

Session 21 A Minister of the True Tabernacle

Before the Silence: A Study of Hebrews

Session 21 | Hebrews 8:1-6

The Priest In Heaven (Hebrews 8:1-6)

Session 20 showed why Jesus needs no successor: He lives for ever, is holy and undefiled, and offered Himself once. God's oath appoints the Son for evermore. Chapter 8 now draws the conclusion: the Hebrews have this very High Priest, serving in the sanctuary the Lord established.

The Temple's priests remained visible to these Hebrew hearers before Jerusalem's destruction. Their Messiah was in heaven. His heavenly position fulfills Israel's Scriptures and supplies the ministry the earthly order could not provide.

Follow The Argument

- **Verses 1-2:** The qualified High Priest is seated at God's right hand and ministers in the true tabernacle.
- **Verses 3-5:** His priesthood requires an offering; His ministry belongs to the heavenly reality represented by the earthly sanctuary.
- **Verses 6:** His more excellent ministry corresponds to a better covenant founded upon better promises.

Hebrews 8:1-2 - Such An High Priest

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;

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

Exegesis

- **"This is the sum"** identifies the principal point of the priesthood argument. **"Such an high priest"** gathers the qualifications just given in 7:26-28: holy, undefiled, exalted, and appointed for evermore.
- **"We have"** states a present provision for the Hebrew hearers. Their appointed Priest already lives and serves before God; His qualification is not merely a future possibility.
- **"On the right hand"** recalls Psalm 110:1. The Son is seated with the Father while awaiting His enemies' subjection. This heavenly session is distinguishable from His future public reign on David's throne.
- **"A minister"** describes continuing service. His self-offering is complete, and His intercession continues. Sitting does not mean inactivity.
- **"The true tabernacle"** identifies the heavenly reality the earthly sanctuary represents. **"Which the Lord pitched"** places its establishment in God's hands. Hebrews 9:24 explains Christ's destination as heaven itself, where He appears before God for His people.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Psalm 110:1, 4** - The same psalm places Messiah at God's right hand and appoints Him Priest for ever.
- **Hebrews 7:25-28** - His enduring life, holy character, single offering, and permanent appointment define the Priest described here.
- **Hebrews 9:24; 10:11-13** - Christ appears in God's presence; His sitting after one offering contrasts with priests standing to offer repeatedly.
- **Revelation 3:21** - Christ distinguishes His present place with the Father in His throne from the promised sharing of Christ's own throne.

Text And Translation Notes

- **"Sum"** translates *kephalaion*, the chief or main point.
- **"Who is set"** represents the active verb **sat down**. The KJV describes His seated position; the Greek also states His action.
- **"Tabernacle"** means tent; **"pitched"** means erected or set up. **"True"** contrasts the ultimate reality with its earthly representation.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not identify the earthly tabernacle as a false religious institution. God Himself commanded its construction.
- It does not say the Son's heavenly session completes every promise concerning His coming kingdom.

Hebrews 8:3 - Something To Offer

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

Exegesis

- **“For”** explains a necessary part of the Priest’s ministry. Appointment to the office includes offering before God on behalf of others.
- **“Gifts and sacrifices”** recalls the recognized service of Israel’s high priests. Heavenly exaltation does not remove the question of what offering Jesus supplies.
- **“This man”** identifies the particular Priest already described. Hebrews 7:27 has supplied the answer: **He offered up Himself**.
- His continuing ministry rests upon that completed offering. Hebrews will explain His entrance by His own blood and His effective representation before God.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Hebrews 5:1** - The earlier definition of high-priestly service includes offering gifts and sacrifices for sins.
- **Hebrews 7:27; 9:14** - Christ’s offering is Himself, without spot to God; Priest and offering meet in one Person.
- **Hebrews 9:25-26** - His heavenly service does not require repeated self-offering and repeated suffering.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Ordained”** translates *kathistemi*, to appoint or constitute in an office.
- **“Somewhat”** means **something**, not a small or inadequate offering. **Man** is supplied in **“this man”** to express the reference to this particular Priest.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not require a fresh sacrifice each time Christ represents His people. His one self-offering supplies the basis of His continuing service.

Hebrews 8:4 - Why His Ministry Is Heavenly

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

Exegesis

- **“If he were on earth”** compares His actual heavenly ministry with the earthly priestly establishment. **“According to the law”** states the governing limitation.
- Jesus belongs to Judah. The Mosaic law gives altar service to Aaron’s family, so Jesus does not hold that hereditary earthly office.
- **“There are priests”** describes the existing earthly service. In the study’s pre-70 setting, the comparison confronted the hearers in the Temple’s continuing activity.
- Psalm 110 supplies God’s appointment of another order. Christ’s ascension fits this priestly calling; His heavenly location does not signal the failure of Israel’s Messianic hope.
- His offering Himself at the cross and His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary belong together. Verse 4 addresses the law’s earthly priesthood rather than denying the self-offering already stated in 7:27.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Hebrews 7:13-14; Numbers 18:1-7** - Judah has no assigned right to altar service; the law entrusts the priest’s office to Aaron and his sons.
- **Psalm 110:1, 4** - God’s oracle joins the right-hand session with the permanent priesthood of another order.
- **Zechariah 6:12-13** - The Branch will be Priest upon His throne, preserving the expectation of Messiah’s coming royal-priestly rule.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Should not be”** means **would not be** in this conditional sentence.
- The KJV/TR explicitly says **“priests”** and begins with **“For.”** Critical editions have shorter wording about those offering and a connective commonly rendered **now** or **then**. The law-governed earthly service remains the subject.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not make Jesus an Aaronic priest or give Him a hereditary claim to Jerusalem’s altar.
- It does not exclude His return to earth as King-Priest.

Hebrews 8:5 - The Example And Shadow

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.

Exegesis

- **“Who serve”** refers to the earthly priests of verse 4. Their service takes place within the sanctuary whose construction followed God’s revealed pattern.
- **“The example and shadow”** describes the earthly sanctuary’s representative character. It was an actual tent, with actual furnishings and sacrifices, while also bearing witness to a greater reality.
- **“Of heavenly things”** gives the direction of the comparison. The contrast reaches beyond an old earthly building and a newer earthly building to Christ’s service in God’s presence.
- **“As Moses was admonished of God”** grounds the argument in God’s instructions. The comparison is not an invented religious allegory; the Lord required a sanctuary constructed after the pattern He showed Moses.
- **“All things according to the pattern”** explains why the details were not left to Moses’ imagination. God’s authorization makes the earthly representation trustworthy, while its representative character marks it as preparatory.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Exodus 25:8-9, 40** - God commands a sanctuary and supplies the pattern for the tabernacle and its instruments. Verse 40 provides the quotation’s immediate foundation.

- **Exodus 26:30; Acts 7:44** - Both repeat the requirement that the tabernacle follow the form or fashion shown to Moses.
- **Hebrews 9:23-24** - The holy places made with hands are patterns or figures; Christ enters heaven itself.
- **Hebrews 10:1** - The law is a shadow of good things to come; its repeated sacrifices cannot bring the worshipper to the required perfection.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Example”** translates *hypodeigma*, here a representation or copy. It does not mean merely a moral example to imitate.
- **“Pattern”** translates *typos*, the model governing construction. **“Shadow”** and **“pattern”** contribute to the comparison without being identical definitions in every setting.
- **“Admonished of God”** means instructed or warned by God. **“Shewed”** is the older spelling of **showed**.

Theological Insights

- An institution can have God’s authorization and still point beyond itself. Its preparatory role does not make its historical service fraudulent.
- God’s revealed pattern controls this comparison. The earthly sanctuary’s significance rests upon His design and the explanations Scripture supplies.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not turn heaven into a state of mind or the tabernacle into an imaginary building.
- It does not provide a secret meaning for every measurement, color, or fastening without further scriptural support.

The Sanctuary Comparison At A Glance

I. The Earthly Representation

A. Moses and Israel constructed the tabernacle according to God’s instructions.

1. Its priests served under the law’s assigned boundaries.
2. Its gifts and sacrifices had a real but limited function.

II. The Heavenly Reality

A. The Lord established the true sanctuary where the ascended Son ministers.

1. His sufficient self-offering supports His continuing representation.
2. His service supplies the effective approach to God developed throughout Hebrews.

The connection: The earthly pattern points beyond itself. Confidence belongs in the living Priest who serves in God’s presence and provides what the earlier order could not complete.

Hebrews 8:6 - A Better Ministry, A Better Covenant

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.

Exegesis

- **“But now”** turns from the hypothetical earthly service of verse 4 to Christ’s actual ministry. His exclusion from Aaron’s office does not diminish Him: He has obtained a more excellent ministry.
- **“He is the mediator”** states His present role. The living Son stands between God and the covenant people with an effective offering and enduring priesthood.
- **“A better covenant”** develops the **“better testament”** introduced in 7:22. Verses 8-12 identify its parties as Israel and Judah and explain the better promises: inward law, restored relationship, knowledge of the Lord, and forgiveness.
- Christ’s accomplished offering and present mediation secure the promised outcome. In this series’ reading, the full national realization of those promises awaits Israel’s coming kingdom restoration.
- The distinction concerns what Christ has accomplished and what God has promised for Israel. His blood has been shed and the Mediator lives; the national conditions described in the following quotation are not yet fully realized.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Hebrews 7:22; 9:15** - Jesus guarantees the better testament; His death and mediation secure the promised inheritance.
- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** - The covenant names Israel and Judah and specifies the promised transformation and forgiveness.

- **Luke 22:20** - Jesus identifies His blood with the new testament, supplying its necessary sacrificial foundation.
- **Romans 11:25-29** - Israel’s present partial blindness is distinguished from the Deliverer’s coming work and God’s covenantal taking away of sins.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“More excellent”** uses a comparative form of *diaphoros*, surpassing or superior in excellence.
- **“Covenant”** and **“testament”** translate the same noun, *diatheke*. **“Mediator”** translates *mesites*, one intervening between parties.
- **“Was established”** represents a perfect passive verb describing legal establishment. **Has been enacted** is also a legitimate rendering. The word alone does not date the realization of every promised effect.

Theological Insights

- Christ’s present ministry and Israel’s future national restoration belong within God’s faithful purpose. The completed sacrifice guarantees the promised future.
- The covenant’s superiority concerns what God undertakes to accomplish. **Better promises** does not imply that His earlier word was untruthful.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not rename Israel and Judah as the present Body of Christ.
- It does not make Christ’s sacrifice ineffective until every national promise is fulfilled, or settle the entire covenant chronology by choosing between **established** and **enacted**.

Session Summary

The Logic At A Glance

- **The qualified Priest is present:** the Hebrews have the very Son whose permanent fitness chapter 7 established.
- **His sanctuary is greater:** He ministers in the true tabernacle established by the Lord.
- **His offering is sufficient:** He offered Himself once; His heavenly service rests upon that completed work.
- **His appointment has another basis:** Aaron’s hereditary earthly office does not govern the Priest appointed by God’s oath.

- **His ministry belongs with better promises:** the next passage identifies the covenant parties and the promised results.

Looking Toward The Covenant Promise

Hebrews 8:7-13 will explain why another covenant was needed and quote Jeremiah’s promise in full. The named houses of Israel and Judah, the law written within, knowledge of the Lord, and forgiveness give specific content to **better promises**.

One-sentence summary: The Hebrews have a living High Priest whose sufficient offering, heavenly sanctuary, and better covenant make His ministry superior to the earthly order.