



INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 8:1-13

“Keeping the main thing the main thing” was the marketing slogan of Ford many years ago. In a struggling US industry, facing deep financial challenges, many motor car companies were diversifying as a means to stay afloat. Ford deemed it wise to stick to what they knew, and so they focused on manufacturing motor vehicles.

By all accounts, Ford is today one of the leading motor vehicle companies with a healthy bottom line and a quality product. Several years ago, when several US motor vehicle companies applied for government financial bail-out, Ford was the lone company who refused to do so. Today, they are out of debt and very profitable. Because they stuck to the main thing they are the better off for it. Shareholders are happy and customers are overwhelmingly satisfied. The adage that seemed to stick many years—Fix or Repair Daily—rarely applies.

The writer to the Hebrews would have agreed with Ford’s slogan because keeping the main thing the main thing was precisely what he was seeking to do with this epistle. Of course, the main “thing” is not a product but rather a person, the second person of the Godhead, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this epistle, the anonymous author seeks to focus all attention on the Saviour, our glorious High Priest. (Perhaps this was the major reason for his anonymity: He desired all the attention to be on Jesus Christ.)

You will recall that the writer was deeply concerned that some Hebrew Christians were being tempted to revert to Judaism. They were tempted to return to the temple rituals, thereby resulting in a departure—an apostasy—from Christ. They were being tempted to depart from the gospel message of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone to a works-focused approach to God. They were tempted to turn back to a weak and ultimately useless means of drawing near to God (7:18--19). In other words, they were being tempted to fall away from the better hope of drawing near to God offered through God’s Son (7:25).

What is so sad is that the entire Judaistic system of worship with its Levitical rituals was designed to point to the main thing; that is, to the Lord Jesus Christ. These Hebrews were guilty of not keeping the main thing the main thing. In fact, this is precisely what he says in 8:1: “Now this is the main point.”

In every well-constructed sermon, the preacher has a main point, and the congregation is helped when this is pointed out. This is what our writer does here. It has taken him a while to get here, but here we are. If you want to know the theme of the epistle to the Hebrews, look no further than chapter 8.¹

Watch It  Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #13; Heb. 8:1-13 www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples

¹ Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <https://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/the-crowning-affirmation/>

Open it

1. If your family and friends had to describe you, what one word answers might they give about you?

Read it

Hebrews 8:1-13

Explore it

2. Where is our High Priest seated?
3. How do earthly priests serve Christ in verse 5?
4. Why did the old covenant not stand the test of time?
5. What will be different about the New Covenant from the Old?
6. What will God do with our sins and iniquities?
7. What was happening to the old covenant?

Apply it

“The Best”

Summing up in a sort of bullet-point fashion the major subjects treated thus far, the author of Hebrews begins, “Now the main point in what has been said is this” (8:1):

- *We have a great High Priest who is greater than those of the old covenant. (8:1)*
- *Our High Priest sits in the heavens at the right hand of God. (8:1)*
- *He ministers in the true tabernacle made by God, not by man. (8:2)²*

8. How have the previous chapters served the readers well in establishing that Jesus is worthy to be “The Great High Priest Forever”?

9. What kind of error might these Hebrew believers have fallen into had the Author only addressed Jesus as high Priest but not the covenant itself?

² Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Hebrews (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 12) (p. 123). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

In verse 1 the author says Christ is seated “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” This makes his priesthood completely different. The old priesthood was a terrestrial priesthood, which focused on the earthly calling of the priests. They became priests because they were born into the tribe of Levi. Priests from that tribe fulfilled this role over and over and from generation to generation. But Christ, the great high priest, serves in an exalted status never occupied by those earthly priests. As such, he’s seated at the right hand of God on high.³

10. Jesus Christ is seated in heavenly holy of holies. What makes this place as well as His posture help each of us to persevere in our faith, particularly in difficult times of trials and tribulation?

11. Christ is seated in Heaven having made complete our redemption. What if anything do we do to complete our part of the work that He has done in our own lives?

³ Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (p. 120). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The words “holy place”(ESV) or “sanctuary” (NIV) means “a sacred place,” and the tabernacle referenced is said to be the “true” one. This does not mean true as opposed false. Rather, as the following verses make clear, he is contrasting the substance over the shadow; the antitype over the type; the eternal over the temporal. The tabernacle that God commanded Moses to build was not a false tabernacle. It served a purpose. But it was limited in that it was earthly. Jesus, however, sits and serves (“a minister”) in the heavenly, perfect and eternal tabernacle in heaven. The point is that this was always the purpose of the tabernacle made by man: to point to the fulfilment in Christ.⁴

12. Read John 2:13-17. What had happened to the temple of God and what priestly work did Jesus do to it?

“I Idolize You”

But though the writer is not denigrating the tabernacle (and the later temple), it can be said that if a person rejected Christ in favour of sacrificial ritual at the temple, then indeed the temple could be said to be false.⁵

13. The Jews in the New Testament were more enthralled with the significance and proximity of the temple than that of Messiah. This is religion's greatest weapon: Focusing on that which is secondary instead of what is primary. How does someone prevent putting the rituals and systems of Christianity before Christ?

⁴ Sermon excerpt by Doug Van Meter found @ <https://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/the-crowning-affirmation/>

⁵ ibid

The idea of the Law of Moses being defective in any way would have been unthinkable for the Jews! The Law was the foundation of their entire way of life. It was the basis of their religious worship, which was the very warp and woof of being a Jew. In chapter 7, the author argued that the change of the priesthood required a change of the law also, since the two were inextricably bound together...The reason for replacing the old covenant was that it was defective. He is quick to add that the problem was not with the Law itself, but with the people who failed to keep it: "For finding fault with them" (8:8).⁶

14. What specific ways did the Mosaic Law and the Levitical Priesthood serve as a shadow of things to come? In what ways is Jesus and the New Covenant superior as verse 6 declares?

"Talk to My Heart"

This is why the writer of Hebrews quotes extensively from Jeremiah 31:31-34. His point is to demonstrate from the Old Testament Scriptures themselves that the covenant under Moses was imperfect and required replacement by a new covenant that was faultless (Heb. 8:7). In this context, the term "faultless"—applied exclusively to the new covenant—does not imply that the old covenant was sinful, but that it was insufficient. It could not accomplish eternal salvation nor bring about perfect righteousness. It was adequate for what it was meant to do—to serve as a standard and reminder of human sinfulness (Rom. 7:7; Heb. 10:3) and to hold back wickedness among God's people until the coming of the Messiah (Gal. 3:19).⁷

15. Look at the promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 which the writer cites in verse 8-12. What would this help to convince the audience of? How does the new covenant deal with our greatest problem of sin once and for all?

⁶ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-23-better-priest-better-covenant-hebrews-81-13>

⁷ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Hebrews (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 12) (pp. 125-126). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

16. With the New Covenant, God puts His law in our minds and writes it on our hearts (Heb. 8:10). How have you experienced this? How does the presence of God's grace in Christ make this covenant radically different from the old one?

“What’s Love Got to Do With It”

Our passage is a reminder that there is a new high priest who is Jesus and he has brought a new covenant to his people. While the old revealed man's sin, the new removes sin, and gives him a pure heart. While the old required perfect obedience, the new gives God's Spirit to his people because Jesus obeyed it perfectly on our behalf. Where the old demanded the blood of lambs to put off God's wrath, the new uses the sacrifice of Jesus to save us wholly and completely from the wrath of God.⁸

17. **If total and habitual adherence to the Old Covenant was the proper response for the Jewish people, what is the proper response for the Christian when it comes to this far more superior New Covenant? Helpful Hint: (Read Psalm 51:1-17; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 40:6-8 and apply these passages to your life.)**

⁸ Study notes by Tim Badal