

The Book of Hebrews

מֵאַנֶשׁ מִנִּמְדָּא דֵּא מִנִּי תֵּאֲקֵלָא
צִמְאֵל לֵּל נִתְאַתְצֵרְחָ דִּרְתִּסְנִי סְקֵ
אֵת פִּקְלָא תֵּסְנִי סִרְבֵּאֵל
רֵדֵ תֵּאֲסֵדֵ תֵּאֲקִסְנֵ דִּמְמֵצֵ
תֵּאֲתִפְלֵשׁ נִתְרִדְנֵהֵרְפֵרֵ נִרְלֵדֵ
תֵּאֲגֵשׁ רֵלֵדֵ מִלְּלֵצֵ סֵסֵ תֵּלֵשׁ



Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

Outline of Hebrews

IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14–5:10)
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- C. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- D. Jesus Is the Mediator of a *New* Covenant That Is *Far Superior* to the *Old* Covenant (8:1-13)
- E. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

Outline of Hebrews

A. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

1. Ministry Under the Old Covenant. (9:1-10)
2. Ministry Under the New Covenant (9:11-14)
3. Further Reflections on the New Covenant (9:15-10:18)
 - a. The Need for the Death of the Covenant Ratifier (9:15-22)

The Need for the Death of the Covenant Ratifier (9:15–22)

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,

²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ ***Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.***

- As we saw at the end of the last section, Christ's blood-shedding has achieved what the old covenant with its priesthood and sacrifices was incapable of achieving, namely, to "*purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*" (Heb 9:14)
- Picking up on that idea, our author begins verse 15 with: "***Therefore he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant***" – new not **only** in that it's **different** from the old covenant but also in that it **supersedes** it.

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**.*

- We have already seen earlier in the letter (in Heb 8:6) that Jesus is "*mediator of a **better covenant***" – the "*new covenant*" foretold told by Jeremiah.¹
- But this verse gives us the **basis** of Christ's **mediatorship** of that new covenant: his **sacrificial death**.¹
- And, it tells us, that by virtue of his death **redemption** has been provided for those who had broken the law of God – the life of Christ was the costly **price paid to liberate** them from their "*transgressions*".¹
- Remember, the author is writing to Jews who had lived under "*the first covenant*" and had sinned under it beyond any provision made by it for atonement.²

¹ F. F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

² William S. Plumer; *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Hebrews* (p.364)

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

- As we saw last week, the “*first covenant*” was *incapable* of providing “*eternal redemption*” (Heb 9:12) – this was a blessing which had to await the inauguration of “*a new covenant*”, under which God promised his people: “*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*” (Jer. 31:34).
- The idea that the new covenant is based on the death of Christ is not an idea found in Hebrews alone.
- We find the clearest expression of this idea in the words of Jesus when he instituted the Lord’s Supper: “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*” (Mark 14:24) or, as it says in 1 Cor. 11:25: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*”

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that **those who are called** may receive the **promised eternal inheritance**, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

- And now that this redemptive death has taken place, the “*promised eternal inheritance*” has been given to “*those who are called*” – the “*new covenant*”, and everything that the grace of God provides under it, is forever theirs.¹
- “*Those who are called*” has the same meaning that the word “*called*” does in Paul’s letters (e.g. Rom 8:30) where it designates God’s powerful, life-changing and effectual call in the life of believers.²
- Because of Jesus’ mediatorial new covenant work, those who are “*called*” by God are guaranteed that they will obtain the “*eternal inheritance.*”²

¹ F. F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

² Schreiner, Thomas R. – *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary - Hebrews*; pp. 274-275

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that those who are called may receive the promised **eternal inheritance**, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

- "*Eternal*" is an adjective which our author associates especially with the "*new covenant*".
- The "*new covenant*" itself is "*eternal*" (Heb 13:20), and therefore the redemption which it provides and the "*inheritance*" into which it brings the people of God are likewise "*eternal*" (vv. 12, 15).
- The Mediator of this covenant, having offered himself up to God as "*through the eternal Spirit*" (Heb 9:14), has become to all who obey him the "*source of eternal salvation*" (Heb 5:9).

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- But why are rituals involving “*death*” and bloodshed at the core of Israel’s worship and of God’s covenant with them (i.e., the “*first covenant*”)?
- The answer lies in the exclusive, comprehensive commitment the Lord imposed on his people by inaugurating a covenant relationship with them.
- Only two outcomes were possible:
 - If covenant servants were **faithful**, they would be **blessed** (“*eternal inheritance*”).
 - If **not**, they would endure a **curse** (“*death*”).

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised **eternal inheritance**, since a **death** has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**.*

- Moses elaborated these opposite alternatives in graphic detail in his farewell addresses to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 28).
- The gravity of the covenant mandated that a death had to occur in order for those who had transgressed its commandments to escape its curse.

¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a **death** has occurred that **redeems** them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**.*

- Of course the Israelites “*did **not** continue in [God’s] covenant*” (Heb. 8:9).
- Therefore they brought upon themselves the covenant’s dire curses, including famine, violence, exile, disease, and death.
- They needed to be **redeemed**, which could occur only through the “*death*” of an innocent substitute, Christ, whose blood purified covenant breakers from their treasonous acts, which were deserving of death (Heb 9:14).

¹⁶ *For where a **will** is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a **will** takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- The ESV, like most versions and interpreters, gives the impression that the discussion shifts here suddenly, surprisingly, and briefly from biblical **covenants** (verse 15) to the administration of a last will and testament in the Greco-Roman legal system (verses 16-17) and then back again to biblical covenants (verses 18-20).¹
- So verses 16–17 read: “*For where a **will** is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a **will** takes effect only at death...*”
- Well, that’s true for a will, isn’t it?²
- You have a will, and it’s lurking there behind the scenes, but until somebody dies, that will does not go to probate and its terms do not come into effect. That’s exactly correct.²

¹ Dennis E. Johnson; *ESV Expository Commentary* (Volume 12) (pp. 211-213)

² DA Carson Lecture on Hebrews

¹⁶ For where a **will** is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a **will** takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

- This Greek word translated “**will**” here (*diathēkē*) often did mean “last will and testament” in Hellenistic **extrabiblical** literature, but *diathēkē* was also the term that the Septuagint typically used to translate the **Hebrew** word for covenant for (*berit*).
- Did our author, even though he was deeply influenced by the Septuagint and biblical categories, suddenly “switch gears” to introduce a secular Hellenistic concept into his discussion of the relation of Jesus’ death to the transgressions of the first covenant?
- Recent research into ancient Near Eastern treaties and biblical covenants suggests that is not the case.

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- I believe the first clause of verse 17 should **not** be translated as it is in the ESV, “*For a will takes effect only at death,*”
- Instead, it should be translated, quite literally: “*For a **covenant** is made legally secure on the basis of the dead ones.*”
- Notice that “*dead ones*” is **plural** – **not singular**. That’s literally what the Greek says.
- You will notice that the ESV translates it as a **singular**: “*at death*”

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- In the case of a will, the will comes into force when the person in whose name the will is drawn up dies.
- You don't have to have 30 people dying in order to have a will come into force!
- You only need to have the one person in whose name the will is drawn up die.
- But you have a plural word for dead here, "*the dead ones*," which I believe refers to the **sacrificial animals** that died in the making of the covenant.

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- So if we include the idea of sacrifices, verse 17 will now read as follows: *“For a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the dead sacrifices.”* That’s true in the Old Testament. We’ll look at that in just a minute.
- I believe verse 16 should read: *“It is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies a **covenant** to be **brought forward**.”* That’s what the verb literally means: “to be brought forward, to be presented”.
- Verse 17: *“For a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the sacrificial victims, since it is never valid while the ratifier lives.”*

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- Now we need to understand how a covenant worked in the Old Testament.
- The persons making a covenant in the Old Testament had to be “executed” symbolically.
- That brings us back to Genesis.
- You’ll recall we looked at Genesis **14** in connection with Melchizedek back when we covered Hebrews 7.
- We’re now going to look at Gen **15**, starting in verse 6: *“And [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness”*.

Genesis 15:7-18

⁷ And [God] said to [Abraham], "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." ⁸ But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ **And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other...** ¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years..." ¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ **On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,** saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates..."

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- The cutting of a covenant in that time and place meant you took an animal, or even several animals, and you cut them in half.
- Normally, **both** parties of the covenant would then walk between the two parts. They were saying, in effect, “May it be done to me also if I do not keep the terms of this covenant.”
- Thus, symbolically, they came under the curse of execution.
- They are executed, as it were, symbolically, and taking on themselves the curse if they do not keep the terms of the covenant.
- In that sense, the covenant is not ratified until there has been a kind of symbolic death of the ratifiers. How is that ratifying death done? By the death of the sacrifices.

¹⁶ *For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.* ¹⁷ *For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*

- So in the Old Testament, when the people are being cleansed by blood and the covenant being ratified by blood and blood being sprinkled on the people, the point is not just that they're being cleansed by someone who bears sin; it's a covenantal ratification.
- It's as if God and the people are together saying, "May it be done to us if we do not keep the covenant."
- God, of course, always **keeps** his vows, but the people don't and therefore end up under the curse.

¹⁶ *It is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies a **covenant** to be **brought forward**.* ¹⁷ *For a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the sacrificial victims, since it is never valid while the ratifier lives.*

- In other words, this text is saying, “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, and he seals this covenant in his blood.”
- It’s not only a sign of **sacrificial death**; it’s a sign of **covenantal curse**: “May it be done so to me and to those who join me in the ratification of this covenant if we break the terms of this covenant this day.”
- Except that Christ carries the whole death **himself**. It’s **his blood**. Under the old covenant it’s the blood of **animals**, but in the new covenant it’s the blood of one of the ratifying parties: God’s!
- It’s no longer symbolic. The case of the animals is just symbolic of the death of the covenanters, but in this case, it’s the death of the covenanting party. Not the covenanting party who breaks faith, but the covenanting party who does **not** break faith.

¹⁶ *It is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies a covenant to be brought forward.* ¹⁷ *For a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the sacrificial victims, since it is never valid while the ratifier lives.*

- Now do you see the argument? *“In the case of a covenant, it is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies it to be brought forward.”* That is, he had to be represented in the death of the sacrifices.
- *“For a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the sacrificial victims, since it is never valid while the ratifier lives.”*
- In the Old Testament, the ratifier had to die symbolically in the death of the animals
- But in the **new** covenant, Christ, the ratifier **himself** dies!

¹⁸ ***Therefore*** not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."

- In verse 18 the opening “*Therefore*” indicates that the death-covenant connection described in general terms in verses 16-17 can be seen in the specific event of Moses’ sprinkling of “*the blood of the covenant*” to inaugurate the covenant at Sinai.

¹⁸ *Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.* ¹⁹ *For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,* ²⁰ *saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."*

- The ratification of the Sinai covenant illustrates the principle of verses 16-17: entering into covenant with the living God is deadly, dangerous business!
- Although the ritual of passing between animal carcasses is not mentioned in connection with the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai, the sprinkling of sacrificial blood at that ceremony served to symbolize the lethal consequences that would ensue in the event of a breach of commitment.

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- Unlike the covenant with Abraham, in which the Lord alone bore the obligation to secure his servant's blessedness, at Sinai blood was sprinkled **both** on the **people** and on objects representing the **Lord** (Exodus 24:3-8).
- The Exodus account states that Moses threw half of the blood of slain animals on the Lord's altar, read from the book of the law, and then sprinkled the rest of the blood on the people who had vowed to observe "*all that the LORD has spoken.*"

¹⁸ *Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.* ¹⁹ *For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the **book itself** and all the people,* ²⁰ *saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."*

- Hebrews says that the blood was sprinkled on the “*book itself*” (representing God) and then all the people – God (and his word) **and** the people. He sprinkles them **both**.
- Both texts speak of the blood being applied to the people, which is our author’s point: at Sinai, Israel bound themselves to keep the Lord’s covenant or else face a violent death under his curse.

¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took **the blood of calves and goats**, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "**This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.**"

- The "*blood*" of both "*calves and goats*" was integral to the Day of Atonement ritual (Heb 9:12; cf. Leviticus 16).
- Moses' announcement, "*This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you*" (cf. Ex. 24: 8), was appropriated by Jesus when he instituted the Lord's Supper: "*This is my blood of the covenant*" (Mat 26:28).

²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

- The tent (tabernacle) was to be the dwelling place of the holy covenant Lord.
- Yet the tent and its furnishings had been crafted by the hands of those same covenant-breaking, defiled, death-deserving servants.
- Therefore the sanctuary itself and its equipment needed ceremonial purification, as did the people.

²¹ *And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.* ²² *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

- As we saw in our text last week, the widespread use of blood in the procedures of the old covenant's sanctuary served only for the ceremonial purification of the flesh and could not reach the conscience (Heb. 9:9-10).
- Yet those rites announced a truth transcending their own effects: in order for sinful people to be redeemed from covenant curses, they need a full and free forgiveness that wipes their sullied record clean.

²¹ *And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.* ²² *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

- They need the God of justice, who does not merely excuse breaches of his covenant, to fulfill his promise that he “*will remember their sins no more*” (Heb 8:12).
- Such forgiveness cannot occur “*without the shedding of blood*,” and the only blood that can wash clean our stained consciences is “*the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*” (1 Pet. 1: 19).

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- In our day, people in general (sometimes even Christians!) underestimate the seriousness of sin.
- In Old Testament times, one of the ways that people could get a sense of the seriousness of their sin was watching all the hundreds, perhaps thousand of animals that had to spill their blood to ceremonially atone for the sins they had committed.
- We don't have this experience in our day – though we can read about it, as we did today.
- Do you think if people could actually witness the bloody sacrifices in our day it would give them a more serious outlook?
- In reality, our sin resulted in the bloody death of something far more valuable than all the animals that ever died under the Jewish sacrificial system – the blood of Jesus Christ, God come in human flesh!
- How does this idea affect your view of the seriousness of sin?