

Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 8

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Introduction:

Chapter eight is a summary of the arguments Paul has put forward in the letter up until this point. As he says at its beginning, "The sum of what we have said is this" (Heb. 1:1), with "sum" translating the Greek word *kephalion*, meaning "head" (cf. *-cephalic*) or "main point". In this chapter Paul summarizes the basic points he has already made, contrasting the old priesthood and old covenant with the new priesthood and new covenant, reiterating Christ's new high priesthood – "the *main point* of what we have been saying so far" – in order to emphasize the shift occasioned thereby to the new covenant of the Spirit from the old one of the letter. Paul hereby is also "setting the table" for the expansion and application of these principles in chapters nine (where he will contrast the animal sacrifices of the Law with the blood of Christ which they represent) and in chapter ten (where he will demonstrate that by returning to animal sacrifice these believers are actually abandoning the only sacrifice which can save them, the spiritual death of Jesus Christ).

Chapter eight may be divided into four parts. The first paragraph (vv.1-2) reaffirms that Jesus Christ is the new, true High Priest, having replaced with His priesthood the old, Levitical one. The second paragraph (vv.3-6) demonstrates the logic of this replacement: rather than only being a symbolic priesthood based upon a Law which merely foreshadowed heavenly realities, our Lord has mediated a better covenant for us based upon better promises. The third paragraph (vv.7-12), proves that this change of covenants should not have come as a surprise to the Jerusalem believers because it was prophesied in scripture (and has now come to pass). And the fourth paragraph (v.13), a single, concluding sentence, really, draws the inescapable conclusion that therefore the old covenant of the letter which foreshadowed the Messiah's sacrifice has now been replaced by the new covenant of the Spirit whereby the Son of God has accomplished salvation and has been fully revealed as the one and only true High Priest – leaving the recipients of this letter with no excuse for their abandonment of the new to return to the old.

Chapter eight is therefore a summation, an important one for Paul to give here for purposes of persuading his readers. In any rhetorical situation, it is not a bad idea, after setting up the argument, to take a moment, before launching into the main application of what one is trying to accomplish, to recap the proofs one has just adduced. Because while these may be obvious to the speaker or writer, and while they may also have made an impression on the listeners or readers, nailing down said proofs as incontrovertible before moving on is often very helpful in compelling even reluctant readers and listeners to accept the possibly uncomfortable conclusions one is trying to get them to make. In chapters nine and ten, Paul is going to destroy all reasonable bases for any residual allegiance to the continuation of animal sacrifice (chapter nine) and confront the Jerusalem believers with their shortcomings and the deadly consequences for them of that unauthorized continuation (chapter ten). Next, Paul will encourage them and seek to guide them into better paths (chapters eleven through thirteen). Affirming the truths he has so laboriously established in the first seven chapters by summarizing them in a pithy and persuasive fashion here in chapter eight is thus an excellent persuasive strategy – one approved of and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

II. Translation

(1) The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, (2) a Minister of the holy things (or "holy ones") and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man.

(3) For every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices. Wherefore it was necessary for Him (lit., "this One", i.e., Jesus Christ) also to have something to offer. (4) Now if He were [ministering] on earth, He would not even be a priest, inasmuch as there are already those who present offerings according to the law [of Moses]. (5) These minister in [what is a] copy and a shadow of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as Moses was commanded as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain (i.e., Sinai)." (6) But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has now received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises.

(7) For if that first [covenant] had given no cause for complaint, an occasion for the second would not have been sought. (8) Indeed, in finding fault with [those under the first covenant, God] says, "Behold, the days are coming", says the Lord, "when I shall ratify a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah – (9) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not remain [faithful to] My covenant, and so I in turn disregarded them." says the Lord. (10) "For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. (11) They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (12) For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more." [Jeremiah 31:31-34]

(13) In mentioning a "New [Covenant]", He has rendered the Old one obsolete. And that

which is obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing.
Hebrews 8:1-13

III. Summary and Paraphrase

Jesus Christ is the genuine High Priest, the One who offered the efficacious sacrifice necessary for us to be saved. It is on that basis that we now have the New Covenant, because He fulfilled the Old one.

What all this means is that Jesus Christ is the genuine High Priest, the One who offered the efficacious sacrifice necessary for us to be saved. He did not enter the earthly temple in order to perform a mere ritual sacrifice, but the actual holy of holies in heaven above where His session at the Father's right hand confirms that sacrifice's acceptability. All priests must offer sacrifices, and so Jesus Christ did as well: His own blood (that is, His spiritual death for all sin on the cross). Had our Lord been an earthly priest, then indeed He would have offered the ritual sacrifices of the Law which merely foreshadowed that great atonement for sin He was destined to and has since made for us. Those earthly priests serve at a sanctuary which is a mere replica of the actual heavenly abode of the Father where our Lord has entered. After all, Moses was told to construct the earthly sanctuary after the heavenly pattern (Ex.25:40). But the sacrifice made by our Lord was infinitely better than the ritual ones made by earthly priests because it accomplished what they could not in taking away our sins. Jesus has therefore empowered for us a new and better covenant, a new and better conferring of God's blessings upon us, one which is based upon promises which are better: resurrection, eternal life and inheritance through faith in Him.

After all, God had already prophesied through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:34) that He was going to replace the Old Covenant with a New one, finding fault, one may say, with the Old one, since the people of Israel were never able to abide by it – and that, after all, was the point: the Old Covenant demonstrates our need for a Savior. Under the New Covenant, that passage informs us, God would write the truth, rather than on stone, on the very hearts of those who believed, and He would forgive all their sins. This is the New Covenant Jesus has validated with His own blood, having fulfilled the old one and all of its stipulations which we sinful human beings never could do. Mark my words carefully: by calling this covenant "New", hasn't the Father rendered the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, obsolete? Indeed He has, and everything that is obsolete and has been replaced in this way is on the verge of disappearing altogether. And rightly so, because its purpose has been fulfilled – Jesus has now come and died for the sins of the world. So why are you determined to turn back to what will soon have vanished entirely?

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Two

(1) The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality

that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, (2) a Minister of the holy things (or "holy ones") and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man.

Hebrews 8:1-2

The True High Priest: It should come as no surprise to Paul's readers at this point that Jesus Christ is our new, true High Priest. Paul has been hammering away at this important truth throughout the prior part of his epistle, e.g.:

For this reason (i.e., to accomplish salvation for us), it was essential for Him to be like His brothers in every respect, in order for Him to be a merciful and faithful [**High Priest**] (i.e., go-between trusted by both sides) in matters concerning God so that He could expiate (i.e., "cover" them symbolically as if with His blood so as to propitiate God's justice) the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2:17

So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, set your hearts on Him whom we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the **High Priest** [of that salvation], [even] Jesus.

Hebrews 3:1

(14) Since we have, therefore, a **Great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens, [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him]. (15) For we do not have a **High Priest** who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin.

Hebrews 4:14-15

(5) In the same way Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a **high priest**, [rather, God the Father appointed Him, even] the One who said to Him, "You are My Son; today I have begotten you", (6) just as He likewise says [of Him] in another verse, "You are a **priest forever** in the order of Melchizedek", (7) [where He is also speaking to Jesus our High Priest,] who in the days of His flesh[ly life] (i.e., while He was on earth prior to the resurrection), having offered up prayers and petitions with powerful shouting and with tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and having been hearkened to on account of His devoutness, (8) although being [God's one and only] Son, nevertheless He came to understand [firsthand in His humanity] from what He suffered [what] obedience to God [truly is] (i.e., what it takes for a human being to be fully obedient to God), (9) and, once He was perfected (i.e., had perfectly completed His course), He became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i.e., believers), (10) having been previously proclaimed by God [the Father Himself] **High Priest** in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:5-10

(19) And this hope is what [truly] "anchors" our lives, so to speak: it is certain; it is solid; it penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], (20) where our

vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a *high priest* forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
Hebrews 6:19-20

(13) After all, the One about whom these things are said, [Jesus Christ], came from a different tribe, one which never had a share in the altar. (14) For it is crystal clear that our Lord stemmed from the tribe of Judah, a tribe about which Moses never said anything about priests. (15) And this [need for a change of Law] is even more clear if *another Priest* arises who is fundamentally similar to Melchizedek (i.e., in the two main points of comparison: eternity and superiority to Abraham), (16) namely, One who becomes [*Priest*] not on the basis of the Law's commandment, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life [which brings with it an unchanging priesthood]. (17) For [the Father] testifies that "You are a [*High Priest*] forever according to the order of Melchizedek".
Hebrews 7:13-17

(20) And indeed this has not occurred without an oath! For while [the Levites] became priests without [God's] oath, [Jesus Christ] became *Priest* through the oath of the One who said to Him, (21) "The Lord has sworn, and will not change His mind: 'You are a [*High Priest*] forever according to the order of Melchizedek' ".
Hebrews 7:20-21

This is just the sort of *High Priest* we needed, holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and having ascended higher than the heavens [into God's presence].
Hebrews 7:26

This fact of our Lord Jesus Christ's new, true high priesthood is a critical point for Paul's readers to understand, digest, *and accept* – because by doing so they will have to admit that the earthly sanctuary worship at the temple has been superseded and that the Law has been rendered obsolete.

For when there is a change of priesthood, of necessity there must also be a *change of law*.
Hebrews 7:12

(18) Herein we have then a *revoking of the prior commandment* (i.e., the Law) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of a better hope through which we [actually do] draw near to God.
Hebrews 7:18-19

In mentioning a "New [Covenant]", He has rendered the Old one *obsolete*. And that which is *obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing*.
Hebrews 8:13

[But] "Then", He has added, "Behold, I have arrived to do your will". [God the Father] is

[thereby] taking away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second one.
Hebrews 10:5-10

And this replacement of the Law of the letter with the Law of the Spirit must be the case. Other priests served for only a few years. Our High Priest will serve forever. Other priests died as all naturally born human beings do. Our High Priest has been appointed "on the basis of an indestructible life" (Heb.7:16). Other priests received their positions by virtue of their descent from Levi. Our High Priest was appointed by God directly and confirmed in that position by an oath from the Father Himself. Other priests offered animals in sacrifice whose blood symbolized the cross to come. Our High Priest offered Himself to actually die for the sins of the world. In short, there is absolutely no comparison between our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and those who went before. His priesthood is superior in every qualitative and quantitative way. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the Levitical priesthood along with the Law upon which it was based merely served to illustrate and foreshadow the true High Priest and His New Covenant which would actually provide salvation and life eternal for all those willing to accept Him and His sacrifice.

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into *a kingdom and priests* to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!"
Revelation 5:9-10 (cf. 1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 20:6)

All that we have and all that we anticipate as believers is based upon our Lord Jesus Christ's priestly sacrifice for us on the cross. And as a result of that sacrifice, His spiritual death on our behalf, we now share in all that He has won, having been made priests with Him in His new high, royal priesthood forever.

Minister of the Holy Things: Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is presently ministering on our behalf in "the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man" (Heb.8:2).

(1b) . . . we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, (2) a Minister of *the holy things* (or "holy ones") and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man.
Hebrews 8:1b-2

What are these "holy things" in the Father's presence of which our Lord is presently *the* Minister?

"And see to it that you make [all these holy things] according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."
Exodus 25:40 NKJV

While the earthly tabernacle/temple was made by human beings, gifted and inspired by God though they were (Ex.31:1-11), all of the items within the tabernacle/temple and the structures themselves are mere models, made "according to the pattern shown to you" (Heb.8:5; cf.

Ex.25:40), designed to represent the heavenly realities.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.

Hebrews 12:22 NKJV

And I looked and heard, as it were, the voice of many angels around the throne and [around] the [living] creatures and [around] the [twenty-four] elders, and their number was myriads upon myriads and thousands upon thousands.

Revelation 5:11

As these and many other passages make clear (e.g., 1Ki.22:19; Dan.7:10; Rev.7:11; 8:2; 14:15; 14:17; 15:6; 16:1), there are innumerable holy angels available in heaven above to carry out whatever duties may be desired by God, duties which the care of the earthly tabernacle/temple and its accouterment by the Levites only represented – just as the holy items themselves are merely models of the realities above (Ex.25:9; 25:40; 26:30; Num.8:4; Acts 7:44; Heb.8:5). That being the case, we may well ask ourselves "what are these 'holy things' of which our Lord is presently 'High Priest and Minister' before the Father in heaven above?" Since the earthly models are not present in the third heaven (see below), and since there are innumerable elect angels on call to carry out any subordinate priestly functions the Father should require there above, it stands to reason that the "holy things" are not the heavenly equivalents of the furniture in the earthly tabernacle temple. So what are they?

In Hebrews 8:2, we have translated the Greek phrase *tōn hagiōn* (τῶν ἁγίων) in the past as "holy things", to draw a clear distinction with the rendering of nearly all English versions: "sanctuary" or "holy place(s)". But the genitive plural in all Greek declensions is common, meaning that "holy *people*", or "holy ones", namely, "the saints" or believers presently here on earth, is an equally defensible interpretation.¹ Given that no particular "ministry" on our Lord's part is now necessary in the heavenly sanctuary above – for His "once and for all" sacrifice has already accomplished the opening up of heaven and of salvation for us who believe in Him (Heb.7:27; 9:12; 10:10) – we are within our rights to understand this phrase as referring *to ourselves*, the Church of Jesus Christ. And we know of a certainty that, indeed, from His august position in session with the Father above, our dear Savior *is* ministering to us and for us, interceding on our behalf with the Father in His capacity as High Priest, having already completely fulfilled all of the symbolism of the tabernacle/temple through His incarnation, perfect life, and efficacious sacrifice on our behalf (Matt.5:17-18; Rom.10:4; cf. Heb.2:10; 10:14; 12:2).² That present ministry of intercession is the "ministry" our High Priest is currently engaged in. Not symbolic or ritualistic, but real and present and blessed . . . for us.

¹ The adjective "holy" (ἅγιος) does refer to the "Church militant" elsewhere in (Heb.3:1; 6:10; 13:24; cf. Heb.12:23)

² See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.o.2.6, "Access and Intercession"; and Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter Seven: section IV, Verses Twenty Two through Twenty Five, under "Intercession".

Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] **at the right hand of God**, who is also **making petitions on our behalf**.

Romans 8:34

(5) For as God is One, so there is [only] **One Mediator** between God and Man, Christ Jesus in His humanity, (6a) who gave Himself as a ransom for all [mankind] . . .

1st Timothy 2:5-6a

For this reason (i.e., being our eternal High Priest) [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever **making intercession** for them.

Hebrews 7:25

My children, I am writing these things to you so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have **an Advocate** to [approach] the Father [on our behalf], Jesus Christ the righteous.

1st John 2:1

This is the essential meaning and function of what a "priest" is, biblically speaking, namely, someone who acts as a go-between, a mediator between God the Father and sinful mankind (in the language of the KJV, a "daysman": Job 9:33-34). The Father dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim.6:16), but Jesus Christ has entered into the presence of the Father, and from that heavenly seat He ministers for us as our High Priest, petitioning the Father on our behalf. He was and is the only One who could and can do so, since only He could and did present the perfect sacrifice before the Father: His own blood (i.e., His spiritual death in propitiating the justice of God by paying the entire penalty for all of our sins).³

Levitical priests on earth "minister" in intercession through ritual; our Lord performed the actual sacrifice through which we have God's righteousness in spite of sin, since He died to pay for them all (Rom.3:24; 3:28; 5:1; 5:9; 8:30; Gal.2:16-17; 3:24; Tit.3:7). And He is presently "ministering" on our behalf not via ritual on earth but in actual petition of the Father on our behalf in heaven above, a ministry based **not** on animal sacrifice which merely foreshadowed His work on the cross, but on His actual and efficacious spiritual death on our behalf, now once and for all completed (Heb.7:27; 9:12; 10:10), that true sacrifice whereby He redeemed us from sin and death (1Cor.6:19-20; 7:23; Gal.3:13; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 1Pet.1:18-19; Rev.5:9-10).

We have covered this comparison of heavenly realities versus earthly representations before, but a quick recap of the most germane points will be helpful here (readers are encouraged to review

³ See BB 4A: Christology, sections II.4, "The Blood of Christ"; II.5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ"; and II.6, "Propitiation".

the fuller treatment in CT 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude").⁴

1) The Brazen Altar⁵: The altar of sacrifice standing before the tabernacle/temple is the one earthly article *not* represented in the third heaven – and for good reason. The earthly altar of bronze represented the cross (1Cor.5:7; Heb.9:11-14; 1Pet.1:19), and the animal sacrifices upon said altar represented our Lord's sacrifice for us, His spiritual death whereby He paid for all of our sins and opened up the path of redemption – forgiveness and life eternal – through faith in Him and what He did for us.

For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.
1st Corinthians 5:7b NKJV

(18) Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.
1st Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

Thus there is no need of any brazen altar in the third heaven. Christ's sacrifice, the cross and His victory thereupon, has already been accomplished . . . here on earth.

2) The Heavenly Sea⁶: The earthly laver of bronze which was positioned next to the brazen altar served for the purpose of washing, namely, the ritual cleansing of those serving at the tabernacle/temple. That literal washing represented the forgiveness or "washing away" of sins, a very common feature of many rituals in the Law and one also given to John to perform as a prelude to the coming of the Messiah (e.g., Matt.3:11; cf. Acts 22:16).

(9) This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. (10) They are only a matter of food and drink and *various ceremonial washings* – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.
Hebrews 9:9-10 NIV

No one and nothing in the third heaven requires cleansing. Only here on earth do we find ourselves in a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, requiring even of those who have "had a bath" to continue to "wash their feet" (Jn.13:1-17).

So while there is also a sea in the third heaven, its function is different. Instead of being a reflecting pool into which believers looked as they participated in cleansing rituals, seeing

⁴ See CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple".

⁵ See CT 2B, section 1.b, "The Brazen Altar".

⁶ See CT 2B, section 1.c, "The Laver".

themselves "as they were", so to speak, sinful human beings in need of said cleansing against the background of the sky above, the awesome heavens of God which stand between Him and us (Ex.38:8; cf. Jas.1:23-25), the present heavenly sea provides a means for those above to see what is going on upon the earth at present (cf. Rev.15:2), so that all in heaven above, now clean and in no further need of repentance or cleansing, may observe God's righteous acts as He renders judgment on the earth below on behalf of those who belong to Him.

Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.
Revelation 4:6a NIV

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying . . .
Revelation 15:2-3a

3) The Table⁷: The table of "shewbread" (KJV), standing in the "holy place" and on which "the bread of the presence" was continuously displayed is not said to be present in the heavenly temple. But then there is now no need for a humanly constructed table of the bread of the presence since the Son is seated in the Father's presence. Jesus is the "Bread of Life" Himself (Jn.6:35; 6:48). The table with the bread represented Him and His human body given up for us. That is why we eat bread during communion as a symbol of our faith in Him, who He is, the God-man, the Word of God incarnate. Because of our relationship with Him, we will "never hunger or thirst again", physically or spiritually (Rev.7:15-16; cf. Ps.23:1-3).

4) The Seven Lamps⁸:

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God (i.e., the Holy Spirit; cf. Is.11:2; Zech.3:9; Rev.1:4; 3:1).
Revelation 4:5b

There is no need of any humanly constructed physical menorah to provide light in the Father's throne room. As this verse demonstrates, that is done by the Holy Spirit Himself (analogous to the provision of light to the world by the Father and the Son themselves in New Jerusalem: Rev.21:23-24; 22:5). The earthly menorah represented Jesus Christ, the Light of the world (Jn.8:12; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 9:5; 12:46; Eph.5:8-15; 1Jn.1:5-7; 2:8-10); and also the Holy Spirit who empowered Him (Is.11:2; 61:1; Matt.3:16; Lk.4:18; Jn.3:34), who empowers us all (Zech.4:6), and who provides the power for all spiritual enlightenment (Jn.16:12-15; 1Cor.2:10-

⁷ See CT 2B, section 2.a, "The Golden Table"; and SR 1, section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle", under "The Bread".

⁸ See CT 2B, section 2.b, "The Golden Lampstand"; and SR 1, section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle", under "The Light".

16; 2Cor.3:17-18).

(4b) Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, (5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:4b-5

5) The Heavenly Altar of Incense⁹: This is the only altar in the third heaven, and it serves a purpose similar to that merely represented by the altar of incense standing in the holy place of the tabernacle/temple, directly in front of the veil which separated that space from the holy of holies. Both altars are used to burn incense which is a memorial before the Father, with both bringing to remembrance Christ's work on the cross in paying the fiery price to save us. It is also a vivid demonstration of the acceptability of Jesus sacrifice: to the Father, the burning of the incense produces a "sweet, savory aroma", indicative of propitiation, the satisfaction of His justice through the sacrifice of His Son.¹⁰

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Ephesians 5:2 NKJV

Our prayers are acceptable to the Father *because* they are offered in the Name of His dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

(3) And another angel with a golden censer came and stood by the altar, and much incense was given to him so that he might offer it *for the prayers of the saints* on the golden altar in front of the throne. (4) And smoke from the incense went up from the hand of the angel before God *for the prayers of the saints*. (5) Then the angel took the incense holder and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Revelation 8:3-5 NIV (cf. Rev.5:8)

6) The Throne of God and the Ark:

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. (4) And there was a rainbow around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden

⁹ See CT 2B, section 2.c, "The Golden Altar of Incense"; and SR 1, section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle", under "The Aroma".

¹⁰ See BB 4A: Christology, section II.6, "Propitiation".

crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back.

Revelation 4:2-6

And the temple of God which is in heaven above opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there occurred flashes of lightning and thunderous voices and an earthquake, and large hail [fell].

Revelation 11:19

While perhaps not obvious at first glance, the "ark" in the second passage above is, in effect, the same as the "throne" in the first passage. The ark of the covenant in the tabernacle temple was a symbolic representation of God's throne. "There I will meet with you" (Ex.25:22), the Lord had told Moses, and the golden cherubs which overlooked the mercy-seat on top of the ark are direct representations of the actual cherubs guarding the Father's throne in the first passage above. In both passages here, we witness the emanations of lightning and thunderous voices. The appearance of the ark described as such (rather than as a throne) in the second passage is significant. For in addition to being the seat upon which God resides, the ark is also constructed in the form of a battle-chariot (and sometimes so described: 1Chron.28:18; cf. Dan.7:9).

And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne.

Ezekiel 10:1 NKJV

This quick reprise of the heavenly versus the earthly accouterment of the respective temples should be sufficient to demonstrate that there is no further need of any earthly priests to service the archetypes in heaven above, and that there is likewise no need for our glorified Lord to do so. The "holy things" to which Jesus is said in our passage to presently Minister *are us*.

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God *for us*.

Hebrews 9:24 NKJV

The True Tabernacle:

"According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."

Exodus 25:9 NKJV

"And see to it that you make [all these holy things] according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."

Exodus 25:40 NKJV

"And you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain."

Exodus 26:30 NKJV

1) The Court¹¹: As with the furniture and paraphernalia of the tabernacle/temple, so with the enclosure itself, Moses was instructed to make it and set it up "according to the pattern" he was shown. Therefore the tabernacle (and later temple) is only a model of the heavenly realities, designed to teach us about the things above and to symbolize the plan of God in Jesus Christ and our place in it.¹² The inner court represented the sanctified community of believers on earth, namely, those who had entered through the gate of salvation (i.e., Jesus Christ: Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Ps.118:19-27; Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25) opened up by His victory on the cross (Matt.27:51; Eph.2:14-18; 4:7-10; Col.2:13-15; Heb.9:24; 10:19-20), accepting His sacrifice which confronted them at the point of entry in the form of the brazen altar (a type of the cross). The enclosure or "barrier" of the court which separates unsaved mankind from those who have been sanctified by God represents the "enmity" of God toward sin which is only removed in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:11-22), who is the only gate or door into the place of fellowship with God while we are still on earth. Since they are illustrations which speak of our earthly experience (acceptance of Christ and entrance into the court of fellowship with God on earth, or rejection of Christ and exclusion from this same court), the outer court along with its physical enclosure are not represented in the heavenly temple.

2) The Tabernacle Itself and the First Veil: The outer curtain of the tabernacle, with its four layers, each with its own symbolic importance¹³, represented the sky above and the universe beyond it, barriers which mortal man cannot penetrate apart from God, thus effectively demonstrating the impossible distance between man and God from the standpoint of human effort (and it was for that reason, along with the inner veil, embroidered with representations of cherubim that angelic class which guards the sanctity of God: Ex.26:1; Ex.26:31).¹⁴

(19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] ***holy of holies*** by the blood of Jesus, (20) an ***entryway*** through the [heavenly] ***veil*** [of separation] which is new (lit., "newly slain") and alive and which He has

¹¹ See CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple", section 1.a, "The (Inner) Court".

¹² For a more detailed treatment, see CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple"; and also SR 1, section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

¹³ See CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple", section 1.d, "The tabernacle and the first curtain".

¹⁴ See SR 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall, section III.i, "Cherubs".

consecrated for us, that is, [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Heb.10:10; 10:18) . . .
Hebrews 10:19-20

Only Levitical priests could enter the earthly tabernacle itself. But we believer-priests have confidence, as the passage above declares, that Jesus Christ has opened up the entryway into the heavenly holy of holies, not by animal sacrifice but by through "His own "blood", His spiritual death for us which took away all of our sins.

(13) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (14) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

(7) Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. (8) All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listened to them. (9) I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."

John 10:7-9 NIV

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."
John 14:6

Now that our High Priest has opened up the way into the heavenly holy of holies above for us, we believers – believer-priests as all of us now are – are confident of likewise entering into the presence of the Father in the third heaven when our course down here on earth is run.

(1) For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens (i.e., the resurrection body). (2) For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. (3) And [even] if we do put off this present one, at any rate, *we* (i.e., our spirits) **will not be found naked** (i.e., "body-less"; for we will enjoy an interim body in the meantime: cf. Lk.16:19-31).

2nd Corinthians 5:1-3

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And *a white robe* was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

Revelation 6:9-11

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and

before the Lamb, *clothed in white robes* and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Revelation 7:9-10

3) The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies¹⁵: While the other priests entered the holy place for the servicing of the menorah (representing Jesus Christ, the "Light of the World": Jn.8:12; 9:5), of the table of the bread of presence (representing Jesus Christ, the "Bread of Life": Jn.6:35; 6:48), and of the altar of incense (representing Jesus Christ, the savory incense that propitiates the Father: Eph.5:2), and as such symbolized believers in interim bodies in heaven today, only the high priest entered the holy of holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement, to make atonement by blood on the mercy seat above the ark "because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been" (Lev.16:16 NIV). As we have seen in the past, this action foreshadowed and represented our Lord's perfect sacrifice on the cross, "the blood of Christ", being accepted by the Father, the victory of victories through which we are saved when we appropriate this redemption through faith (Eph.2:8-9; cf. Eph.1:7; Col.1:14).¹⁶ Jesus Christ is, therefore, our true, new High Priest, the One who entered into the actual holy of holies above (as opposed to the mere earthly copy: Heb.8:5), in order to appear before the Father on our behalf (Heb.9:24; cf. Heb.6:20), receiving the following accolade due Him for His mission perfectly accomplished, the so great salvation upon which the entire Plan of God is based:

But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet (Ps.110:1)"?

Hebrews 1:13

What needs to be understood at this point is that the "true tabernacle" in heaven (Heb.8:2; 8:5), the one "not made by human hands" (Heb.9:11; 9:24), while the *actual* place of God the Father at present, is yet itself still not His permanent and eternal residence:

(2) Then I, John, saw the holy city, *New Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, *the tabernacle* of God is with men, and He will dwell [literally "tent/tabernacle"] with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Revelation 21:2-3 NKJV

It is *New Jerusalem* which is the final, permanent, eternal habitation of the Father, the Son, the

¹⁵ See CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple", section 2, "The Holy Place"; and section 3, "The Holy of Holies".

¹⁶ See CT 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, under Revelation 4:2-11, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple", section 3.a, "The Mercy Seat"; and BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

Spirit, the Church, and the entire, complete Family of God (Eph.3:14-15). It was only following the devil's rebellion that the Father voluntarily quit the earth, the original place of fellowship between God and His angels, self-sequestering Himself in the third heaven until the conflict created by Satan's revolt has fully run its course, "till He has brought justice through to victory" (Matt.12:20 NKJV), through the gift and sacrifice of His own dear Son.¹⁷ Just as the ark is at one both a representation of God's throne *and* His battle chariot (see part 6 under "Minister of the Holy Things" above), so also the third heaven is the Father's present "battle headquarters" where He is temporarily residing, but destined to return to the new heavens and the new earth once the conflict begun by Satan's revolt has been completely resolved in victory, with every trace of sin and evil expunged from His creation, once our Lord Jesus Christ has placed His feet upon the neck of all of His enemies.

(23) But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (24) Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. (25) For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27) For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. (28) When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.
1st Corinthians 15:23-28 NIV

Verses Three through Six

(3) For every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices. Wherefore it was necessary for Him (lit., "this One", i.e., Jesus Christ) also to have something to offer. (4) Now if He were [ministering] on earth, He would not even be a priest, inasmuch as there are already those who present offerings according to the law [of Moses]. (5) These minister in [what is a] copy and a shadow of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as Moses was commanded as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain (i.e., Sinai)." (6) But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has now received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises.
Hebrews 8:3-6

The Old Priesthood:

Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.
Genesis 3:21 NKJV

Along with the curse upon the serpent and the prophecy that the Seed of the woman who, though

¹⁷ These matters are fully discussed in the five part Satanic Rebellion series.

"crushed" in regard to His heel (i.e., the cross), would "crush" the head of Satan's seed (predicting our Lord's victory at the cross during the first advent and subsequent victory over the devil and his antichrist at Armageddon at the second advent: Gen.3:15), the verse above is a clear indication of the *means* God the Father ordained for the redemption of now fallen mankind: a blood sacrifice which would wash away our sins and make us acceptable to His holiness once more. These passages taken together are often referred to as the *protoevangelium* or "first gospel", because together they constitute the first statement of the basis of salvation (Christ's victory on the cross empowering His victory at His return), along with the means of that salvation for individual believers: accepting these skins from God (a picture of faith), from animals slaughtered on our behalf (a picture of Christ's sacrifice for us: the "blood of Christ").

Directly after their expulsion from Eden, when there was no one else to act as a go-between, the Lord Himself played that part in giving Adam and Eve this very vivid picture of the basis and the means by which He was going to reconcile them to Himself, reconciling them in fact then and there on account of their faith (accepting the God-given alternative to the self-effort 'fig' leaves they had thought to use to hide their guilt), doing so on the basis of "credit", so to speak, until such time as Jesus Christ had actually paid for the sins of the world.

(25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26

Thereafter, however, God chose to deal with humanity through intermediaries, specially appointed individuals who would represent the rest of mankind to Him, not because of any innate holiness on their part (for we all have sin natures after the fall, our dear Savior being the sole exception through the virgin birth and maintained through His sinless life), but in order to symbolize the Person and the work of Jesus Christ. All legitimate priestly function ever since the *protoevangelium* has had this representation as its prime goal, reaching its peak of ritual and divinely authorized symbolism in the Levitical priesthood, and particularly in the duties of the high priest, whose activities on the Day of Atonement most clearly foreshadow our Lord's victory on the cross and subsequent resurrection, ascension, session and glorification.

~ No need now for any animal sacrifice: our new, true High Priest has taken away all sin by covering it with His own precious blood, that is, His spiritual death on the cross (Tit.2:14).

~ No need now for a selection process on the death of the old high priest: our new, true High Priest has been resurrected and is no longer subject to death (Rom.6:9).

~ No need now for the Law which established the Levitical priesthood: our new, true High Priest was appointed directly by the Father completely apart from the regulations of the Law in a new and unique way, confirmed by the oath of God Himself (Heb.6:16-17; 7:20-21; 7:28).

The final point above really is the main point to which Paul is directing his readers' attention in this chapter. If Jesus really is the new, true High Priest, appointed and confirmed by the Father Himself, having sacrificed Himself so as to actually take away our sins (rather than merely act this out symbolically through animal sacrifice), occupying that position in the true holy of holies above forevermore, then what need is there of the earthly regime of the Law which simply served to represent these far greater realities now come to pass? And even more to the point, how would continuing in these prior rituals not take away from our focus on and understanding of the greater truths they were meant for a time to represent? How would such behavior, not, in fact, be an affront to God by suggesting if ever so subtly that our new, true High Priest was somehow not legitimate and His sacrifice for us somehow insufficient? Before answering these questions – which he will do in no uncertain terms in the next two chapters – Paul will first attempt to demonstrate the most important positive conclusions to be drawn from the reality of having a new, true High Priest who has fulfilled the original purpose of the Law.

But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has now received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises.
Hebrews 8:6

The Better Covenant: Our new, true High Priest is the One responsible for providing us with this new, better covenant under which we believers today are blessed to be able to operate: the New Testament of the Spirit which has replaced the old covenant of the letter. He accomplished this by means of the greatest sacrifice ever made – which is why our Lord called it "the new covenant/testament [validated] *by my blood*" (Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:24). This blood, the "blood of Christ", is, as we have seen many times in the past, not literal blood (for our Lord gave up His spirit while His blood was still in His body: Jn.19:33-35; cf. 1Jn.5:6-8). The "blood of Christ" is how scripture describes our Lord's work on the cross, His spiritual death for us in the darkness whereby He paid for all of our sins, for the sins of the entire world. It was natural for the Bible to describe His suffering and dying for our sins as "blood", because the animal sacrifices of scripture are all meant to represent this sacrifice of sacrifices, portraying through the violent death and immolation of animal sacrifices what it cost our Lord to pay for our sins. The sacrificing of said animals by the Levitical priests – the rites they were authorized to carry out – simply represented what our Lord would do in sacrificing Himself, giving those who witnessed those rituals some very small idea of how high the price of salvation would be once the Sacrifice Himself came into the world to save us. For "every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices" and so "it was necessary for Him" (Jesus Christ) also to have something to offer" (Heb.8:3). And He offered *Himself* to save us.

(13) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, (14) how much more shall *the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit *offered Himself* without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
Hebrews 9:13-14 NKJV

Paul does not go into the details of Christ's so great sacrifice on the cross at this time. That he

will do in the two chapters following when he contrasts that Sacrifice with the mere symbolic representations of the Law in order to demonstrate the folly, the wrongness, and the blasphemy of continuing to perform them now that "Christ our Passover has [already] been sacrificed for us" (1Cor.5:7). Instead, as mentioned above, Paul will "lead" with the great benefits of that sacrifice, the wonderful, powerful, dynamic "new covenant" we are blessed to have and blessed to be able to enjoy in place of the highly-ritualized, restrictive and laborious old one.

(18) Herein we have then a *revoking of the prior commandment* (i.e., the Law: the Old Covenant) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of a *better hope* through which we [actually do] draw near to God.

Hebrews 7:18-19

We have discussed before Paul's use of the "better" theme throughout this epistle. Everything about belonging to Jesus Christ, everything about having the Holy Spirit, everything about the New Covenant is "better" in every way than what it replaced. To have the Messiah is so much better than to merely anticipate His coming. To have the Holy Spirit permanently dwelling in us is so much better than only to have Him "with" us (Jn.14:17). To actually have our sins cleansed away and paid for at the cross is so much better than the admittedly great blessing of the expectation of their future propitiation (Rom.3:23-25), something which the rites of the Law could symbolize but not effect. In short, the reality of what we now possess as believers in the resurrected Messiah, ascended and glorified for His great victory over sin which completely fulfilled the requirements of the Law is better to an inestimable degree than the previous situation believers found themselves in before the cross – which makes behaving as if the cross never happened all the more inexcusable. That is the gross error which Paul is trying to correct with this letter, the same gross error that anyone today involved in any legalistic organization or legalistic behavior is guilty of as well.

~ Jesus Christ is superior to angels and has obtained a much more glorious and *better Name* than them all through His victory at the cross (Heb.1:4) – but many were and are putting angels and "knowledge" related to them above Him.

~ Jesus Christ has opened up for us a *better hope* of actual resurrection having been resurrected Himself as our forerunner, a hope that allows us in this life to draw closer to God than was ever the case in the past (Heb.7:19) – but many were and are focusing on rituals which put a veil over that blessed reality.

~ Jesus Christ was appointed High Priest by the Father Himself and as a result is the guarantor of a *better covenant* (Heb.7:22) – but many were and are behaving as if the Old Covenant were still in force and the New Covenant did not even exist.

~ Jesus Christ provided actual cleansing of all of our sins through His blood, His spiritual death for us on the cross, a *better sacrifice* than any of the merely symbolic sacrifices of the Law (Heb.9:23) – but many were and are essentially ignoring that great sacrifice in their continuation of various and sundry sacrifices, rituals and other legalistic practices under the Law of Moses.

~ Jesus Christ has opened for us who believe in Him the great opportunity to have possessions which are **better and more enduring** than any possible worldly gains (Heb.10:34) – but many were and are comporting themselves as if this world was the only one and compromising everything for it and the things of it.

~ Jesus Christ was always the truth behind all of the sacrifices of the Old Testament and behind every symbolic aspect of the Mosaic Law, so that His once and for all sacrifice for us on the cross speaks louder, more clearly, and gives an incomparably **better message** – the good news, the gospel itself – than all of the prior sacrifices, ritual and rites which only looked forward to that glorious act of justification (Heb.12:24; cf. Rom.15:18) – but many were and are demonstrating by their actions that for them the shadows of the past are not just on a par with the cross but actually superior to it.

We who believe care little for this world or for its opinions, even if it makes us pariahs, because we are looking forward to a "better" world to come (Heb.11:16). We are resolved to suffer whatever we must in anticipation of life eternal which is so much "better" than what we see now (Heb.11:35). We understand that the here and now is of little import because we will be blessed with perfect bodies in New Jerusalem with the entire resurrected Church of Jesus Christ, infinitely "better" than any worldly affiliation or association (Heb.11:40). In short, we who have put our hope in Jesus Christ are looking longingly forward to "better things" than the things we see and hear and feel at present – or at least we should be. That was Paul's hope for those he was ministering to. That is certainly my hope too and the hope of any minister of Jesus Christ worth his salt for any and all ministered to.

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of **better things** in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.
Hebrews 6:9 NIV

In our present context, what Paul describes as "better" is the New Covenant, which is so on account of its being "established on **better promises**".

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on **better promises**.
Hebrews 8:6 NIV

We have already discussed above and in the past the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old (and will go into more detail in comparing the two in the next section below). At this juncture, we need to consider just what these "promises" are to which Paul refers in our context verse. This is especially important because, as Paul states, it is the "better promises" which support the New Covenant making it "better" in every way to the Law.

First, a covenant or testament **is** a promise, an agreement whereby both parties are bound to accede to the terms it contains. Typically, formal agreements have multiple parts constituting the

terms of the covenant or testament. In a will, the testator grants certain property or rights to the beneficiary, and the will comes into force at the testator's death.

(16) In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, (17) because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. (18) This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.

Hebrews 9:16-18 NIV

Scripture deliberately uses this analogy to call attention to the event which validated the New Testament/Covenant, the spiritual death of Christ on our behalf, the foundation of the entire plan of God which the Old Covenant/Testament could only illustrate but could never empower. Herein we see the main difference between the two: the old one only looked forward to the realities to come; the new one actually put them into place. This is the fundamental reason why the promises of the New Testament are better than those given under the Old Covenant – because they have been accomplished in principle through the cross. Believers before and after the cross found and find ourselves in the world with the fulfillment of the great promises of scripture having to do with eternity not yet visible then or now. But in the past these future glories were not yet won, even though anticipated; today, they are a reality, even though at present we await their fulfillment.

(24) For it is in this hope [of the resurrection of our bodies] that we have been saved. Now a hope that is visible is not [really] a hope. For why should someone wait expectantly for what his eyes can see? (25) But we have set our hope on what cannot be seen, and so are patiently awaiting its fulfillment.

Romans 8:24-25

Since we are assured in our context that the New Covenant is superior to the Old precisely because it is founded upon "better promises", it is fair to ask specifically just what those "promises" are.

Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
Joshua 21:45 NIV

This statement, coming at the end of the book of Joshua, the book which relates the entrance of the people of Israel into the land of Canaan and their reception of their inheritance therein, affirms that God's promises to the Jewish people were all fulfilled. The exodus generation had failed to trust God, leaving it to their children to enter into the promised land. As we have noted in the past, the experience of the exodus generation and their progeny is deliberately paradigmatic of the experience that awaits the final generation of the Church Age. Like them, we too will be delivered through a "sea of trouble" (Zech.10:11), escaping the ultimate Pharaoh, whether by martyrdom or resurrection, so as to enter into the promises which God has made to us and to all who believe in Jesus Christ, to His entire assembly, the Church.

(39) These [great believers of the past] were all commended for their faith, yet none of

them [has yet] received what had been promised, (40) since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (i.e., resurrected and given their rewards).

Hebrews 11:39-40 NIV

But while the words "promise(s)" and "promised" exist in Greek as special and specific items of vocabulary, in biblical Hebrew they do not. What Joshua 21:45 says literally is "not one *word* of every good *word* which the Lord God spoke to the house of Israel fell: every one came to pass".¹⁸ If God says something, it is true by definition. If He says something will happen, if He says that He will do something, then do He will. Formal promises, oaths and covenants are given to us for our benefit for the purpose of solidifying our faith – but God's Word is perfectly and absolutely solid, completely apart from us and independent of our level of belief.

"(10) As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, (11) so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."
Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV

In one sense, then, everything God has told us about the future is a promise. And since God could do nothing for us absent the removal of the barrier of sin which separated mankind from Him as a result of the fall (Eph.2:14-16; cf. Gen.3:22-24), the premier promise, indeed, the basis for all other promises, is the promise of the Gift of Jesus Christ.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" *in Christ*. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

2nd Corinthians 1:20 NIV

(16) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. (17) What I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify *the promise*.

Galatians 3:16-17 NASB20

The last passage above affirms that Jesus Christ is the ultimate promise, because only through Him would or could any of God's gracious promises to mankind in general and to Israel in particular be fulfilled – because Christ had to pay the entire penalty for sin in order for God to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom.3:26 NKJV).

Theirs (i.e., "the people of Israel") is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship *and the promises*.

Romans 9:4b NIV

¹⁸ I.e., the Hebrew root *dhabhar* (דָּבַר) both for the nouns "word" and for the verb "spoke".

(8) For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that *the promises* made to the patriarchs might be confirmed (9) and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Romans 15:8-9a NIV

Just as in every other aspect of the Law, as we have seen, earthly models represent greater heavenly realities, so also in the case of the promises to Israel. Entering into the land of Canaan, for example, and into a God-given inheritance was a wonderful and literal fulfillment of God's promises to that effect, but our eternal inheritance in New Jerusalem will be infinitely and eternally better – and was something not lost on or unknown to even the special recipient of God's promised Seed (Gal.3:16-17).

(8) By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (9) By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10 NIV

(15) If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:15-16 NIV

Promises look forward, not backward, and even in the case of those which were materially fulfilled in Israel's history, these great believers likewise looked forward to the complete fulfillment of the underlying promise(s) based upon the coming of the Messiah, His victory over sin and death, and all of the glories to come as a result in our eternal future.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – *in the hope of eternal life*, which God, who does not lie, *promised* before the beginning of time.

Titus 1:1-2 NIV

Since being cast out of the garden of Eden and being made subject to physical death and the condemnation which necessarily follows (Heb.9:27), our common mortality is the prime concern of humanity after the fall. Relieving us of that horrendous future and substituting for it forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life in New Jerusalem with God forever is the ultimate set of promises and the true focus of all of God's promises to us. And since that blessed eternal future is completely dependent upon Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross, all of God's promises are centered upon our dear Lord and Savior (2Cor.1:20).

All the prior promises made to Israel were part and parcel of her special status, a status which cannot be separated from the Messiah who would come to confirm, validate and empower them.

Who are Israelites, whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the lawgiving, and the service, and *the promises*.
Romans 9:4 YLT

And I say Jesus Christ to have become a ministrant of circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm *the promises* to the fathers.
Romans 15:8 YLT

And it is through our union with Jesus Christ, being made one with Him through faith in His precious person and His work for us on the cross, that we gentiles enter into the promises of God, all of which are centered on, dependent on, and fulfilled in Him.

That ye were at that time apart from Christ, having been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of *the promise*, having no hope, and without God, in the world.
Ephesians 2:12 YLT

That the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of *His promise* in the Christ, through the good news.
Ephesians 3:6 YLT

The great advantage of the new set of promises over the old is precisely the same as the advantage of the New Covenant over the Old, the New one being superior precisely because of these "better promises": they are better as it is better because they and it are *real* and *spiritual* and no longer merely symbolic and material; they have been validated by Christ's efficacious sacrifice and are no longer dependent upon some future payment of the necessary price (Rom.3:21-26).

~ The Law promised long life (Ex.20:12; Deut.4:40; 5:16; 11:9; 25:15), but the good news of the New Covenant is that we now *have* life eternal in Jesus Christ, destined to blossom forth in our coming resurrection (Jn.3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 17:3; Acts 13:23; 13:32; 26:6-7; Rom.2:7; Gal.6:8; 1Tim.1:16; Heb.11:39; 1Jn.1:2; 5:13).

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to *the promise* of life which is in Christ Jesus.
2nd Timothy 1:1 NKJV

And this is the promise that He has *promised* us – eternal life.
1st John 2:25 NKJV

~ Under the Old Covenant, believers were helped by the Holy Spirit who was "with them", but under the New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is *now* "in us" (Lk.24:49; cf. Acts 1:4; 2:33; 2:39; Gal.3:14; Eph.1:13; 2Pet.1:4).

(4) And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from

Jerusalem, but to wait for *the Promise* of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; (5) for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Acts 1:4-5 NKJV

~ The inheritance of the "Promised Land" (Gen.12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; 26:3; 48:3-4; Ex.6:8; Lev.20:24; Num.33:53; Acts 7:5 7:17; Heb.11:8-9) was a wonderful blessing for Israel, a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex.3:8; 3:17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev.20:24; Num.13:27), but the best of it pales in comparison to the future inheritance which is *now* positionally ours: the New Jerusalem which we believers have been promised under the New Covenant.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and *heirs* according to the promise.
Galatians 3:29 NKJV

. . . that those who are called may receive the promise of the *eternal inheritance*.
Hebrews 9:15b NKJV (cf. Heb.6:17)

~ Abraham was promised an heir and a progeny which would be "as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen.22:17; Heb.6:13-15; 11:12; cf. Rom.4:13). Under the New Covenant we believers have *now* entered into the special relationship of being part of Christ's Bride forever, one with Him and with each other for all time in the greatest and best family there is, the family of God, the family of our heavenly Father, in company of all of whom we shall enjoy blessings in perfect harmony, world without end (Matt.19:29; 2Cor.6:18-7:1).

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name.

Ephesians 3:14-15

(12) But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, (13) to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.

Hebrews 12:22-24a NIV

~ The shedding of blood under the Old Covenant represented God's future redemption of believers through the sacrifice of His Son (Rom.3:25-26; Heb.9:7; 9:18; 9:22-23). We who have put our faith in Jesus Christ under the New Covenant *now have* actual not symbolic forgiveness for everything we had done in the past and going forward for all we confess based upon the Blood of Christ, His spiritual death for us which washes away our sins (1Jn.1:9).

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is *the new covenant in my blood*; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1st Corinthians 11:25 NIV

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Hebrews 9:15 NIV

~ None of the promises under the Old Covenant could endure for long since mortal human beings do not live forever. For that reason, none of the eternal promises which were merely seeds, so to speak, destined to sprout into something better only in eternity, were fulfilled for our brothers and sisters who went before us (Heb.11:39). But we, together with them, on account of the fulfillment of the Old and its transformation into the New are *now* looking forward to a sure and certain eternal resurrection which is better than anything on this temporary earth (Heb.11:35), to promised rewards which will endure forever (e.g., Jas.1:12), to an eternal dwelling whose architect and builder is God Himself in the promised eternal kingdom (Heb.11:10; Jas.2:5).

But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth *just as He promised* – [a world] where [only] righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:13 (cf. 2Pet.3:4; 3:9)

These are all "better promises" indeed, promises of things eternal, not merely temporal, but of things perfect and complete, not subject to the ravages of time and decay.

"And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me."

Luke 22:29 NIV

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:10 NIV

Verses Seven through Twelve

For if that first [covenant] had given no cause for complaint, an occasion for the second would not have been sought. (8) Indeed, in finding fault with [those under the first covenant, God] says, "Behold, the days are coming", says the Lord, "when I shall ratify a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah – (9) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not remain [faithful to] My covenant, and so I in turn disregarded them." says the Lord. (10) "For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. (11) They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (12) For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."

[Jeremiah 31:31-34]

Hebrews 8:7-12

No Cause for Complaint: The adjective *amemptos* generally means "blameless" in Greek, being a combination of the alpha-privative (i.e., the negativizing "a-" prefix; cf. "atonal", "asexual", etc.) and the verbal root *memph-* ("to blame"), a verb which does also occur in the following verse ("in finding fault with [them]). But occasionally, as here, the adjectival force of this word is active rather than passive (as in Xen. *Cyr.* 4.5.52; 8.4.28; as is also the adverb at 4.2.37): "**giving** no cause for finding fault/complaint". Upon hearing this word, Paul's readers at the time (as most ever after) would immediately assume that the first covenant was being described as "at fault", but then with the use of the verb from the same root in the next verse we find, as we should have expected, that it was the Israelites who failed to live up to the first covenant who were at fault. Therefore it is God who had "grounds for complaint" in regard to the first covenant – not against this perfect covenant of His own making, but against those who disregarded it so thoroughly from the very start.

The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.
Exodus 19:8 NIV (cf. Ex.24:3; 24:7)

(7) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. (8) They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "
Exodus 32:7-8 NIV

So Paul is not, in fact, suggesting that the Old Covenant was imperfect. Rather he is demonstrating to his readers that they and their ancestors are the ones who were and are at fault for failing to live up to the perfect standards of the Law. That the imperfect fulfillment of Paul's contemporaries was not of the same sort as that of their forefathers (contemporary legalism versus historical idolatry) was of no moment. God had reason to blame both groups, and the Old Covenant provided in each case the basis for the blame. *That*, after all, was its essential purpose, rightly understood (Rom.7:7; Gal.2:19). No human being could ever hope for perfection in between Eden and the resurrection – except for Jesus Christ. The rest of us need God's grace, His forgiveness, His redemption from sin. The rest of us need Jesus Christ. And the purpose of the Law was always to point to Him and His sacrifice, making it clear in no uncertain terms that there was no other way to approach the Father than through His unique Sacrifice.

(19) Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. (20) Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.
Romans 3:20 NIV

(15) We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles (16) know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the

law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.
Galatians 2:15-16 NIV

Thus the true fault, the true blame, lies in human beings, not God. The Law was and is perfect, but only Jesus Christ could (and did) perfectly fulfill it (Matt.5:17-18; Jn.19:28-30; Rom.10:4). For the rest of us, our inability to do so is proof that we need a Savior and a prod to turn to God through Jesus Christ.

(21) Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. (22) But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those *who believe*.

Galatians 3:21-22 NIV

Behold: Not for the first time, Paul includes here a quotation from the Old Testament several verses long. We saw this also in chapters one (Heb.1:10-12), two (Heb.2:6-8) and three (Heb.3:7-11).¹⁹ This citation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, however, is the single longest quotation of the Old Testament anywhere in the New, so that the length and fullness of the passage cited cannot help but to catch our eye (and/or ear). That is deliberate, and meant to draw the attention of all readers and listeners to the importance of this point: the New Covenant *was prophesied* in the Old at length, the very New Covenant which the contemporary Jerusalem believers were neglecting for the sake of returning to and preferring the Old.

(36) He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. (37) And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. (38) No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. (39) And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, '*The old is better.*' "

Luke 5:36-39 NIV

In terms of the long quotation from Jeremiah itself, there are a number of small differences from the LXX, that is, the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which was likely in circulation at the time of writing largely in the form we presently possess it. The very fact that Paul wrote this epistle in Greek instead of in Hebrew is somewhat remarkable, because many if not most of the intended recipients did still speak Hebrew (Matt.26:73; 27:46-47; Mk.14:70; Lk.22:59; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14; Jn.19:20; 20:16). And the fact that this epistle is in Greek, not Hebrew, also shows that Paul – and definitely the Holy Spirit – had in mind a wider audience beyond just the long-time contemporary residents of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Paul's series of quotes occurring at Romans 3:10-18 is collectively longer, but these come from multiple passages, and are not a single, sustained quotation (the same is true of Hebrews 1:5-13).

It is also true that the LXX version has had a complicated history. There are, in fact, a number of Greek translations of the Old Testament dating from antiquity with which it was sometimes confused, and such could be the case in quotations from memory (in the same way that those of us with less than perfect memorization skills occasionally make small mistakes in quoting favorite passages, especially if we are in the habit of using multiple versions). These two eventualities on their own, that is, the question of what the actual text of the LXX really was at the time, and the possibility that Paul was quoting it from memory rather than from a scroll of Jeremiah (we have seen how that he was anxious for Timothy to bring him scrolls from Troas, "especially the parchments": 2Tim.4:13), could easily account for the small divergences from the standard text. But it is also the case as we have demonstrated earlier that Paul often did re-translate passages or parts of passages from the Hebrew in order to make the point of his quotation more clear (as in the case, e.g., of Heb.1:12).

Archer and Chirichigno list three small differences between the LXX and Paul's extended quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, none of which changes the essential meaning of the passage and all of which are consistent with the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text:²⁰ 1) Paul uses a different verb for "says", namely the more generic λεγω as opposed to the somewhat more Classical and colloquial φημι; 2) Paul uses three different phrases for "make a covenant" (Heb. תָּרַבַּח תְּרַבַּח), whereas the LXX uses the same phraseology throughout; 3) in verse ten, Paul simplifies the stock LXX doubling of the main verb and participle by simply using the verb "give" once. The effect of all three minor changes is to make the passage seem less archaic and somewhat more vivid.

This approach, ratified by the Holy Spirit, also has the effect of challenging readers who were well-versed in the LXX version, inviting them to wonder about the changes and thus to pay somewhat more attention to the quotation itself. That is particularly important in this context when one considers that Paul's main point in providing this extended quotation is to demonstrate that the New Covenant was not only prophesied, but that this prophecy was very well-known to his readers and should have long since been accepted by them as fulfilled. Instead, they should have been embracing the coming of the new rather than ignoring the completion of God's promise in their preference for the Old Covenant, which very testament – as this quotation affirms – predicted, prophesied and promised the coming of the new one from which these believers were in the process of falling away. If the Old Testament/Covenant predicted the New, on what basis were these individuals now setting aside that promise now fulfilled in Jesus Christ in preference for the shadows of the past?

The Old Covenant versus the New: In the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, the differences between the old covenant and the new are spelled out clearly enough.²¹

"Behold, the days are coming", says the Lord, "when I shall ratify a New Covenant with

²⁰ G.L. Archer and G.C. Chirichigno, in *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago 1983), pp.136-139.

²¹ See in SR 5: "The Old and New Covenants"; in Hebrews Chapter One, section I.d, "Covenants"; and in Hebrews Chapter Seven, "The New Covenant versus the Old Covenant".

the house of Israel and the house of Judah – (9) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not remain [faithful to] My covenant, and so I in turn disregarded them." says the Lord. (10) "For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. (11) They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (12) For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."
Hebrews 8:8b-12

Rather than a written code etched on tablets of stone (the perfect carrying out of which was impossible and meant to be so: Acts 15:10; Rom.3:19-20), the New Covenant was pledged to be "written on their hearts" with its precepts "placed in their minds", and with all so endowed being defined as "His people", all "knowing Him" and needing no ritualized instruction. Rather than including a system of sacrifices whereby offenses were symbolically cleansed, mercy and forgiveness was promised as the foundation of that coming New Covenant, providing the reality of redemption from sin instead of its future anticipation.

Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."
Luke 22:20 NKJV

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.
Romans 7:6 NIV

He has made us competent as ministers of a New Covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
2nd Corinthians 3:6 NIV (cf. Rom.2:29; 8:10)

Essentially, then, the old one was external, comprising visible rituals, specific and detailed prohibitions, and meant as a code of visible actions valid for the entire population of God's special nation, Israel. The new one, in contrast, is internal, existing in the hearts of those who belong to Jesus Christ, comprising the most wonderful realities, the Gift of the Spirit, the indwelling of Christ Himself, with the truth "written in the hearts" of those who have responded to the gospel around the world, and with everything in this New Covenant being ratified by the blood of Christ, so that the Father can justly "have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and . . . remember their sins no more".

(21) Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. (23) But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through *promise*, (24) which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – (25)

for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – (26) but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. (27) For it is written:

"Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband."

(28) Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of *promise*. (29) But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born *according to the Spirit*, even so it is now. (30) Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." (31) So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Galatians 4:21-31 NKJV

The New Covenant provides freedom to serve the Lord in truth, delivering us from the slavery to mere ritual which characterized the Old. We who have the better promises of the New Covenant are now free to serve our Savior "according to the Spirit".

(23) "But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. (24) For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., "in spirit") and truthfully (lit., "in truth")."

John 4:23-24

Israel was meant to be a nation exclusively composed of believers, but she never came close to measuring up to that perfect standard historically. She will do so during the Millennium, at least at its inception (e.g., Matt.3:10-12). Meanwhile, we of the Church of Jesus Christ are all believers by definition, the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise in the mystery of this present age, that mystery whereby gentiles too are included in the covenants of promise (Eph.3:1-11; cf. Rom.11:25; 15:8-12; Eph.2:11-22; 3:8-10), that mystery which at its core is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col.1:26-27).

(5) Moses writes about the righteousness that comes through the law, "The person who does them will live in it" (Lev.18:5). (6) But the righteousness that comes through faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend to heaven?' " – that is, to bring Christ down – (7) "or 'Who will descend into the Abyss?' " – that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. (8) But what does it say? "The word is near you: [it is] in your mouth and in your heart." That is *the word of faith* that we proclaim.

Romans 10:5-8

The Law was meant to be composed of works which represented faith and which were based on

faith. The New Covenant is all about faith – and then results in all manner of truly "good works", spiritual growth, progress and production, on the part of those who believe. Leaving out faith under the Law and reducing it to a set of rules as the Pharisees did or ignoring it completely as prior generations before the exile did is to fall short of its very purpose. Leaving out the proper responses of growth, passing tests and entering into the ministries our Lord intends for us under the New Covenant is equally misguided (cf. Jas.2:14-26). Faith, trust in the Lord, recognizing our absolute need for Him in all things, first and foremost in His deliverance of us from sin and death, has always been at the heart of scripture, Old and New Covenants both.

Now [Abraham] had believed in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it.

Genesis 15:6

(6) . . . just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

(7) Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-7 NKJV (cf. Rom.4:1; Heb.2:16)

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29 NKJV

We who now live under the New Covenant, prophesied so straightforwardly by Jeremiah, are blessed to be liberated from the onerous strictures of the Old. We are free to worship the Lord and serve Him "with faces unveiled", basking in the glory of His truth.

(12) Since we have such a confident expectation of success [based on the support from the Spirit's ministry], we speak the truth unreservedly – (13) and not like the previous situation where Moses had to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not see that temporary glory fading out; (14) now their hearts became hard, and until today at the reading of the Old Covenant there is still a [similar sort of] veil remaining in place [one which hides the true glory]; and [this "veil" which obscures the truth] is not being taken off because only in Christ is it done away with; (15) so until this present day, whenever Moses is read, this veil [of sorts] lies over their hearts, (16) but whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed – (17) for the Lord and the Spirit are one, and wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is also freedom (i.e. the opportunity and power to do God's will). (18) And everyone of us, when we reflect [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becomes more Christ-like) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.

2nd Corinthians 3:12-18

To turn back from this blessing of growing closer to the Lord and becoming more like Him day by day through the Spirit is unconscionable. But that is what the Jerusalem believers were doing: trading their spiritual heritage for an essentially material one in the Law (when said Law is stripped of its underlying spiritual meaning), and an outdated and *obsolete* one at that.

But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has now received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises.
Hebrews 8:6

God the Father promised the Messiah, promised a new "agreement" based upon His sacrifice, promised His Holy Spirit, promised forgiveness of sin, promised everlasting life and eternal reward – promises all now made real in Jesus Christ for those who put their faith in Him, soon to fulfilled in every detail when He returns to rescue us, to render justice for all, and to be adored and worshiped by us, His Bride the Church, forevermore. While it may seem inconceivable to us that anyone who has "tasted" the first-fruits of all these good promises should turn back to previous shadows of the Law (Ps.34:8; Heb.6:4-6; 1Pet.2:3), we see the same draw of traditionalism in our own day, and the same attraction of "community". The Jerusalem believers did not want to be ostracized by their fellow (unbelieving) Jews and were willing to compromise their faith – and risk their eternal future – for the sake of such false fellowship. And while we rightly find fault with them for so doing (as scripture does also), it is good to remember that in our own Laodicean day, the vast majority of "Christians" in the church-visible today have similarly traded love for the truth for the pottage of social interaction in churches which are scarcely worthy of the name despite the comfort of tradition – because they are not doing what Jesus Christ wants a gathering of His people to do.

(14) I am writing these things to you, expecting to come to you very shortly. (15) But [I am giving you these instructions] so that in case I am delayed you may know how a person must comport himself in a "house of God" – which is an assembly of the living God, a pillar and a support of *the truth*.
1st Timothy 3:14-15

Verse Thirteen

In mentioning a "New [Covenant]", He has rendered the Old one obsolete. And that which is obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing.
Hebrews 8:13

The fact that the New Covenant, the "new testament/agreement [validated] in My blood" (Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25), has rendered the old obsolete should not have come as news to the recipients of this letter. Jeremiah predicted it. Our Lord in establishing the communion ceremony confirmed it. And the apostles, in producing the books of the New Testament through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit explained it. Pretending that the Law was still valid was to ignore everything that God had done in the past thirty years since John heralded the Messiah's coming. John *did* baptize with water for the repentance of Israel to prepare the way for Christ (Mk.1:4; Lk.3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). Jesus *did* minister the truth and fulfill all the prophecies about Himself in His three and a half year ministry. He *did* suffer (Ps.22:5-18; Is.52:13-15; 53:1-12). He *did* die for the sins of the world (1Jn.2:2). He *was* resurrected (Mk.10:34; Acts 10:40; 1Cor.15:3-11). He *did* ascend to the third heaven (Jn.20:17; Acts 1:9-11; Eph.4:10). He *did* take His seat in glory at the Father's right hand (Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20; 2:6; 3:1; Heb.1:3;

1:13; 8:1-2; 10:12; 12:2). He *did* send us the Holy Spirit (Jn.7:39; 14:16-17; 14:26; 16:7; Acts 1:4-5; 2:32-33). And the Spirit *did* empower the apostles in their ministry of expanding Christ's Church (Eph.4:11; cf. Eph.3:2), inspiring them to pen the New Testament wherein all of these wonderful things and the glories soon to follow are explained (2Pet.1:16-21; cf. Eph.1:3). Returning to the Law which our Lord's life, sacrifice and victory fulfilled – and thus rendered obsolete – was to pretend as if none of the above ever happened. It was, in effect, to behave in the same way as prior generations of Israel had done, determining to be "stiff-necked" in their resistance to the truth instead of opening up their hearts to the Lord and His truth.

(40) "Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: (41) 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you' (Hab.1:5)."

Acts 14:40-41 NIV

These believers certainly *had* believed . . . in the past. But now they were behaving just as if they did not and had never believed, "crucifying the Son of God afresh" (Heb.6:6), turning back to what they knew was going to be replaced, what they had seen replaced with something far better, the Father Himself testifying to them of Christ's victory and fulfillment of the Law "through signs and wonders and various [other] demonstrations of His power, and with distributions of the Holy Spirit (i.e., spiritual gifts) according to His will" (Heb.2:4). Just as the generation of our Lord's day knew that a Savior would be coming, but refused to accept Him when He did (because He did not meet their secular expectations), so these marginal believers were refusing to acknowledge the Lord as they should out of fear of persecution and longing for the traditions of the past.

The Law had been fulfilled (Matt.5:17-18; Rom.10:4; cf. Heb.7:11; 7:19; 7:28). The Law of the letter had been unalterably changed for the Law of the Spirit (Rom.8:2; Heb.7:12; 10:9; cf. Rom.7:6). The Law, as our context assures us, had been rendered obsolete, was now antiquated, and was on the point of entirely disappearing (as would the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem not too many years hence). The recipients of Hebrews knew all these things well enough even before they received Paul's letter. After being schooled so thoroughly by this epistle, they had not a shred of excuse for any further compromise.

(47) "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. (48) But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

Luke 12:47-48 NIV

The context of the passage above is the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants who will be rewarded or punished according to their performance when their Master returns. Given that we in the Church today find ourselves on the cusp of that very return, let us resolve to eschew the bad example of the Jerusalem church of Paul's day, dedicating ourselves instead to the mission our Lord Jesus Christ has given us of spiritual growth, progress and production, "exhorting one

another" to do so all the more as with every passing hour we "see that Day approaching" ever closer (Heb.10:25), and being unwilling to substitute the pottage of false community or pointless tradition or anything else for the truth of the Word of God.

I will bow myself in worship toward your holy temple, and I will give thanks to your holy Name on account of your mercy, and on account of your *truth*, for *You have magnified Your Word above Your entire Name.*

Psalm 138:2

What the Old Covenant could not do, namely, provide eternal life and an eternal inheritance in New Jerusalem with all of our brothers and sisters forever, the New Covenant has done – through the blood of Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior. Better promises than this there never were, now fulfilled in principle for all who belong to Him, soon to burst forth in glorious reality at our Lord's return.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, *and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.*

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17