

Text: Heb 7.20-22

Last time we began a series of three contrasts that show Jesus is a better priest for us than the Levitical priesthood of the OT.

The first contrast was between the Law and the better hope which brings men into the presence of God.

The second contrast has to do with the way the priests are appointed in both eras, but the contrast of appointment is brought to bear on an implied contrast of the arrangement between God and man that is brought about in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

This answers why there must be a change between the Old priesthood and the New priesthood, but it also makes the consequences even more valuable in the era of the New Covenant.

All of this is heavily theological. What does it mean for us?

Last time we were talking about how the better hope in Jesus is the way we draw near to God.

This time we are talking about how that nearness to God puts us in a better relationship with God than the OT saints had.

As I've said before, the OT saint could have a rich and rewarding relationship with God. Just read the psalms. Consider what they say about how David, Korah, the sons of Asaph, Solomon, Moses, and others had a relationship with God.

Consider the prayers and psalms of Mary and Elizabeth and Zacharias when Jesus was conceived, and John was born.

These examples speak of people who had a deep relationship with God.

What I am saying is that because of who Jesus is and what he did we can have a deeper relationship to God than they did. We have a better system. We can be closer to God than these examples of spiritual people in the Bible were.

Let's read our text, this time just reading the three contrasts and the concluding statement.

Heb 7.18-25, text 20-22

Proposition: Anyone who comes to God through Jesus can have a closer relationship with God than anyone had before Jesus came.

I. Shown through the organization of the passage

A. The correlation of concepts in v. 20 and v. 22

1. Inasmuch as ... to the degree that (20)
2. So much the more ... to the same degree (22)

“The comparative expressions ... direct attention to the relationship between the divine oath and the ‘guarantor’ of the better covenant: the divine oath stands behind the guarantor and supports him in his mission.”¹

This is the main point of our passage

B. The basis for making this correlation (21 ... “for”)

1. For on the one hand, they became priests without an oath
 - a. Basis of the OT priesthood: the command of God (Ex 28.1)

Ex 28.1 ¶ “Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me-- Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.

- b. These priests were selected, and vested with the priesthood as a heritage (passed from father to son)

2. But on the other hand, he became a priest with an oath (Ps 110.4)

C. The organization of the passage gives weight to the consequence of this oath (22)

1. The oath created a better covenant
2. The oath appointed a guarantor

We will come back to this, but this is the point of the comparison: everything is better with Jesus.

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 186.

II. Shown through the vehemence of the appointment

A. The word for “oath” encompasses more than a simple statement

“the process of taking an oath, *oath-taking*, *oath*”²

1. There is a process for oathtaking
 - a. Laid out in the OT law for men
 - b. Pictured in the vision Abram saw in Gen 15 when the Lord alone walked between the bloody portions of the sacrifices
2. There is a solemnity in taking an oath
 - a. When men take an oath, they swear by something higher that their word is true (calling judgement on themselves if false)
 - b. When God takes an oath, he swears by himself that is word is sure (offering his very life as the guarantee of the oath)

B. The oath itself is shown to be a key distinguishing feature between Aaron and Jesus

1. They became priests without an oath
2. Jesus became a priest with an oath

“Jesus is not said to become a priest by a ‘better oath’ than the Levites. ... The distinction that he draws is ... not of degree, but of kind: between priests with no oath and Jesus, a priest by means of God’s oath recorded in Ps 110:4.”³

C. The citation of the oath emphasizes the oath itself, with no qualification

1. Here, Melchizedek drops out of the picture
2. Some mss. add “after the order of Melchizedek” here, but this is almost certainly in error
3. Here the focus is on the oath and the oath-taker
4. This increases the vehemence of this contrast

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

³ Allen, *Hebrews*, 427.

III. Shown through the Person of the fruit of the oath-taking (22)

A. Two big words in this verse (these form the fruit of the oath-taking)

1. Covenant
2. Guarantee

B. The better covenant

1. "Covenant" is a BIG term in Hebrews
 - a. Used 17 times in Heb (out of 33), no more than 2x in any other NT book
 - b. Different from a more common word in Gk
 - 1) More common word = an agreement on relatively equal terms
 - 2) Our word "has the idea of a more absolute and final will, such as a last will and testament."⁴
 - 3) It is less agreed than imposed

When someone makes a will, they set their own terms. They aren't making an agreement with anyone.

2. Hebrew use of the term

- a. Used for the Heb *berîth*, "covenant"
- b. Some covenants made between men and men (e.g. David and Jonathan)
- c. Especially used of God when God makes covenants with men
 - 1) Noah (unconditional)
 - 2) Abraham (unconditional)
 - 3) Moses (conditional)* — it is this covenant, which appoints the priests, which is in contrast with the "better covenant" of Heb 7
 - 4) David (unconditional)

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Heb 7.22.

- d. The Hebrews had no word for a “last will” — they learned about this from the Romans
 - 1) When they wrote of someone making a will they used Hebrew letters to spell the Greek word in the Talmud
 - 2) They borrowed this word to translate the OT word in the LXX (at least 200 times)
 - 3) The Hebrew usage elevated the idea of covenant to a higher concept than merely a “last will and testament”

3. Definition of a covenant

“a free manifestation of divine love, institutionalized in an ‘economy’ whose stability and consummation are guaranteed by a cultic ratification, the sacrificial death of Christ, and whose aim is to make men live in communion with God, to impart to them the treasure of grace and the heavenly inheritance.”⁵

To translate to the Old Covenant:

- a. A manifestation of divine love
- b. Institutes or begins an “economy” – a way of doing business with God (*i.e.* drawing near to God)
- c. Guaranteed by a “cultic ratification” – a sacrificial system cementing agreement between the parties
- d. Aim or goal: to “make men live in communion with God” (see Heb 7.19 “through which we draw near to God”)

4. Comparison to our most common covenant today: marriage

- a. A manifestation of human love
- b. Institutes or begins an “economy” – a way of relating to one’s spouse in an exclusive relationship that sets you apart from all others
- c. Guaranteed by “cultic ratification” – oaths, rings, public ceremony

⁵ Ellingworth, Hebrews, 388, quoted in Allen, *Hebrews*, 427.

d. Aim or goal: that two should be one

This is what makes marriage more than “just a piece of paper” — the covenant of marriage creates a binding (and beautiful) relationship.

5. The concept of covenant in Hebrews

a. This is the first mention (of 17 as noted)

b. The concept is so important, one has called Hebrews “the Epistle of the Covenant”

“a free manifestation of divine love, institutionalized in an ‘economy’ whose stability and consummation are guaranteed by a cultic ratification, the sacrificial death of Christ, and whose aim is to make men live in communion with God, to impart to them the treasure of grace and the heavenly inheritance.”⁶

1) Better economy than the old

2) More successful in its aim: (communion with God)

3) Because of its better guarantor

And it is this word, notwithstanding the importance of “covenant” that is the big word of our passage

C. Guarantee

1. Occurs only here in the Bible

2. Used in the Gk papyri to “denote a bond, a collateral, or some form of material guarantee that a debt will be paid or a promise fulfilled”⁷

a. Recall that the Old Covenant (Mosaic) was conditional, dependent on obedience of the worshipper

b. The New Covenant is unconditional, dependent on the obedience of the guarantor

⁶ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 388, quoted in Allen, *Hebrews*, 427.

⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 188.

3. In some ancient covenants, a guarantor would offer his own life as the guarantee: this makes him more than a mediator
 - a. Jesus *is* a mediator between God and man
 - b. But he is also the *guarantee* of the covenant

“Through his death, exaltation, and installation as heavenly priest, Jesus provides security that the new and better covenant will not be annulled.”⁸

“It must be noticed that Christ is not said here to be a surety for man to God, but a surety of a covenant of God with man.”⁹

Conclusion:

Proposition: Anyone who comes to God through Jesus can have a closer relationship with God than anyone had before Jesus came.

So again, for us, with this guarantee, why would anyone go back on Jesus?

Should the Hebrew Christians go back to their ‘safe’ Judaism?

Should you go back to your less demanding easier ways in the world?

And if you are not in Christ, what are you waiting for?

⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 188.

⁹ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 191.