

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 8, Verses 8-13
Notes From Class on December 8, 2009
Last Revised on (December 10, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then you may wish to have the handout we have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews.

Tonight there is second handout comparing the text for Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:8-12. Please make sure that you have a copy of this handout as well.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started.

Review

So far in this class we have finished reading the first **seven** Chapters of Hebrews

as well as the first 7 **verses** of Chapter 8.

Before we continue reading, let's begin, as usual, with a brief **review**.

Q. Can somebody please remind us what **sort** of document this (i.e. Hebrews) is?

A. Hebrews is perhaps best thought of as the text of a **sermon**,

A. And the Church has long understood that it is **inspired by God**

Q. **When** was this sermon written?

A. Around the end of the **First Century**, A.D.

Q. And why might the date of authorship be **important**?

A. This is not **very** long after (within about one generation of) the time of Christ

A. and it is also about the time (70 A.D.) of the **destruction of the temple** in Jerusalem.

Q. What do we know about the **preacher** and his **audience**?

A. **Not much.**

A. They were **Christian**.

A. and they evidently **knew each other**.

Q. What does the preacher seem to be trying to **accomplish** with this sermon?

A. To encourage his listeners to "**hold fast**" to their confession of faith?

A. and, conversely, **not** to "**fall away**."

This then is a sermon that **all** who call themselves Christians need to hear!

Q. **So far** (through 8:7) what are some of the main things the preacher has said?

A. He has spoken of the **unqualified supremacy of Christ**. **(1:1 - 3:6)**

A. He has warned us **not to imitate the history of Israel**. **(3:7 - 4:13)**

A. He has introduced the idea of **Jesus as our great high priest**. **(4:14 - 5:10)**

A. He has **warned against apostasy** and **reassured us of God's faithfulness**. **(5:11 - 6:20)**

A. He has explained how Christ **supersedes** and **replaces** both the priesthood and the law. **(7:1 - 8:7)**

So **ends** our very compact review of what we have studied in this class to date.

Are there any **questions** or **comments** before we read on?

By the way, two weeks ago, someone asked whether all of this is consistent what Jesus said in

Matthew 5:17-20 and Luke 16: 16-17.

As we discussed near the end of class last week, it **is** consistent.

Jesus did **not** come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.

but rather to **fulfill** and **accomplish** them.

Have we dealt with that question to everybody's satisfaction?

n.b. It seems that we have.

Chapter 8, Verses 8 - 13

O.K. then, would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 8, Verses 8 - 13, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English (ESV)

8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Thank you.

What we have **just** read, seems to continue the thought begun at the end of the preceding paragraph.

So let's back up a bit and begin our verse-by-verse discussion at verse 6.

It reads:

(Verse 6)

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

The **ministry** of Christ is **much more excellent** than "the old"

just as the **covenant** he mediates is **better**

because it is enacted on **better promises**.

Notice that this comparison does not **disparage** the old.

Rather it exalts the **new!**

This is a tactic which our preacher has been using all along:

not disparaging angels, or moses, or Abraham, or priests, or law, or covenant

but **exalting** these and exalting Christ the more so in comparison.

All of these things are excellent, **because** they presage Christ.

Here in verse 6, we understand that the **old** ministry of the Levitical priesthood was **excellent**,

its just that the ministry of Christ is much **more** excellent.

The old covenant mediated by the Levitical priesthood was **good**,

its just that the new covenant mediated by Christ is **better**.

Likewise the promises made under the old covenant were **good**,

but the promises of the new covenant are **better**.

Can you see it?

What was excellent has been replaced by something even better: something **much more** excellent.

That such improvement was possible, however, proves that the old covenant was **not** faultless.

That was the meaning of verse 7, the last verse of last week's lesson.

Verse 7 reads

(Verse 7)

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

So **what** fault was found in the old covenant?

This is the question which verse 8 **anticipates** and begins to answer.

Again, verse 8 reads:

(Verse 8)

For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

"For **he** finds fault"

Q. **Who** is "he"

A. **God**. It stands to reason:

Only God **could** have ordained the new covenant.

Therefore it **must** have been God who found some fault under the old covenant

Q. **What** exactly did God find fault with?

A. God found fault with "**them**"

Q. **Who** or **what** are they?

A. The covenant **people**: the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Q. **What** fault did he find with them?

A. We're going to find out....because God is going to tell us!

Q. The quotation marks preceding the word "Behold" mark the **beginning** of a divine statement, which continues to **where?**

A. The **end of verse 12**. Right.

Q. **Before** and **after** the quotation marks, whose voice do we hear?

A. The **preacher/author** of Hebrews. Yes.

And you will notice that he is **telling** us that God said these things and **explaining** to us what God said.

Q. But how does the preacher/author of Hebrews **know** what God said?

A. **Scripture**. Yes, the same way **we** know what God said!

Thus far in our study of Hebrews, we have heard our preacher quote frequently from several different Psalms and also from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel, and Isaiah.

Q. What part of scripture is our author quoting **here**?

A. **Jeremiah**

A. Specifically Jeremiah, **Chapter 31, Verses 31-34**.

n.b. This passage, which the author returns to later, in Chapter 10, plays a pivotal role in the argument developed in Hebrews. It is not quoted elsewhere in the NT (outside Hebrews). It is the only place where a "new covenant" is expressly mentioned in the Old Testament.

Q. How do we **know** that this quotation is from Jeremiah 31:31-34?

A. In the first instance, for most of us, because this is provided as a **footnote** in our Bible.

Q. Where does the **footnote** come from?

A. **Not** from the preacher/author of Hebrews.

So it is **not** part of the inspired text, and it behooves us to check it out.

Q. So how **well** does Hebrews 8:8-12 match Jeremiah 31:31-34?

To make this easier and faster to answer, please refer to the **handout**.

*n.b. The **handout** is reproduced below*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will **make** a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

32 **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband**, declares the LORD.

33 **But** this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and [I will] write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And **no longer shall each one teach** his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, [declares the LORD].

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Hebrews 8:8-12

8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and [with] the house of Judah,

9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. [For] they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

10 **For** this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

11 And they **shall not teach, each one** his neighbor and each [one] his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sin[s] no more."

I may have missed some, but I tried to identify **all** of the differences in the ESV between Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the corresponding citation in Hebrews 8:8-12.

This is just my opinion, but it seems to me that none of these differences are worth discussing now except possibly the passage highlighted in yellow, which is a real and significant difference in **meaning**.

But even this is not a contradiction: **both** things are true. The covenant people **did** turn away from God who had chosen them (figuratively speaking) as a bride and for this reason he **showed** no concern for them.

Q. How do we **account** for such differences in the text?

A. Jeremiah as it appears in our Bible is a translation into English from (what?) a **Hebrew** original.

A. Hebrews as it appears in our Bible is a translation into English from (what?) a **Greek** original.

A. Furthermore we know the author of Hebrews always quoted from (which?) a **Greek** version of the Old Testament.

n.b. Here the author is citing a text most similar to LXX (38:31-34) in Codex Alexandrinus

Therefore in the handout we are comparing English translations of two manuscripts written in different languages

It would be shocking **NOT** to find such differences.

That's why it is sometimes worth comparing a New Testament citation of the Old Testament with the Old Testament text it is referring to, as I have done in the handout.

In this case, however, I think you will agree we have seen that there are no big differences to talk about.

So let's get back to Hebrew, Chapter 8, verse 8. We read, once again:

(Verse 8)

For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

As we have already noticed, the quotation which begins with the word "Behold" and continues to the end of verse 12 are the words of **God** as declared by the prophet Jeremiah.

And we know that the words which precede and follow the quotation marks are the words of the **preacher/author** of Hebrews.

Who is here **explaining** to us this prophetic declaration of God.

His **introductory** explanation is that, in the declaration of God to follow, God "**finds fault with them.**"

In the very first sentence of this declaration, as we have seen, it is the **covenant people**, referred to here as the house of Israel and the house of Judah, with whom God finds fault.

And interestingly (!) his **response** to the fault which he finds with them is to announce that he will establish a **new** and better (!) covenant with them.

This is **consistent** with the larger context within which the quote from Jeremiah is taken.

There the prophet is offering **hope** for the future to a people who are in serious trouble.

Q. **When** is this new covenant going to be established?

A. Sometime **after** the time of Jeremiah.

A. With the coming of Christ, as **we** now understand clearly.

How clearly **Jeremiah** perceived the person and work of Christ is an interesting question.

Q. **When** was the time of Jeremiah?

A. Just before and during the time of the **Babylonian exile**, (c.f. Jer. 1:1-3)

A. Several hundred years **before** the birth of Christ.

So the prophet is writing **from** a time of nearly complete failure of the Old Covenant

and he is looking **forward**

to a time, **not** of returning to the Old Covenant

but of **establishing** a new one.

Verse 9 reads

(Verse 9)

not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

So the **new** covenant which the prophet foresees,

will not even be **like** the old covenant

which he speaks of as having been established at **Sinai**, or even before that, as they left Egypt.

That was **God's** covenant, and therefore good in itself

but it was not faultless, in the sense that God's covenant **people** did not continue in it,

and so he **showed** no concern for them, 'declares the Lord'.

notice that God is here quoting his **own** declaration

This is God declaring that **his** manifest lack of concern proceeds from **their** covenant breach.

What else could God do, other than to really change them, as he proposes in the following verse?

He could not leave them as they were and withhold correction,

much less continue to reward their wicked and self destructive behavior

any more than loving earthly parents could fail (at least to attempt) to correct,

much less continue to encourage the wicked and self destructive behavior in their children..

The people people walked away from the old covenant and into all kinds of trouble,

and never really came back, or ever would.

A better covenant was needed, next time.

Not a covenant in which the Lord would deliver the people out of slavery, and into earthly prosperity.

But a covenant in which the Lord would transform his people and prepare them for a eternal life.

Of course all of this was part of God's eternal plan,

and the prophets help us to see that this is so

as do the Apostles

and the inspired authors of the New Testament

Verse 10 reads

(Verse 10)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

from the before the time of the Exodus until after the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D.

the old covenant was always dying or dead

Jeremiah knew this.

And he himself lived during some **very** difficult times in Israel, just before and during the **Babylonian** exile.

Yet Jeremiah foresaw a time **after** "those days" of old covenant decadence and decline

when God would make a new **kind** of covenant with the house of Israel

neither a return to **law** of Horeb or Sinai,

nor a return to the **lawless** times of the Patriarchs

nor yet a return to **Eden** before the fall

No there would **be** a covenant

and this time one in which God would **put** his laws into their **minds** and write them on their **hearts**

That is, a time when, men would **actually understand** and **truly desire** to obey God's perfect will.

A **similar** prophesy is offered by Jeremiah's younger colleague Ezekiel (see Ezek. 11:19f)

This we now know is a description of the **Kingdom of Christ**

The Kingdom which Christ **established** and which he **rules**,

and of which he himself is the perfect **example**

and **forerunner** on our behalf.

Verse 11 reads

(Verse 11)

And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

Here we have a good description of the **Kingdom of Christ**.

All of its subjects, that is all Christians, from the least to the greatest **do** know God

because they **know** Christ.

they know Christ because God, the Holy Spirit, **dwells** in each of them.

Christians can and **should** teach one another (c.f. 10:24)

and each of us should remain as **teachable** as a little child

But nothing beside Christ it needed to "**know the lord**"

Indeed in order to know Christ we must first be known **by** him

This is the work of God **Himself**.

But that is not all

Verse 12 reads

(Verse 12)

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

Not only does every Christian **know** God

And not only does every Christian come to **understand** and to **desire** to obey God's perfect will,

but every Christian has **already** been fully forgiven for all of their sins: past, present, **and** future.

This does **not** mean that we will ever be without sin in this life.

And of course it does not mean that sin is **good** (that is a logical contradiction)

It merely means that God does not **count** our sins against us

because of what **Jesus** accomplished, once for all, on the cross of Calvary.

The new covenant is really a **new** covenant

And it really **is** better than the old one.

Because of these better **promises**.

Under the new covenant, God **effectively** transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

Finally we read verse 13

(Verse 13)

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Now **God** has finished speaking and we are hearing the voice of the preacher/author of Hebrews.

He tells us that when God, through Jeremiah, revealed his eternal plan to establish a **better** covenant

the **first** covenant immediately became the "**old** covenant" and was ready to vanish away.

Several hundred years later, Christ firmly **established** this new covenant. (c.f. Mark 14:24)

The old covenant finally **did** "vanish away."

in the sense that the new had **fulfilled** it

and fully and finally **replaced** it.

This is something we all really need to **grasp**, and it is not easy

The old covenant is really **hard** for people to let go of,

perhaps especially for **Jewish** converts to Christianity

But even for Christians with no Jewish background it seems strange that **all** of our sins should be **simply** forgiven, **only** because of the righteousness of Christ

We think we need to add something of our **own** in order to be forgiven and accepted by God.

But of course we have **nothing** of our own that we can possibly add.

It also seems strange that we should prefer to take up our **cross** and follow Christ

rather than seeking **earthly** blessings through good works of piety and charity

But one thing that is certainly proved by the Bible is that the Old Covenant **never** worked

and never **could** work and, therefore, that the new covenant **always** was the **only** way

The **prophets** saw this far in advance, as we read last week in 1 Peter 1:10-12 (reread)

and as we saw again tonight in the words of **Jeremiah**.

We Christians now know this more **certainly** with better evidence

The old covenant **has** vanished away.

We are free to **follow** Christ

and to become **like** him. (cf Romans 8:3 f)

Are there any **quesitons** or **comments**?