Hebrews 8:1- 13

**Digging Deeper in the Word**

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***Hebrews 8:1–13*** (ESV)  
**1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, **2** a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. **3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **4** Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. **5** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” **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. **7** For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. **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.

1. What are the focus points of Hebrews 8 in its entirety?

The main ideas that are to be focused on in Hebrews 8 are the priesthood, the tabernacle, and priestly duties, whether it be by the Levitical priesthood or by the Melchizedek priesthood. While covenants are mentioned in this passage, the context of this passage is primarily on priesthoods.

1. In Heb. 8:2, the author uses the word “tabernacle” (tent; GK *skene*) as opposed to the temple. In an era where the temple was the main geographical location for worship, why does the author use the word tabernacle? See Acts 7:37-43 and Mat. 21:12-13.

***Acts 7:37–43*** (ESV)  
**37** This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ **38** This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. **39** Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, **40** saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ **41** And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. **42** But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: “ ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? **43** You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

***Matthew 21:12–13*** (ESV)  
**12** And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. **13** He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

During Yeshua’s time, and even in the era after his death, the temple was seen in some sense as a place of corruption. The temple had become a place of business, leaders would murder for power, and the Jews would bow to Rome in ways that defiled their religious practices.

1. Why does the author describe Yeshua’s tabernacle as the “true tent”?

a) **true** in the sense that it is the real thing… the physical tabernacle was a **representation** of the real tabernacle.

b) **true** in the sense that it was **not false**, as in the corrupted version that existed in Jerusalem at that time.

1. What is the difference between a tent that YHWH pitches (see Num. 24:5-6) versus a tent that is pitched otherwise?

***Numbers 24:5–6*** (ESV)  
**5** How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! **6** Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that YHWH has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters.

Like the Tabernacle, when YHWH pitches a tent, it is a source of life. Yeshua is a tent that is pitched by YHWH and it is unstained, pure and clean, free from the religious pressure applied by the Pharisees to obey the man-made commandments and oral traditions.  A tent pitched by man is destined to fail. The author uses the Tabernacle in contrast with the Temple as a way to illustrate that YHWH’s Tabernacle needs to be the focus, not the Temple that these Jewish believers are no longer welcome to worship at.

1. What is the point of Heb 8:3? What did Yeshua have to offer?

He offered the truly perfect sacrifice – his sinless life.

1. In Heb. 8:3-4, the author states that if Yeshua were on the earth, he wouldn’t be a high priest since there is a priesthood that already offers gifts and sacrifices.  Why wouldn’t Yeshua have been an earthly high priest?

The priesthood is restricted by the bloodline of Aaron. Even up to the date of this letter being written, gifts and sacrifices were still offered at the Temple.  Notice that verse 4 says, “according to the Torah”. According to the Torah, Yeshua could not have been a high priest since the Torah permits only the line of Aaron to be high priest.

1. In Heb 8:4 what does the phrase “since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law” suggest regarding the time when this letter to the Hebrews was written?

The present tense suggest that the temple has not yet been destroyed, and that at the time of the writing there were still priest actively offering sacrifices at the temple. So this suggests a writing prior to 70 AD.

1. “Heb 8:5 says the earthly priests “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” What are they “serving”, and what is this a copy of shadow of?

They “serve” the tabernacle. They light the menorah, place the bread, burn incense, offer sacrifice, and enter the holy of holies once a year into the presence of God on behalf of all the people.

Was this a copy of the priesthood of Melchizedek? Yes, but also more than that. Even the priesthood of Melchizedek was a picture the TRUE priesthood – that of Yeshua, who sits at the right hand of Elohim, in the TRUE tabernacle. This is the dwelling place of YHWH. And this is where Yeshua sits to mediate on our behalf to the Father.

As you consider the next several questions, note the literal wording of Heb 8:6-7: *“But as it is, he attained a service that is more excellent than, as he is the mediator of a better covenant enacted on better promises. For if the first had been faultless there would be no need for a second.”*

1. In Heb 8:6, Yeshua attained a **service** more excellent than the old. What does this refer to?

The service of the high priest, as he served in the tabernacle (or temple). Yeshua’s service as high priest was more excellent that the service of the earthy high priests.

1. Furthermore, Yeshua is “mediating” a covenant, a covenant that is apparently in some way better than a prior covenant. What was the prior covenant and who mediated it (see Exo. 19:4-8 and Num. 25:10-14).

***Exodus 19:4–8*** (ESV)  
**4** ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and **keep my covenant**, **you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’** These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” **7** So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that YHWH had commanded him. **8** All the people answered together and said, “All that YHWH has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to YHWH.

***Numbers 25:10–14*** (ESV)  
**10** And YHWH said to Moses, **11** “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. **12** Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, **13** and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him **the covenant of a perpetual priesthood**, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.’ ” **14** The name of the slain man of Israel, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, chief of a father’s house belonging to the Simeonites.

The lesser covenant was received by Moses, detailing the high priesthood and ordinances for its existence and proper functioning.  Since the Messiah initiated the new covenant, the role of high priest is being transferred to his priesthood.

It’s not clear whether the prior covenant refers specifically the “covenant of a perpetual priesthood” or more generally to the entire covenant first made with Abraham, and then revealed in more detail throughout the generations, culminated with the specifics of the Torah given to Moses, which included the Aaronic priesthood.

1. In Heb. 8:6, the author says that the new covenant is better since it is *enacted* (GK *nomotheteo*) on better promises.  We see this word one other time in the New Testament- Hebrews 7:11.  What is the definition of *nomotheteo* and how does this help explain the prophetic text to come in verse 8?

*Nomotheteo* means to be “given by the Torah”, “ordained by Torah”, “regulated by Torah”, or “found by Torah” if applied to this context.  **The better covenant is “given by Torah”** based on better promises. It is based on the promise of the Holy Spirit helping us to desire to keep the Torah.

***Heb 8:6*** he is the mediator of a better covenant ***enacted***  ***/ nomotheteo*** on better promises

***Hebrews 7:11*** (ESV)  
**11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood **(for under it the people *received the law / nomotheteo*),** what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? [This phrase is impossible to translate literally into English and have it read smoothly. It is literally: “**for the people under it [it= the priesthood], given by the Torah.**” In other words, “the regulations of the priesthood, which the people are under, are **given by Torah.**”

It is interesting to note that both the prior and the new covenants are “given by Torah”!!

1. What were the promises of the Mosaic covenant? See Lev 26:1-20. Also, what priesthood functioned under this covenant?

The promises of the Mosaic covenant were earthly blessings for obedience but it never produced justification.  It provided punishments and sometimes death for crimes of disobedience, but it couldn’t justify a person in the face of eternal judgment from YHWH. The priesthood of Aaron functioned under this covenant.

However, keeping the covenant included making sacrifices which atoned for sins, and did result in righteousness. Sacrifices were continually needed, because there was always sin to deal with. These sacrifices, along with all the rest of the obedience to Torah, were to be done in faith, knowing that somehow God would by his grace see them as righteous people. Of course, in God’s bigger plan, this all foreshadowed what the Messiah would do, as he sacrificed once for all sin.

1. Since Yeshua is the *mediator* of a covenant based on better promises, from whom do these better promises originate?  What *are* those promises?  What priesthood functions under *this* covenant?

These promises originate from Abraham. The promises gave Abraham offspring and established an eternal lineage to Abraham through faith.  Yeshua mediates this covenant after the order of Melchizedek. As verse 6 states, Yeshua obtained this priesthood. From whom?

The better promises are stated in Jer 31:33 (Heb 8:10). See also Ezek 36:26-28.

***Hebrews 8:10*** (ESV)  
**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.

***Ezekiel 36:26–28*** (ESV)  
**26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you**. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** **And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.** **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The promise of the first covenant can be summarized by “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”. But since the people failed at their part, the new covenant adds better promises for their benefit: “I **will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.”**  Furthermore, YHWH promises now that he **“will remember their sins no more”.** The sacrifice of Yeshua has paid for these sins once and for all time.

1. As noted above, in Heb. 8:7, the word covenant (*diathekes*) is not present. It was simply inserted as the likely referent from the prior sentence. *“For if* ***the first*** *had been faultless, there would be no need for the second.”* So it’s implied that “**the first**” was somehow faulty. What was faulty and why?

Since there is no word, we can’t say for certain what the author is speaking of. There are several possibilities.

a) first refers to **the** **priesthood**. Although this would make sense, it seems somewhat unlikely that this would be the grammatical reference since the word occurs nowhere in the prior sentences.

b) first refers to **the ministry or service** (of the priesthood). This is a distinct possibility as this noun is used in the prior sentence. In meaning, the service of the priesthood is basically the same as if it were talking about the priesthood. The first priesthood was indeed faulty. High priests died, new ones were instated, and sacrifices were given endlessly.  The second priesthood, the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, is the priesthood that we have been waiting for and have found in Yeshua.

c) first refers **the covenant**. This is also a distinct possibility since this noun is most recently used. This would seem strange at first, since we would not call covenants made by YHWH “faulty”. But if we think of it more like “there was a problem with the first covenant… the problem was that the people didn’t keep it.” Over time, Israel broke their covenants with YHWH numerous times. They did not keep the Torah. They clearly needed help. This help was given in the form of the Holy Spirit, and his writing the Torah on their hearts so they will desire to keep it.

It seems most likely that first refers to the first covenant, since in the next verses, the author specifies where the fault of the first was. He states that **“the house of Israel”** and “**the house of Judah**” were at fault because they “**did not continue in my covenant**.” This implies “the first” refers to the original covenant. It is faulty in the sense that the people did not keep their end of it.

Also this makes sense in light the discussion below re Heb 8:13 and the phrase “in the calling of it new”. The ONLY time in the prior passage anything was referred to as new, was in the quote from Jer 31, which speaks of “ a new covenant”. So there was **nothing** called new **except** the covenant of Jer 31.

1. Who or what does YHWH find fault with in Heb. 8:8? Note that it literally says “he finds fault with **them** [plural].”

Carrying on from verse 7, this can either mean YHWH’s covenant(s), the priests of the priesthood, or the people in general. It seems to make most sense that this **refers to the people in genera**l, since the **Jeremiah passage speaks to the house of Israel and talks of them not continuing in the covenant**. And then the “better” promises writing the Torah on their hearts and minds so that this time they would truly continue in the covenant.

1. Who is the new covenant for- according to Heb. 8:8?  How does one become part of this new covenant? See Mat. 15:21-28, Mat. 3:7-10, and Rom. 11:17-20.

In order to be a part of the new covenant, you must be either a part of the house of Israel or with the house of Judah. What is important, however, is that faith grafts even the most pagan of people into Israel.  Israel is not a religion based on family ties or heritage, but faith is what binds together all people who want to love and obey YHWH.

1. What is new about the new covenant in Heb. 8:10-11? Are these the “better promises”?

* YHWH will put the Torah in our minds.
* YHWH will write the Torah on our hearts.
* YHWH will be our God and we will be his people.
* Israel will not need to teach each other, for all Israel will know YHWH.
* YHWH will remember our sins no more.

1. Consider carefully the literal reading of Hebrews 8:13: “***In the speaking of it ‘new’, he [calls] the first ‘old.’”*** Note that the word *covenant* is not used, and the word translated as *obsolete* simply means “*to become old or to wear out*.” So what is actually being called “*old or worn out*”? See also Gal 3:15-18.

***Galatians 3:15–18*** (ESV)  
**15** To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. **17** This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. **18** For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

The priesthood is the context of this chapter, not the covenant. Paul himself states that covenants cannot be annulled. They cannot be made obsolete.  YHWH finds fault with the old priesthood, and the new priesthood, mediated and led by Yeshua, will transfer the Torah into our minds and hearts as opposed to tablets of stone.

Yet, “in the speaking of it **‘new’**” clearly refers to something that was just called “new”. The only time “new” was used is in **Heb 8:8 “I will establish a new covenant.**” The priesthood was never called ‘new’. So the inevitable conclusion here is that “new” must refer to the “new covenant” of Jer 31:31.

It is helpful to realize that “obsolete” is better translated as “old”. The prior covenant is indeed growing old or “wearing out.” This is a process. The new covenant has been initiated, and is in the process of being implemented more fully as we approach the return of Yeshua. The role of the priesthood has now changed since we have Yeshua as high priest and have the benefit of his sacrifice. Likewise the Torah’s role as “guardian” (in Galatians 24-25) is no longer needed, now that we have the Holy Spirit. So there are aspects of the old covenant that are no longer needed as it diminishes while the new covenant grows into its fullness.

1. What is getting old and being ready to disappear, as stated in Heb. 8:13?

There are two options.

* 1. The old covenant is “wearing out” and the new covenant is eventually going to make the old covenant vanish away. This is in the process of happening. When the new covenant is finally fully in place (probably at the return of the Messiah), then the old covenant will be “worn out”. It will have served its usefulness, having been replaced with a better covenant (still the same Torah, but now written on our hearts).
  2. The old priesthood and tabernacle from the Mosaic covenant is growing old, as the Melchizedekian priesthood through Yeshua is now the eternal, spiritual, and permanent system of sacrifice. The fact is that for the past 2000 years there has been no temple and no Levitical priesthood. So thus, a very large component of the commands of the first covenant are no longer able to be fulfilled, and have already vanished. Note however that even in the future temple, after Yeshua returns, it seems the Levitical priesthood will be functioning again. See Ezek 44:15.