

Hebrews 8

Pastor: Hebrews 8: The New Covenant makes the Old Covenant obsolete.

“Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘SEE,’ He says, ‘THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN’ [Exodus 25:40]. But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, ‘BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 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 CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, “KNOW THE LORD,” FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE’ [Jeremiah 31:31-34, LXX]. When He said, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”

Hebrews chs. 8-9 employ some very complicated arguments, which readers should recognize as being the natural climax of our author’s epistle.¹ If we do not have a proper handle on what he is communicating in Hebrews ch. 8, which is relatively brief, yet very monumental, **then we may risk misunderstanding his primary purpose for writing about the ministry work of Yeshua and what it has brought to the redeemed.**

8:1 Hebrews 8:1 opens with the statement, “Now this is my main point” (NEB). What readers consider or identify as the “sum” (YLT) of the author’s argument is of key importance for a correct interpretation of what he will proceed to say. The author of Hebrews plainly says, “Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven” (NLT). Louis H. Evans, among Christian commentators, notes, “We have come to the third and final section of doctrine—the ministry of the High Priest.”² Donald Guthrie likewise remarks, “the focus falls on what the high priest has to offer and where he performs his ministry.”³ This High Priest is undoubtedly Yeshua the Messiah. But while these commentators, and others, rightly identify the main point as Yeshua’s priesthood and continuing ministry in Heaven, the conclusions readers often draw, may not always be as rooted within the text as much as it should.

To emphasize how important it is to understand Yeshua’s High Priesthood operating in Heaven, our author employs the term *kephalaion* (κεφάλαιον), meaning, “**a brief statement concerning some topic or subject, main thing, main point**” (BDAG).⁴ The majority of his remarks from the beginning of his composition, where he talks about Yeshua’s superiority over angels, His humanity and humbling, the penalties for rejecting Him, and how He functions in the office of Melchizedek—now leads to him discussing what this priesthood has brought to the redeemed. David A. deSilva describes what is about to be discussed as the “leading idea.”⁵ William L. Lane offers us an excellent description of what the author of Hebrews is about to do, saying that

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

² Evans, 143.

³ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 170.

⁴ BDAG, 541.

⁵ deSilva, 279.

“The ‘crowning affirmation’ is not simply that [Believers] have a high priest who has taken his seat at God’s right hand (v 1) but that he is the ministering priest in the heavenly sanctuary (v 2).”⁶

The remark that Yeshua has “sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (NIV) is a major indicator of how much power the Son actually and truly has. Implicit in our author’s statement are some of his constant references to Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (cf. Hebrews 1:13). A possible secondary reference is Zechariah 6:13 from the Septuagint, which notably includes the phrase *ek dexiōn autou* (ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ), “on his right hand” (LXE), which is absent from the Hebrew, which only has *kohen al-kiso* (כֹּהֵן עַל־כִּסֵּא), “priest on His throne.” This text is certainly Messianic in nature, as it relates to “a man whose name is Branch” (Zechariah 6:12). We have to remember that many of our author’s theological arguments are derived from the subtle differences seen in the Greek LXX when compared to the Hebrew MT:

ZECHARIAH 6:13 (MT)	ZECHARIAH 6:13 (LXX)
<p>He shall build the Temple of the LORD and shall assume majesty, and he shall sit on his throne and rule. And there shall also be a priest seated on his throne, and harmonious understanding shall prevail between them (NJPS).</p>	<p>And he shall receive power, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and there shall be a priest on his right hand, and a peaceable counsel shall be between <i>them</i> both (LXE).</p>
<p>וְהוּא יִבְנֶה אֶת־הַיְחֹל יְהוָה וְהוּא יִשָּׂא הוֹד וְיָשֵׁב וּמָשַׁל עַל־כִּסֵּא וְהָיָה כֹהֵן עַל־כִּסֵּא וְעֵצַת שְׁלוֹם תְּהִיָּה בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם:</p> <p><i>v'hu yivneh et-heikal ADONAI v'hu-yisa hod v'yashav u'masal al-kis'o v'hayah kohen al-kis'o v'atzat shalom tiheyeh ben shenei'hem</i></p>	<p>καὶ αὐτὸς λήμψεται ἀρετὴν καὶ καθίεται καὶ κатарξει ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσται ὁ ἱερεὺς ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ βουλὴ εἰρηνικὴ ἔσται ἀνά μέσον ἀμφοτέρων</p> <p><i>kai autos lēmpsetai aretēn kai kathietai kai katarxei epi tou thronou autou kai estai ho hiereus ek dexiōn autou kai boulē eirēnikē estai ana meson amphoterōn</i></p>

Our author makes it clear that Yeshua the Messiah “is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (RSV), and the “right hand” does have some critical significance. First of all, as the Son of God, Yeshua has literally “taken his seat” (NEB) and is present right next to God the Father in Heaven. Secondly, the Son has the supreme authority, as it is Yeshua who is upholding the universe by His word (cf. Hebrews 1:3-4).

What makes Yeshua’s priesthood very special for the redeemed is that He has gone in and sat directly beside His Father. Levitical priests were limited in their service to God, because they could only be in the presence of God in the Tabernacle or Temple. The Son, however, sits right next to the Father in His service, and is able to *continually mediate*, without having to leave as a mortal priest would. As Paul Ellingworth summarizes it, “the author will explore what Jesus is now doing at God’s right hand.”⁷ This is an awesome thing for any of us to consider, because it is by means of Yeshua’s priestly service—*continually in Heaven*—that He has inaugurated the New Covenant.

8:2 Yeshua the Messiah “ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands” (Hebrews 8:2, NLT). The Tabernacle on Earth was incomplete because it is a copy of the one that exists in Heaven, where God Himself sits upon His throne. Take note of the fact that in our author’s vocabulary he does not concern himself with the Temple, but instead the Tabernacle (Grk. *skēnē*, σκηνή), just like Stephen (Acts 7). This is a likely reflection on him being a Hellenistic Jew, as Hellenistic

⁶ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:204.

⁷ Ellingworth, 400.

Jewry in the Diaspora focused more on the Tabernacle in its theology, which they knew from the Scriptures, than the Temple, which Judean Jewry had present among them in the Land of Israel.

One’s view of Hebrews 8:2 should not be significantly altered by the writer of Hebrews only employing “tabernacle,” instead of “temple.” The key in properly understanding what he is trying to communicate is that the edifice where Yeshua serves has not been built by “any mortal” (NRSV). This place in Heaven is *alēthinós* (ἀληθινός), “**genuine, authentic, real**” (BDAG).⁸ We see a possible allusion to Numbers 24:6 in the Septuagint, which adds that Israel is “as tents which [the Lord] pitched” (LXE), *hōsei skēnai has epēxen Kurios* (ὡσεὶ σκηναὶ ἅς ἔπηξεν κύριος). This is only a slight difference from the MT, but it may indicate that as Yeshua is serving in Heaven before the Father, He is indeed serving Israel—and by implication all who are served by Him and who are redeemed, are regarded as fellow citizens of the Kingdom (cf. Ephesians 2:19):

NUMBERS 24:5-6 (MT)	NUMBERS 24:5-6 (LXX)
How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel! Like palm-groves that stretch out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the water (NJPS).	How goodly <i>are</i> thy habitations, Jacob, and thy tents, Israel! as shady groves, and as gardens by a river, and as tents which [the Lord] pitched , and as cedars by the waters (LXE).
<p>מִה־טוֹב אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ כִּנְחָלִים נִטְיָו כְּנֹגַת עָלָי נְהַר כְּאֹהֲלִים נִשְׁע יְהוָה כְּאַרְזִים עַל־מַיִם׃</p> <p><i>mah-tovu ohalekha Ya'akov mishkenotekha Yisrael. k'nechalim nitayu k'ganot 'alei nahar k'ahalim nata' ADONAI k'arazim alei-mayim.</i></p>	<p>ὡς καλοὶ σου οἱ οἶκοι Ἰακωβ αἱ σκηναὶ σου Ἰσραὴλ ὡσεὶ νάπαι σκιάζουσαι καὶ ὡσεὶ παράδεισοι ἐπὶ ποταμῶν καὶ ὡσεὶ σκηναὶ ἅς ἔπηξεν κύριος ὡσεὶ κέδροι παρ' ὕδατα</p> <p><i>hōs kaloi sou hoi oikoi Iakōb ai skēnai sou Israēl hōsei napai skiazousai kai hōsei paradeisoi epi potamōn kai hōsei skēnai has epēxen Kurios hōsei kedroi par' hudata</i></p>

Building upon his statement that Yeshua as High Priest has sat down at the right hand of His Father, our author writes that he is “a minister in the holy places” (ESV) or in *tōn hagiōn* (τῶν ἁγίων). The Greek appears in the plural, literally meaning “the holies,” or perhaps also “the holiest.” There is no doubt that this is a reference to the Holy of Holies (Heb. *ha'qodesh ha'qodoshim*, הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים), especially when we consider the specific work that Yeshua now to be regarded as performing before the Father in Heaven. The high priest on Earth was only allowed entry to the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*:

“He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on *the ark of the testimony*, otherwise he will die. Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat” (Leviticus 16:13-15).

The intercession that the Earth-bound high priest had to perform before God in the Holy of Holies could only be done once a year, whereas Yeshua’s intercession before His Father *occurs continually*. Lane indicates, “By means of a typological interpretation of the OT, the writer asserts that Christ has achieved what the sacrificial action of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement only foreshadowed.”⁹ Yeshua the Messiah is sitting constantly at His Father’s right hand, constantly interceding for the affairs of humankind, and most especially the redeemed in Him.

⁸ BDAG, 43.

⁹ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:210.

While all of this is indeed a most wonderful and greatly beautiful picture to behold, our author's words were likely met with some hostility when they were composed in the First Century. Many in the Jewish community, either in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora, had been raised in a culture that relied upon the high priest in the Temple to intercede for them before God. While this work was indeed important, with the ministry of Yeshua before the Father in Heaven, the Levitical service is not as necessary as it once was. Lane observes, "The point emphasized in v. 2 is that the possibility of access to God through a Levitical and earthly arrangement no longer exists because of their intrinsic inadequacy. Access is possible only through the ministering priest who serves in the heavenly sanctuary."¹⁰

Yeshua's priesthood taking over where the Levitical priesthood leaves off is part of the "change of law" (Hebrews 7:12), or rearrangement that the Torah has experienced as a result of His sacrifice for human sin. Access to God the Father in a priestly context, for Hebrews' First Century audience, would soon **only** be available through the Son functioning as High Priest in Heaven. To a largely Jewish audience that stood on the verge of the Temple's destruction, these would have been candid words to cut to the quick of the problem of those denying or thinking about denying the Lord. The priestly service of Yeshua in Heaven is most superior to the best service any human priest could offer on Earth. Some would have been offended by this, and sadly today, there are some—even in the Messianic community—who still are to a degree. This is because there are those in the Messianic movement, who for whatever reason, fail to study the Torah from the perspective of how Messiah Yeshua has come in fulfillment of its sacrifices for sin, and the priesthood that was to regulate those sacrifices.

8:3 Our author writes in Hebrews 8:3 that the Levitical, human high priest "is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence, of necessity, this one too had something to offer" (REB). Building upon the motif of *Yom Kippur* and of the Earth-bound high priest taking the blood of bulls and goats, he says that Yeshua "must make an offering, too" (NLT). This is not addressed in the text later, where it will be stated that "through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12). The offering that Yeshua is regarded as having presented before the Sanctuary in Heaven, as High Priest, is the redemption accomplished by His own shed blood at Golgotha (Calvary).

8:4 If Yeshua's priestly service "were limited to earth" (The Message), than our author rightly says that "He would not be a priest at all." This is partially because, as he has already addressed, the priests on Earth are to be descendants of Aaron of the tribe of Levi, and our Lord is of the tribe of Judah (7:14). Secondly, it is because the service of the priests on Earth are "already... offering the gifts required by the *Torah*" (CJB/CJSB).

Many examiners think that Hebrews 8:4-5 definitely indicate that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The author does employ the present tense for both "offer" (Grk. *prospheerontōn*, προσφερόντων) and "serve" (Grk. *latreuouein*, λατρεύουσιν), which would imply that these priests were *presently offering* the required gifts and *presently serving* in the required place as detailed in the Torah, as he was writing his work. Others think, on the basis of statements appearing in later literature, describing the Temple service still in operation when it was not, that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written after the fall of the Second Temple. If this were actually the case, though, one would not expect for his composition to have its necessary effect on an audience teetering on denying the Lord, unless Hebrews were written not too long after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

8:5 The author of Hebrews states how the Levitical priests "serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things." Yeshua is a different kind of High Priest from the Earthly high priest, because of the fact that He occupies the office of Melchizedek and serves in Heaven, and does not occupy the role of the Levitical high priest, which is to serve on Earth. The priestly system established on Earth in the Torah may be actually regarded as being a copy of that which exists in Heaven. Yeshua's Melchizedekian priesthood in Heaven, consequently, has been copied by the Levitical priesthood on Earth—with Yeshua's priesthood being the model upon which the Levitical priesthood has been based. The author of Hebrews uses Exodus 25:40 as proof

¹⁰ Ibid., 206.

that the Levitical priests serve a copy of what exists in Heaven. God instructed Moses, “See that you make *them* after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.”

Some examiners have more than hinted at a belief that the author of Hebrews employs some form of Platonic Greek dualism, by him suggesting that the priesthood and Tabernacle/Temple service on Earth is a copy of that in Heaven. It is very certain, as deSilva indicates, that “The notion of a heavenly counterpart to the Jerusalem temple or desert tabernacle was common in Hellenistic Judaism,”¹¹ but how far our author goes with this has been debated. F.F. Bruce validly observes, “There is indeed some affinity with Platonic idealism here, but it is our author’s language, and not his essential thought, that exhibits such affinity.”¹² We see that the Earthly priests “serve a sanctuary that is a shadowy suggestion” (*WBC*).¹³ Our author’s statements are actually deeply Hebraic, and are paralleled in First Century Jewish literature, Philo, and later the Talmud. Our author is not necessarily appropriating Plato to suggest that there is a Sanctuary in Heaven upon which the Sanctuary in Earth is based.

In Exodus 25:40 alone, Moses is told to “Note well, and follow the patterns for them that are being shown you on the mountain” (NJPS). Where these patterns originated, which Moses used for the Tabernacle furniture, implements, and the priestly garments, forms the basis of there being a Heavenly Sanctuary where God dwells. *2 Baruch* 4:5-6 in the Pseudepigrapha indicates, “I showed it also to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels. Behold, now it is preserved with me—as also Paradise.”¹⁴ This details an extant Jewish belief that the Tabernacle’s vessels were ultimately with God in Heaven, making those on Earth to be replicas or copies.

Philo of Alexandria communicated some interesting remarks about the Tabernacle furniture:

“Therefore Moses now determined to build a tabernacle, a most holy edifice, the furniture of which he was instructed how to supply by precise commands from God, given to him while he was on the mount, contemplating with his soul the incorporeal patterns of bodies which were about to be made perfect, in due similitude to which he was bound to make the furniture, that it might be an imitation perceptible by the outward senses of an archetypal sketch and pattern, appreciable only by the intellect” (*Life of Moses* 2.74).¹⁵

Philo described what Moses was copying as “the incorporeal patterns of bodies,” but goes on to say that by being put in physical form they “were about to be made perfect.” For him, the physical implements used in the Tabernacle were more important than the Heavenly originals. But nevertheless, he reflects a widescale Jewish opinion that there were Heavenly originals for Moses to replicate.

The Talmud likewise details the reality of God showing Moses Heavenly implements to replicate for the Tabernacle:

“Said R. Samuel bar Nahmani said R. Jonathan, ‘*What is the meaning of the following verse of Scripture: ‘upon the pure candlestick’ (Lev. 24: 4)? [The meaning is,] the instructions on how to make it came down from the pure place.*’ What about the following: ‘upon the pure table’ (Lev. 24:6) — does this too mean that the instructions on how to make it came down from the pure place?’” (b.*Menachot* 29a).¹⁶

The observation being made by the author of Hebrews, in regard to the priests’ service on Earth, is that they *only* serve a replication of a Heavenly reality. Ellingworth remarks, “what Moses is shown constituted a τύπος [*tupos*] simply by the fact that he is told to copy it. It is assumed that the copy is inferior to the original.”¹⁷ Yeshua the Messiah operates in a priestly service, in a far deeper reality beyond what can be humanly seen on Earth, this surely makes His Heavenly ministry far superior to the Earthly ministry of the Levites. Our author is by no means appropriating Platonic Hellenism to assert that there is a Heavenly Sanctuary, but bases his views upon widely held Jewish beliefs. This might be a good place for us to note how much of the Book of

¹¹ deSilva, 282.

¹² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 184.

¹³ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:199.

¹⁴ A.F.J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” trans., in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1, 622.

¹⁵ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 497.

¹⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

¹⁷ Ellingworth, 408.

Revelation occurs in the Heavenly Temple, the “temple of the tabernacle of testimony in Heaven” (Revelation 15:5).

It is important for us to understand, as Messianic Believers, that while Yeshua’s priesthood is indeed superior to the Levitical priesthood, Yeshua’s priesthood is not in conflict with the Levitical priesthood. Do note that Phinehas was given a *b’rit kehunah olam* (בְּרִית כֹּהֲנֵי עוֹלָם) or “a covenant of eternal priesthood” (Numbers 25:13, ATS) by God, and we do know that the Levitical priesthood will be restored in the Millennium with Yeshua reigning from Jerusalem (discussed previously). However, unlike Phinehas and the human Levitical priests who serve on Earth, Yeshua can minister for the redeemed eternally because He serves in Heaven.

8:6 The author of Hebrews writes his audience that Yeshua “has now obtained a superior ministry” (HCSB) or “service” (YLT). The term he uses to describe this is *diaphoros* (διάφορος), which “**pert. to being different, w. focus on value, outstanding, excellent**” (BDAG).¹⁸ Yeshua’s Heavenly ministry is far beyond the Earthly ministry of the Levites, when the two are compared. Because of Yeshua’s “higher ministry” (*Lattimore*) in Heaven, He is “the mediator of a better covenant.” Yeshua serves before the Father in Heaven, offering priestly intercession, not being limited as any mortal priest would have been.

Yeshua the Messiah is stated by our author to be the *mesitēs* (μεσίτης), “mediator, umpire, arbitrator” (LS).¹⁹ The Apostle Paul also uses this term to describe how Yeshua willingly gave Himself up, being the Mediator for humankind: “For there is one God, and one mediator [*mesitēs*] also between God and men, the man Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). These verses largely emphasize the humanity of Yeshua, and how all of us as human beings must have a Mediator between ourselves and God. This work of mediation, while being present during Yeshua’s Earthly ministry, continues with His priestly ministry in Heaven, as such priestly work has inaugurated the promised New Covenant.

Generally speaking, *diathēkē* was used in the LXX to render the Hebrew word *b’rit* (בְּרִית) or “covenant,” substantiated later in Hebrews 8:8-12 as being a reference to the *diathēkēn kainēn* (διαθήκην καινὴν) or New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-33. This prophecy details how not only will permanent atonement and forgiveness be available for the Lord’s redeemed, but also how by His Spirit the Torah’s instruction will be written onto their hearts and minds. The verb that our author uses in Hebrews 8:6, commonly rendered as “enacted” (NASU), “founded” (RSV), or even “legally secured” (NEB), is *nomotheteō* (νομοθετέω), often meaning “to ordain by law” (LS).²⁰ *Lattimore* renders Hebrews 8:6 by saying this “greater covenant...is made law on the strength of greater promises,” and the CJB/CJSB has “this covenant has been given as *Torah* on the basis of better promises.”

While these can be some appropriate vantage points for readers to understand *nomotheteō*, the Greek verb *nomotheteō* is commonly associated in the Tanach with the need for God’s people to be trained in His Instruction (Deuteronomy 17:10; Psalm 24:8, 12; 27:11; 119:33, 102), rendering the Hebrew verb *yara* (יָרָה). As previously discussed for Hebrews 7:11, “legislated” is perhaps the best rendering for *nomotheteō*, as “upon it the people were legislated” (PME), meaning that the Levitical priesthood was responsible for training Israel in God’s Torah. Concurrent with this in Hebrews 8:6, our author testifies, *epi kreittosin epangeliais nenomothetētai* (ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται), “which has been legislated upon better promises” (PME), meaning that Yeshua’s priesthood is legislated forth on the basis of the promises of the Messianic expectation. The enactment of the New Covenant, by Yeshua’s priesthood, includes a supernatural transcription of the Torah onto the hearts and minds of God’s people—which was surely not available in the time of the Levitical priesthood, in the manner and to the degree that it is now.

8:7 Prior to seeing the appeal made to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:8-12, our author makes the assertion, “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.”

¹⁸ BDAG, 240.

¹⁹ LS, 499.

²⁰ Ibid., 535.

There is an immediate question to be asked, because in a version like the NASU which employs *italics* for words added by the translators, it is easily seen that “covenant” is not in the original reading.²¹ The Greek actually reads with *Ei gar hē prōtē ekeinē en amemptos* (Ἐὶ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ἐκεῖνη ἦν ἄμemptος), with the term *diathēkē* (διαθήκη) or “covenant” noticeably missing from Hebrews 8:7: “for if that first were faultless” (YLT). While the New Covenant is something that features within the author’s discussion for sure, what is *hē prōtē* really connected to? Is adding “covenant” an inappropriate value judgment, as made by most Bible translators? Grammatically speaking, given the surrounding context, there are four possible feminine nouns that can be legitimately associated with *hē prōtē*. *Diathēkē* or “covenant” is certainly one of them,²² but so are *skēnē* (σκηνή) or “tabernacle,”²³ *hierōsunē* (ἱερωσύνη) or “priesthood,”²⁴ or even *leitourgia* (leitourgía) or “ministry/service.”²⁵ The latter three would be used as references to the Levitical sacrificial system, which the author of Hebrews has affirmed previously in ch. 8, is surpassed in effectiveness by the Melchizedekian priesthood of Yeshua (Hebrews 8:1-4).

Hebrews 8:1, in particular, is frequently left out of readers’ evaluations of what Hebrews 8:7-13 really communicates—even though it clearly controls what the author is trying to communicate. What does he label what he is about to discuss? He calls it *kephalaion* (κεφάλαιον)—“Now this is my main point” (NEB). The discussion in Hebrews 8:7-13 is controlled by the change in priesthoods that Yeshua has brought by His sacrifice, which in turn enacts the power of the New Covenant. As Lane describes, “By his life of perfect obedience and his death, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant of Jer 31:31-34. His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary guarantees God’s acceptance of his sacrifice and the actualization of the provisions of the superior covenant he mediated.”²⁶ Only by the priesthood of Yeshua in Heaven can the enactment of the New Covenant be realized.

Why is it important to recognize that the discussion of the New Covenant is placed within an overarching discussion about a change in priesthoods? It is because it affects how we read Hebrews 8:7: “For if that first...had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second” (NASU). Is this the “first covenant,” meaning the Mosaic Covenant that had been delivered by God at Mount Sinai to His people? Or is this the “first priesthood/tabernacle/ministry,” which had been occupied by sinful human beings? The perspective of the author of Hebrews is that the Levitical priesthood was the problem, because it could not offer the permanent redemption that Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood offers (Hebrews 7:11, 28). No statement is ever given that the Law given by God is somehow bad or is somehow the problem, rather it is those sinful men who occupied the office of Levitical priest (Hebrews 7:27; 10:11) that requires the change. With Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood now in place, the essential reality of the New Covenant can be partaken of.

It was largely the first “priesthood” that was actually discovered by God to not be “faultless,” because its human occupiers (“them,” Hebrews 8:8) cannot perform the same type of work that Yeshua the Son performs before the Father in Heaven. If, for the statement *Ei gar hē prōtē ekeinē*, translators provided “first priesthood,” “first tabernacle,” “first ministry”—or perhaps the most encompassing of these three, “**first service**” (PME)—the reference would be placed upon the Levitical priesthood and Tabernacle service. Not enough realize, that it is upon the basis of Yeshua’s priesthood, that the New Covenant has been inaugurated forth (Hebrews 8:6). The problem was not with any previous covenant God had made with His people, but it was with the actual people—especially the priests—that definitely required salvation history to progress forward (Hebrews 1:1-2), and for a new arrangement to be made via the sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah, providing permanent atonement and forgiveness.

²¹ Most English versions simply have “first covenant” (RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB, CJB) with no differentiation.

²² Hebrews 7:22; 8:6, 9, 10; 9:4, 16, 17, 20.

²³ Hebrews 8:2, 5; 9:2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 21.

²⁴ Hebrews 7:11, 12, 24.

²⁵ Hebrews 8:6; 9:21.

²⁶ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:208.

8:8a Our author notes how the “first *priesthood/tabernacle/ministry*,” or the “first *service*,” **was not** “faultless.” The New Covenant has to be inaugurated because God “find[s] fault with them.” While it might be thought that this is mainly speaking of “the people” (NIV), it is more likely that “them” relates to “the priests” (Hebrews 8:4, RSV/NIV/NRSV/ESV) referred to earlier. However, such sinful and weak human priests do have “to offer up sacrifices, first for [their] own sins and then for the *sins* of the people” (Hebrews 7:27), so the sins of the people at large are still in the equation.

Principally, in light of the wider issues, the New Covenant is inaugurated because of the poorness of the Levitical priests—not difficult to assert in the First Century C.E. due to the corrupt Sadducees—and secondly relates to the people at large. Yeshua exalted in Heaven now serves the people after His Melchizedkian order, bringing the essential reality of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophecy to those who were once served by the Levitical order. Bruce fairly summarizes these expectations as:

“[T]he people’s life would be reconstituted on a new basis, and a new relationship between them and their God would be brought into being. This new relationship would involve three things in particular: (a) the implanting of God’s law in their hearts; (b) the knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience; (c) the blotting out of their sins.”²⁷

8:8b-9 Jeremiah 31:31-32, appearing in either the Hebrew MT or Greek LXX, is the clear promise of the New Covenant that God will make with His people:

JEREMIAH 31:31-32 (MT)	JEREMIAH 31:31-32 (LXX)
<p>“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.</p>	<p>Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took hold of their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they abode not in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord (Apostle’s Bible).</p>
<p>הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נֹאמֵר יְהוָה וְכָרַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה׃ לֹא כִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם בַּיּוֹם הַחַזִּיקִי בְיָדָם לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם׃ אֲשֶׁר־הִקְמָה הִפְרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאָנֹכִי בְעַלְתִּי בָם נֹאמֵר יְהוָה׃</p> <p><i>hinneih yamim ba'im ne'um-ADONAI v'karati et-beit Yisrael v'et-beit Yehudah b'rit chadashah. lo k'brit asher karati et-avotam b'yom he'chezi'qi b'yadam l'hotzi'am m'eretz Mitzrayim asher-heimah hei'feiru et-b'riti v'anoki ba'alti bam ne'um-ADONAI</i></p>	<p>ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται φησὶν κύριος καὶ διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδα διαθήκην καινὴν οὐ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην ἣν διεθέμην τοῖς πατέραςιν αὐτῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν φησὶν κύριος</p> <p><i>idou hēmerai erchontai phēsin Kurios kai diathēsomai tō oikō Israēl kai tō oikō Iouda diathēkēn kainēn ou kata tēn diathēkēn hēn diethēmēn tois patrasin autōn en hēmera epilaboumenou mou tēs cheiros autōn exagagein autous ek gēs Aiguptou hoti autoi ouk enemeinan en tē diathēkē mou kai egō ēmelēsa autōn phēsin Kurios</i></p>

In Hebrews 8:8b-12, Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted by the author. Many pastors and lay readers, unfortunately, quickly jump through the verses that describe the New Covenant or *diathēkēn kainēn* (διαθήκην

²⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 189.

κακίῳ), expelling very little time and energy thinking through or contemplating what the New Covenant specifically involves. So, when glossing through **the single longest quote from the Old Testament in the New Testament**, many of today’s Christians errantly think that the Torah has no more validity or relevance in the post-resurrection era—when this is not at all what the Jeremiah 31:31-34 promise says! Furthermore, the author of Hebrews fully upholds how the New Covenant is delivered “WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH” (Hebrews 8:8b), and not to any separate “Church” entity. While the New Covenant affects all people, it is only accessible through Israel, which non-Jewish Believers have been integrated into via their Messiah faith (Romans 11:16-17; Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-13, 19; 3:6). The fact that the New Covenant is universal to all who place their faith in Yeshua the Messiah, would by necessity imply that non-Jewish Messiah followers are to be involved, to one degree or another, in the eschatological restoration of Israel.

As Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted by the author of Hebrews from the Greek Septuagint, the ancient translation of the Hebrew Tanach employed by the Diaspora Jewish Synagogue (among as many as thirty-five quotes or allusions to the LXX are seen in Hebrews), there are some slight differences witnessed.²⁸ We should by no means make the mistake of thinking, when we go to look up Jeremiah 31:31-34 in our Bibles, translated from the Hebrew Masoretic Text, that the author of Hebrews has somehow made a misquotation if things do not totally match up. (This is also true of other places in the Gospels or Apostolic Epistles where the Greek LXX, and not Hebrew MT, is quoted.)

Hebrews 8:9, quoting from Jeremiah 31:32, specifies the reason why the New Covenant is to be enacted. The Lord says that it is “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 CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.” The LXX translation largely conforms to what is seen in the MT, with the exception of the final phrase. The actual Hebrew of this clause in Jeremiah 31:32 reads with *v’anoki ba’alti bam* (בַּעַלְתִּי הִי בָאֲנֹכִי), meaning “though I was their husband” (RSV) or “though I espoused them” (NJPS). The Greek LXX, employed in Hebrews, contrasts this and has *kai egō hēmelēsa autōn* (καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν), “I had no concern for them” (NRSV).

Ellingworth thinks that “Hyme,lhsa is an LXX mistranslation of the Hebrew ‘although I was a husband to them,’”²⁹ even though he is examining it entirely from a text-critical point of view. It is certainly possible that the Septuagint Rabbis translated *ba’alti* as *hēmelēsa* to interject a theological opinion of God not concerning Himself with Israel for a season after the people broke His covenant. But it is also very possible that the Greek LXX is translating an overlooked and ancient definition of the Hebrew verb *ba’al* (בָּעַל). *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, for example, offers the definition “*to loathe, reject,*” absent from most lexicons. It compares the verb *ba’al* to its Semitic cognates in Arabic, and notes that “there are also other verbs, in which the sense of subduing, being high over, ruling, is applied to the signification of *looking down upon, despising, condemning,*”³⁰ hence by extension not having any concern or regard. This is obviously not a permanent action, because if it were, then the Lord would not seek to establish this New Covenant with His people. But it does indicate that for the season in which Jeremiah prophesied, Israel did need to be punished and He did look down on them with some strong displeasure.

8:10-12 Continuing the author’s affirmation that the priestly work of Yeshua has inaugurated the prophesied New Covenant, there are some more subtle differences to be aware of between the Hebrew MT of Jeremiah 31:33-34, and the Greek LXX version seen in Hebrews. These differences will not change one’s overall interpretation of the text, but do present some particular emphases that cannot go overlooked:

JEREMIAH 31:33-34 (MT)	JEREMIAH 31:31-32 (LXX)
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²⁸ Cf. Ellingworth, pp 37-42.

²⁹ Ibid., 416.

³⁰ H.F.W. Gesenius: *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 130.

<p>“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”</p>	<p>For this is my covenant which I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will surely put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not at all teach every one his fellow citizen, and every one his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them: for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins I will remember no more (LXE).</p>
<p>כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרַת אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים הַהֵם נֹאמְרֵיהֶן נִתְּנִי אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם וְעַל־לִבָּם אֶכְתַּבְנָה וְהָיִיתִי לֵהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהָיָה לִי לְעָם: וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת־אֲחֵיו לְאמֹר דַּע אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי־כֹלֵם יִדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמִקְטָנָם וְעַד־גְּדוּלָּם נֹאמְרֵיהֶן כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעֹנֵם וּלְחַטָּאתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר־עוֹד:</p> <p><i>ki zot ha'b'rit asher ekrot et-beit Yisrael acharei ha'yamim ha'hem ne'um-ADONAI nattati et-torati b'qirbam v'al-l'bam ektavannah v'hayi'ti l'hem l'Elohim v'heimah yih'yu-li l'am. v'lo yelam'du od ish et-rei'eihu v'ish et-achiyv l'mor de'u et-ADONAI ki- kulam yeid'u oti l'm'qetanam v'ad-gedolam ne'um- ADONAI ki eslach l'avonam u'l'chata'tam lo ezkor-od.</i></p>	<p>ὅτι αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη ἦν διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκεῖνας φησὶν κύριος διδοὺς δῶσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν καὶ οὐ μὴ διδάξωσιν ἕκαστος τὸν πολίτην αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ λέγων γνώθι τὸν κύριον ὅτι πάντες εἰδῆσουσίν με ἀπὸ μικροῦ αὐτῶν καὶ ἕως μεγάλου αὐτῶν ὅτι ἴλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι</p> <p><i>hoti autē hē diathēkē hēn diathēsomai tō oikō Israēl meta tas hēmeras ekeinas phēsīn Kurios didous dōsō nomous mou eis tēn dianoiān autōn kai epi kardias autōn grapsō autous kai esomai autois eis Theon kai autoi esontai moi eis laon kai ou mē didaxōsin hekastos ton politēn autou kai hekastos ton adelphon autou legōn gnōthi ton Kurion hoti pantes eidēsousin me apo mikrou autōn kai heōs megalou autōn hoti hileōs esomai tais adikiais autōn kai tōn hamartiōn autōn ou mē mnēsthō eti</i></p>

Hebrews 8:10 continues with quoting Jeremiah’s oracle from the LXX, where we encounter some variation with the MT: “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS.” In either the Hebrew or the Greek the overwhelming consensus is that the critical part of the New Covenant is that God says, “I will place My Torah within them and I will write it onto their heart” (Jeremiah 31:32, ATS). The Hebrew reads *nattati et-Torati b'qirbam* (נִתְּנִי אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם), “I will put my law within them” (RSV). Sometimes this is rendered with “inmost being” (NJPS) or “inward parts” (JBK). The Greek, however, adds a distinct dimension to this, reading *didous dōsō nomous mou eis tēn dianoiān* (διδούσ δῶσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν). The NIV of Jeremiah 31:32 follows the LXX reading in part and has “I will put my law in their minds.” Whether the Torah is written on the inward parts, heart, and/or minds—still implies that it is written onto the very psyche of God’s people.

A second difference, while less notable but quite important, between the Hebrew MT and Greek LXX of Jeremiah 31:33, is that the Hebrew only employs *torati* (תּוֹרָתִי) meaning “My Torah” (ATS) or “My Teaching”

(NJPS),³¹ in the singular, and the Greek uses *nomous* (νόμους) or “laws,” in the plural. Why does “laws” appear in the plural in the Greek? Guthrie suggests, “It may be that the translator wished to emphasize the separate parts of God’s law to distinguish these parts from the law of Moses as a complete unity,”³² which would certainly be the view of a Reformed theology that artificially sub-divides the Torah into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws. Still, the plural “laws” might better suggest that as the Holy Spirit writes God’s commandments onto the heart via the New Covenant, it is not something that happens all at once, and only takes place at the speed of an individual’s sanctification—a speed *only to be determined by the Spirit*.

The contrast between the previous Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant inaugurated by Yeshua’s priesthood, is that God’s commandments would no longer just be written on stone (Exodus 32:15-16), but now on the heart. We see a definite shift from an external to an internal emphasis. The unique rendering of the LXX, adding how God’s laws will be written on the human *dianoia* (διάνοια), only further buttresses how significant the New Covenant is. Not only will redeemed people be empowered by hearts that love God, but they will have minds that can compute who God is that will appreciate the value of His Law.

It is quite sad to see how many Bible readers just skip over the fact that the New Covenant promise includes an implantation of God’s laws onto the psyche of His people. Permanent forgiveness for sins and a restored relationship with God are offered for sure (Hebrews 8:11-12)—and that is why the New Covenant is superior to anything which had preceded it! But, the New Covenant most definitely includes the clear imperative for those affected by it to obey God. Bruce makes a direct reference to Romans 8:1-4, about the work of the Spirit inside of Believers accomplishing “the requirement of the Law,” also noting a variety of Tanach passages that describe obedience to the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26; Exodus 24:7).³³

It is interesting to observe the viewpoints that are made by Hebrews commentators, who have to recognize, that to some degree or another, the Torah is connected to the enactment of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33), as opposed to the two being at odds with one another. In the view of Lane, “The quality of newness intrinsic to the new covenant consists in the new manner of presenting God’s law and not in newness of content.”³⁴ deSilva also observes, “it speaks of an internalization of God’s commandments, an internal knowledge of, and commitment to do, God’s laws.”³⁵

While commentators do have to acknowledge some role that the Torah or Law plays within the dynamics of the New Covenant, they then move on without paying a great deal of attention to it. No time is really spent discussing what it means for a redeemed person—as mentioned in Hebrews—to have the laws of God written on the heart and mind.

What “laws” (*nomous*, νόμους) are written onto the hearts and minds of God’s people? No mature Believer disagrees with the fact that what is Divinely implanted into their psyche is the requirement to love God and neighbor, considered by our Lord Yeshua to be the foremost of the commandments.³⁶ The bulk of the Torah’s commandments relate to such a love imperative, and detail what the proper ethics and morality of God’s people are to be, and how people are to interact with one another, showing one another value and respect. The real issue, as Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood has inaugurated the New Covenant, is whether this signals an end to things like the Sabbath rest, appointed times, or a kosher diet—all of which today’s Messianic movement believes were not annulled by Yeshua or the Apostles.

In principle, the Torah does certainly remain in effect for this era of the New Covenant, but with Yeshua’s priesthood there has come “a change of law” (Hebrews 7:12), as there are new post-resurrection realities to

³¹ Note that the UBSHNT, while largely being a modern Hebrew translation of the GNT, follows the Hebrew of Jeremiah 31:33 in Hebrews 8:10, employing *torati*. The CJB follows suit, having “my Torah.”

³² Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 174.

³³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 189, fn #54.

He also points out the Greek of Revelation 21:3, which employs the plural *laoi* (λαοί) or “peoples,” meaning that Israel proper is not the only beneficiary of the New Covenant promise (Ibid., pp 189-190).

³⁴ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47a:209.

³⁵ deSilva, *Hebrews*, 285.

³⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

be considered. The thoughts of Old Testament theologian Walter C. Kaiser should be well taken here. He says, “Only those laws from which Christ releases his church may be jettisoned,”³⁷ meaning those things directly impacted by the Messiah’s sacrificial work. Kaiser and today’s Messianics actually have no disagreement on the validity of the Torah; we just differ on the matter of *how much* actually has changed with Yeshua’s arrival.

Issues like *Shabbat*, the appointed times, the kosher laws, circumcision, etc.—and passages within the Apostolic Scriptures that have been frequently interpreted as speaking against these practices—need to be worked through contextually and historically, *and with patience*. Have these things really been rendered inoperative in this era of the New Covenant, or have Bible readers possibly missed certain things from First Century Judaism, which can affect our interpretation of certain verses? This requires further study and research of the Gospels and Apostolic Epistles on the part of today’s Messianics.

The great irony of common Christian interpretations and views of Hebrews 8:8b-11, quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34, is that while many haphazardly jump through the text and do not sit down to consider it closely—and many Christian theologians, pastors, and teachers strongly insist that the Torah has been abolished—**most spiritual, evangelical Christians actually keep the majority of the Law of Moses**. Those who come from holiness and pietistic traditions have always looked to the Torah’s instructions on how to be godly, ethical people who follow Christ. There are actually *only a few* course corrections that have to be enacted in terms of things which have often been viewed as just being “Jewish”—which today’s Messianic movement is being positioned to present to our brothers and sisters in the institutional Church, as relevant for their lives, in the future. Specifically, these are areas that only an historically and Jewish-conscious reading of the Apostolic Scriptures will reveal, and often includes the consideration of data and research that previous generations did not have access to. (Learning how to approach this constructively with other Believers, guided by the Torah’s imperative to love, may be a challenge in the short term.)

The greatest emphasis of the New Covenant promise, anticipated by Jeremiah 31:34, and quoted in Hebrews 8:11-12, is the intimate knowing of God and the permanent forgiveness He provides by the work of His Son: “AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, “KNOW THE LORD,” FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.” Yeshua the Messiah’s priestly work is what has brought this reality into the lives of those affected by the gospel. **It is perfectly valid**, in the sentiments of evangelical Christianity, **to recognize that the New Covenant brings one into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ**. Knowing the Lord does not just involve knowing about Him or being reckoned as a member of His people, but brings a new standing of intimacy and being with Him, where we can approach Him with all of our needs (cf. Hebrews 4:16).

8:13 Similar to the translation issues of Hebrews 8:7, where *diathēkē* or “covenant” (noted in the NASU by *italics*) does not appear in the source text, so is this same issue present in the closing remark of Hebrews 8:13a: “[I]n the saying ‘new’” (YLT), *en tō legein kainēn* (ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινῆν). With Yeshua’s new *priesthood*, or perhaps also *ministry* or even (Heavenly) *tabernacle* service, the Levitical service was going to fade into history.

For the remainder of Hebrews 8:13, there are also translation issues. The NASU renders this with “He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear,” yet there are actually two Greek verbs, with one of them used twice, both relating to growing old, that should be translated along “ageing” lines. The first of these is *pepalaiōken* (πεπαλαιώκειν), and as Ellingworth notes, “the active voice means ‘declare old,’”³⁸ as opposed to the more common “obsolete.” The second usage that concerns us is the clause *palaioumenon kai gēraskon* (παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον), employing the previous verb *palaiōō* (παλαιόω), and another verb, *gēraskō* (γηράσκω). Just as *palaiōō* means “to be old or antiquated” (LS),³⁹ so does *gēraskō* similarly mean “to bring to old age” (LS).⁴⁰ Most Bibles render these two participles together as

³⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 312.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 418.

³⁹ LS, 586.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

“becoming obsolete and growing old” (NASU) or “old and worn out” (Good News Bible). But a more accurate rendition of these two verbs is simply “growing old and ageing” (NEB).⁴¹ LITV offers a good translation of Hebrews 8:13 in its entirety:

“In the saying, New, He has made the first old. And the thing being made old and growing aged is near disappearing.”

And what was preparing to disappear?⁴² If Hebrews was indeed written in the mid-to-late 60s C.E., then these are observations made between the thirty to forty year period *after* the sacrifice of Yeshua, His ascension into Heaven, and Yeshua’s Melchizedekian priesthood inaugurating the era of New Covenant. As a result of this, the Levitical priesthood is considered to be “old,” and looking back on this two millennia later, it did disappear with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The First Century Believers need not have been disturbed because the new priesthood of Yeshua was already ministering *for them* before the Father in Heaven, with a still-functioning Levitical priesthood that was “growing old and ageing” (NEB).

For the author of Hebrews, the animal sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood were no longer necessary because of the final sacrifice of Yeshua and the service of His Melchizedekian priesthood. The first *priesthood/tabernacle/ministry* has now given way to the *priesthood/tabernacle/ministry* of Yeshua in Heaven, which offers a permanent sacrifice and eternal forgiveness for sin. As a direct result of Yeshua’s salvation work for us, the promised New Covenant can now come into play, as redeemed Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and supernaturally enabled to keep the Torah’s commandments—the foremost of which would be love for God and neighbor.

⁴¹ Similarly appearing as “growing old and aging” in Bruce, *Hebrews*, 187.

⁴² Grk. *aphanismos* (ἀφανισμός); “the condition of being no longer visible...” (*BDAG*, 155).