls for it, does not that release the brother from any further obligation to me?

Israel had broken their covenants, and that absolved God from fulfilling His side of it. But God had made ample provision whereby they might have salvation if they wanted it, might enjoy communion with God and have the experiences the same as we have today, with the exception of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. And even that was given after a fashion in the case of Elisha following Elijah. They were anointed for certain missions. The Spirit came upon them. That was a type in those days of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

They had justification and sanctification, and that is in evidence throughout many parts of the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. Read the 51st Psalm, which is David's prayer of repentance, and you will find that he prayed for cleansing, which is sanctification.

Therefore the fault in the final analysis was with the House of Judah and the House of Israel and not with God's provision, although it was not up to the heights and lengths and breadths that the Covenant of our day reaches. The very fact that men like Abraham, Job, Noah, Enoch, David and other godly men down the line walked in His commandments and ordinances and kept them, was all indication that the rest of Israel could have done it. There was no fault with that Old Covenant in any way, in any of its provisions; therefore the present Covenant was not just an afterthought.

The Passing of the Old Covenant

Paul quotes here from Jeremiah 31:33:

"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10).

This was what God might have done for Israel, but when they drew back He wrote the Law upon tables of stone. Under the New Covenant, He promises to write it upon the heart. How about the tables of stone? They are no longer necessary.

Paul brings that out in II Corinthians 3:7-11:

"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: . . ."

It was not an afterthought with God, but was in His plan from the beginning.

"How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

"For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

"For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

"For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

Therefore when the Law is written upon the fleshy tables of the heart even the moral Law as it was written upon tables of stone under the Old Testament is dispensed with.

The New Covenant

"And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest" (Hebrews 8:11).

This has reference to carrying the Gospel into all the world. In Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, He said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). Not in the Temple at Jerusalem, but the true worshippers shall worship Him in spirit and in truth irrespective of place. They will no longer be bound by a temple, a Levitical priesthood, they will no longer be limited by prescribed measures of the Law; but bursting all these bounds, the Gospel shall extend not only to the Israelites but shall be disseminated to all nations.

"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation" (Hebrews 9:10).

The time of reformation was the Gospel period. That reminds us of another verse, in Acts 3:21, where Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost. Speaking of Christ he said:

"Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

Those words "reformation" and "restitution" are practically synonymous. From the period of the Law we come up one step to the Gospel, the time of reformation. Peter implies that with the coming of the Lord the heavens must receive Him until the time of the restitution of all things. That is the plan on which God works throughout the ages, stepping nearer and nearer to perfection.

The True Tabernacle

"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary" (Hebrews 9:1).

That means an earthly sanctuary in contrast with that sanctuary which he spoke of in the previous chapter which was the true Tabernacle not pitched by man but by God. Bear in mind that all the time we are studying the Tabernacle we are studying a plan of heavenly things. Here is given us what is in Heaven. That ought to cause us to approach the matter with reverence, and feel that we are treading on holy ground.

"Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel:

"And they saw the God of Israel: and there was

under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" (Exodus 24:9, 10).

Is not that remarkably like what John the Beloved saw when he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos? He saw the Lord enthroned there. Here Moses and those who are with him have a vision of the true Tabernacle, of the heavenly one; thus they have that for the pattern in the making of this Tabernacle that they were to establish upon earth. In Exodus 25:40 we read:

"And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount."