

Hebrews Chapter 8 – John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is the following series of questions: What do I do about the rituals that my priests or pastors do at my church? How do their rituals affect me if Jesus is in charge of my life? What about other rituals that I go through as a Christian? Are they necessary if Jesus is to guide me? In summary, how does Jesus guide me in comparison to other Christian rituals that I observe?
 - a) To explain that title, remember last week's title was "Why should I trust Jesus as my priest when I got this guy right next to me?" In effect, this lesson continues to ask a similar sort of question. In the last lesson, we looked at the differences between what priests on earth are called to do versus what Jesus wants us to do. In this lesson, the question is in effect, "What about the rituals performed by Christians, are they necessary for my life?"
 - b) To understand why this issue is significant, let's return to Israel around Jesus' time. For over a thousand years prior to Jesus, the Jewish priests (called "rabbi's") had a series of rituals ordained in the Old Testament for the forgiveness of sin. The book of Hebrews was originally written to Jewish people that accepted Jesus. Do they stop those rituals?
 - i) What about rituals in Christian churches? I myself grew up attending a Roman Catholic Church. Are all of those rituals necessary? Even most Protestant and Orthodox churches have rituals as part of their worship service that are symbolic of "biblical" things. This lesson ponders the question, what is the necessity of those rituals in comparison to my relationship with Jesus as my priest before God the Father? Let me also state, it is not my goal here to get anyone to hate their church rituals or even to put down rituals that are common in church. My goal is to get us to understand the role of Jesus as our priest before God the Father in comparison to our own rituals we perform as Christians.
2. Speaking of continuing topics from the last lesson, this chapter also expands upon another topic from the last lesson: Understanding the key difference between the Old Testament compared to the New Testament. In the last lesson, I briefly explained what the word "testament" means and why it is significant. The key point is that God made conditional and unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, God also makes conditional and unconditional promises to the Christian church. The key difference of how God is to be approached in the "Old" versus the "New" is what I call "necessity versus gratitude".
 - a) What that means in effect is here are God's standards to be in right standing before Him. Those standards are the Old Testament laws. To be forgiven in the Old Testament, one had to ask for God's forgiveness out of necessity and go through rituals to repent. In the New Testament one is already forgiven based on our trust in Jesus, and therefore, we are to live a life pleasing to God not out of necessity to please Him, but out of gratitude for what He has already done for us by dying for our sins.
 - b) OK most of us Christians already know that. The question that all Christians, including myself must regularly ask ourselves is what am I trusting in for the complete payment of my sins over and above what Jesus already did for me?
 - i) When it comes to rituals, there is nothing wrong with watching a "show" at church if we know it represents things God did for us or things that we should do for Him. The danger is trusting in those rituals to make us "more holy". It is kind of like thinking, "I'm good with God for now, because I'm at church this week."
 - ii) Other examples might be when we do a good deed and we think God must love me more now, because I just did "this"? What is worse is when we think that He will now judge us more favorably in heaven because we just did "this".
 - c) The underlying point of this chapter is not to be an expert in Jewish laws and customs, but to understand the danger of trusting in our own rituals as compared to fully trusting in Jesus as our high priest. With that said, let me start Verse 1 and explain this better.

3. Hebrews Chapter 8, Verse 1: The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.
- a) When the text starts with "The point of what we are saying", one usually has to look back at previous text to see what "it" refers to. I think the point is simply that Jesus is our priest (representative) before God the Father in heaven. If that is true, we don't need to go through any rituals to please Him when we got something better in heaven.
 - b) This chapter is going to go on to explain what is the "true tabernacle" (Verse 2) in heaven, so I won't touch that concept yet. The point is to understand Jesus role as our priest in heaven, and what that means for our lives daily. It means we don't have to perform any rituals in order to please Him. As Christians we do what God the Father desires us to do out of gratitude, not out of necessity. In other words, obedience is part of the Christian life, but we are obedient not to "earn points" with God, but because we are grateful for what He has done for us. Out of gratitude it should be our desire to please God.
 - c) What the writer of Hebrews wants us to grasp is that because we have Jesus in heaven desiring to guide our lives, we don't have to try to please Him with our rituals.
 - i) So what rituals are you talking about? It could refer to rituals that our local church performs each week. If one is thinking God must be pleased with me because I am involved with (or watching) this ritual at my church, then one is trusting in that ritual and not Jesus to guide one's life.
 - ii) It could also refer to something as simple and obvious as bible study itself. I heard Jon Curson explain it this way: Many Christians trust in "God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Bible" (as opposed to the Holy Spirit). What he meant was that people think they are in good standing before God because they read their bible every day. I'm not condemning bible study. I'm saying that if one is trusting in the ritual of studying the bible in order to be pleasing to God, one is failing to trust in Jesus to guide one's life.
 - iii) Let me explain it one more way: If one is trusting Jesus is guiding our lives, we should trust what is taught in the bible as true. Yes we grow in our knowledge of God by studying the bible. However, there should be an instinctive thought that comes in our head as we read it and say, "I know this is correct". A nonbeliever can read the bible not believe it is true. A believer is one who has Jesus guiding our lives and understanding that what one is reading in the bible is in fact the word of God. That concept is an example of Jesus guiding our lives.
 - d) OK John, I get the idea that Jesus wants to guide my life. Give me a situation and explain how it applies to me. Let's suppose we are dealing with some problem right now. Does Jesus just literally tell me what to do next? Sometimes when we pray, we do get an idea of what to do next. Often we just have to go forward, make the best decision possible and trust that God is guiding us. It is usually a matter of bringing our situation in prayer to God and saying in effect, "I don't know what to do next. However, Jesus, You are in charge of my life and I'm trusting You to help me make the best decision possible". Then go forward, do what one believes God is guiding you to do and trust Him for the results.
 - e) What about tragedies? I recently heard about an old friend who lost their two-year old grandson in a drowning accident. How does Jesus guide us in something like that? First, I would take comfort that the baby is in heaven based on the fact that God does not hold young children accountable for their lives. (See 2nd Samuel 12:23 as my biblical support of that concept.) God never ever promises us a pain free life. He promises that He is still there with us and will guide us through tragic times.
 - f) What about situations that are beyond our control? What if someone else is in the picture and I can't do what I believe God is calling me to do? Pray one's way through it and say, "God if this is Your will, help me to accept it and if You can change it, make it possible."

- g) The point of all of these comments and examples is to understand that Jesus as our priest wants to guide our lives. All of the rituals and things we trust in to try to please God the Father are in effect a "waste of time" if we are performing those things in order to try to be pleasing to God. Those rituals may be good things if they comfort us or if they help us to grow in our knowledge of Him. The point is to understand that such things don't earn us "points" with God. His grace and His complete forgiveness of all of our sins have already completely covered all of our sins, past present and future.
 - h) But John, you gave us a speech a lesson or two back about working hard for Jesus. You stated that Paul worked hard the rest of his life to make a difference for Jesus once he was saved. You also stated there are rewards in heaven for trusting in Him. So how does "working hard" for Jesus differ from say, "reading our bible every day" as a ritual?
 - i) The issue of the moment is to understand the role of Jesus as our priest in heaven as opposed to understanding our own rituals that we perform as believers. There is nothing wrong with doing good things to help others grow in their trust and knowledge of God. There is nothing wrong with say studying our bible in order to learn what He desires of us. The issue is are we doing these things in order to try to prove our worth to God, or are we doing them out of gratitude for what He has already done for us? I know that I find myself every so often in effect, patting myself on my back for my good works. That is what the author of Hebrews is warning against: Trusting in our rituals in order to try to please God as opposed to just doing them out of gratitude for Him.
 - ii) If one can grasp that concept of being a good Christian out of gratitude and not out of necessity, then one not only understands Hebrews Chapter 8, but one then understands the type of relationship Jesus wants with us as Christian believers.
 - iii) Meanwhile, we only got through Verses 1 and 2 so far.
4. Verse 3: Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer.
- a) To understand this verse, one has to understand the Jewish system of gifts and sacrifices. In other words, they could not approach God "empty handed". They had to bring animals to be sacrificed as well as other types of offerings. To put it simply, Jewish priests in those days had to bring offerings for themselves and for other people willing to make offerings.
 - b) OK John, so what? God wants us to realize that because He is "holy" (think perfect) we have to come to Him willing to be perfectly forgiven. Those animals that were sacrificed were people saying to God, "I understand what I did was wrong, and I don't want to die just yet, so let me offer this innocent animal to remember that sin "cost me something". What it cost me was my failure to trust God to guide my life and I seek His forgiveness.
 - i) OK John, again so what? We as Christians don't bring animals to church to be sacrificed. However, we do bring, say money to be donated or our efforts to be involved with our church service. It is necessary to state that there is nothing wrong with giving at church or getting involved in our church rituals. The issue is are we trusting in those things in order to try to prove our value to God, or are we doing them out of gratitude for what He has already done for our lives?
 - c) All of this leads me back to explaining why all of those priests' sacrifices were necessary. One has to remember that God designed the whole system of Old Testament sacrifices for sins. Therefore, it is hard for Jewish people to grasp the idea that those sacrifices are no longer necessary now that Jesus has died for one's sins. Yes, one can state how all of those rituals are prophecy to lead to Jesus death. That is "step one". The next step is to realize that because our sins are already forgiven, we don't have to prove our worth to God.
 - i) In summary, trusting in Jesus as our priest before God the Father is a better system than the Old Testament rituals or any other rituals in order to be pleasing to God.

- d) What I am getting at is to help us all understand why a "New Testament" was necessary. Many religious Jewish people can easily think, "Why do I need a new system to trust in God when the one that has been used for thousands of years by Jewish people and is ordained in the bible is already in place? In other words, why is the "New" necessary?
 - i) First of all, God promised in the Old Testament that a "New" one would come and we'll get to that later in the chapter. The point being is one can show a religious Jewish person that God ordained in effect a "New Testament" in the "Old". Again, I'll expand on that later in this lesson. Later in this chapter we get a quote from the Old Testament that speaks of a future day with a new covenant (testament).
 - e) OK John, this is old news. What does it have to do with this verse? The point is when those priests approached God they didn't come empty handed. Even today, when priests in churches perform rituals, they should show humbleness before God and show ones gratitude to Him for what He has already done. The point being that priests "then and now" don't come to God without something to offer.
 - i) What do our "modern priests" offer to God? The last time I checked, my church doesn't offer up any animals in sacrifice. ☺ Yes, but our "priests" may do certain rituals to remind us of some aspect of our relationship with God the Father. As I have stated, the issue for us is are we trusting in those rituals in order to show God how "good we are" or are we involved in those rituals to remind us how grateful we are that God the Father has already forgiven us and desires to guide our lives.
5. Verse 4: If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.
- a) The point is to note here is that Jesus was not considered a priest because He was not born among the lineage of Old Testament priests. For the sake of new readers, understand that there was a specific group of Jewish people who were "born into" the priesthood. If one was a male born into that group, one was required to be a priest whether one liked it or not. The point being is that Jesus was not part of that Jewish group designated to be priests.
 - b) OK John, one more time, so what? The point being is that God calls certain people today to be priests before Him. I call it being "drafted by God". How does one know when one is called into the professional ministry? Easy. One cannot stand to do anything else.
 - i) The point I'm getting at is simply that God calls people to be priests on earth, but Jesus was not called to that specific role, then or now.
 - ii) But if Jesus is our priest before God the Father, isn't He then a priest? Yes, but my point is God calls people to be priests on earth. The Old Testament itself teaches that God calls some to be priests just as some are called today to be priests.
 - c) All of this gets us back to the issue of "priests and gifts" to God the Father. There already was a set of rituals in place to offer up gifts to God as stated in the Old Testament. Why should someone trust in Jesus who we can't see to make me think about God, when I can literally watch my own priest or pastor perform rituals for the forgiveness of my sins?
 - i) In other words, how do I prove my loyalty to God if just trust in Jesus to guide my life? Trusting in those rituals are in effect easier because I can literally see them being performed. Asking me to trust in a God I can't see or hear for guidance is more difficult than trusting in what I can see right in front of me.
 - ii) What is coming up in a matter of verses, is the idea that if those rituals were all it took to please God, then He Himself would not have spoken of a future day when trusting in Jesus was a better system than all of these rituals.
 - d) To state this concept another way, if the New Testament was never written, we could still trust Jesus to guide our lives. Yes studying our bible is helpful and it confirms what God is telling us to do. Daily trusting Jesus to guide our lives is how we live as Christians. Our rituals and even our bible reading should confirm what we know is the right thing to do.

6. Verse 5: They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."
- a) To understand this verse, we have to go back to the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God as told in the Book of Exodus. Moses went by himself up a mountain for 40 days. Moses not only received the 10 commandments, many religious Jewish scholars believe that is when Moses receive all or at the least major parts of the first five books of the bible. Among all of those biblical writings were detailed instructions on how to build the first official temple to God the Father. That temple is in effect a portable structure, which is what this verse calls the "Tabernacle".
 - i) To steal an old joke, when Charlton Heston came down off the mountain in the movie "The 10 Commandments", he should have had a set of blueprints under his arm as God gave him a detailed set of building instructions for this tabernacle.
 - b) OK John, this is old news for most of us. What is the point? The point is this tabernacle is a model of what is in heaven. One thing bible scholars have debated is how literally does one take that concept? Does God's throne room in heaven literally look like the model of the Old Testament tabernacle? Some argue "yes" and some argue "no".
 - i) The "yes" argument is that God told Moses to build this thing as a copy of what exists in heaven. Yet the bible does speak of God sitting in heaven. When you study the details of the original tabernacle there was no place to sit down. The priests were to be always busy working in this tabernacle. Therefore, the debate has gone for millenniums over how literal to take this model. In other words, if the tabernacle that Moses was commanded to build looks exactly like the throne room of heaven, where does God "sit" to judge us?
 - a) Some reconcile that by saying God the Father literally sits on the "mercy seat". That seat, is the lid of the most holy object in that tabernacle. That object was a "box" with a separate lid. On that box were two statues of angels. Some speculate that God's throne itself is Him sitting on that box between the angelic creatures or statues. I don't hold that view.
 - c) To explain my view on this, one has to understand where God is located. Jesus Himself said that the kingdom of God is "within us". (Luke 17:21). When Moses was told to build the tabernacle like it looks in heaven, I don't see this as a literal model of heaven, but a model of our own universe of understanding. Let me expand on this concept:
 - i) The original model of the tabernacle was divided into three areas: There was an outdoor area within a courtyard. There was a single indoor structure that was divided into two compartments. Anyone was welcome to go into the outside area. Only certain priests could enter the first inside area to do the priest's work. Only the top priest could enter the second area once per year for the forgiveness of sins.
 - ii) Yet, when Jesus paid the price for our sins, the curtain that separated the two areas was torn down. (See Matthew 27:51, et. al.) The point is that there is no longer any separation between the priest's work for God and God Himself. In other words, the price for our sins have been paid, so no more separation is necessary.
 - iii) I also heard it described another way that was interesting. Think of the courtyard as all of the accumulated knowledge of our world. Think of the first indoor area as what we are thinking about. The idea is that our thoughts are separate from all physical knowledge. Yet even with our thoughts, we still are not allowed to draw us close to God without the forgiveness of sin. To draw close to God, we still need to enter the "third area". That "third area" in the Jewish Tabernacle was not open to the Jews. Since the price for sins has been paid at the cross, we can enter that third area and yes, talk to Jesus directly in order for Him to guide our lives.
 - a) My thanks to the late Ray Stedman for that illustration.

- d) What does any of this have to do with Verse 5? The writer of Hebrews wants to remind us that the structure that Moses built was somehow a copy of what is in heaven. And we need to know this because? It is to understand that the original tabernacle (along with the Jewish temples built later in history were in effect modeled after that tabernacle) were symbolic of how God the Father desires to be worshipped.
- i) So does that mean that church buildings need to be remodeled to look like that structure? Of course not. The point is at that time, Jewish priests went through rituals as taught in the Old Testament that were specifically to help people draw close to God as well as to ask forgiveness of sins.
 - ii) The idea is then to ask, "if this system is God ordained in the bible, why should there be another system needed?" If rituals and sacrifices are God ordained in the bible, why are they wrong to be performed today? First it is to understand that this system is not perfect in the sense that one has to perform it over and over again, because we still sin even after we have been forgiven. That is why God says in the Old Testament through the prophet Jeremiah, that a day will come where a new system will come into play that in effect brings an end to the Old Testament style of seeking God's forgiveness. The short version is that we accept the idea of Jesus complete payment of our sins and therefore, all other rituals are no longer necessary in our to prove our worth to God.
 - iii) But John, don't we still sin today even with Jesus ruling? Of course. The idea is not that we are better people than they were. The idea is we are fully forgiven. This comes back to the concept I stated in my introduction that the key difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament when it comes to sin, is the two words, "necessity versus gratitude". In other words, in the Old Testament, it was necessary to ask God's forgiveness of our sins. In the New Testament, we seek God to forgive our sins out of gratitude for what He has already done for us.
 - a) So which is a better motivational tool: Necessity or gratitude? Personally, I'll take gratitude every time. Once one learns to live with the concept of being grateful for one's sins being fully forgiven, it is impossible to want to live any other way. That in why these verses teach that God's model of the tabernacle is a model of what is in heaven. Not so we build our church buildings the exact same way. It is so we understand that Jesus complete payment for our sins is the model for how we should live out our lives.
7. Verse 6: But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.
- a) The key point of this verse is to grasp the idea that the ministry Jesus has as our high priest is superior to the ministry of other priests because it "based on better promises".
 - b) OK John, I'll bite. What are those better promises? The promise that we are fully forgiven of all sins, past present and future. The Old Testament rituals for the forgiveness of sin was only good for the sins one confessed up to that moment in time.
 - i) If that is not enough for us, it is also the promise that Jesus will provide for us the resources to overcome whatever sin issue we are facing in our life.
 - ii) Let me make up an illustration here that might help: Dear God, right now I am struggling with this particular issue. There are factors that seem out of my control that I can't fix on my own. I can't deal with what is going on at this moment. The only thing I can (and should do) is to take this whole situation and say, it is now Your (God's) problem now to deal with, because I can't solve it on my own. Once we give it over to Him, we then keep moving forward, make the best decisions possible and trust that He is and will guide us through those issues. I have been amazed in my life to watch God work through things I could not deal with.

8. Verse 7: For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.
- a) It's time for a warning: From Verses 8 through Verse 12 is an Old Testament quote. It comes from the book of Jeremiah, Chapter 31, Verses 31-34. As I have stated in every lesson so far in Hebrews, it is impossible to get through a chapter of this book without at least one Old Testament quote. That is because the original intended audience already believed the Old Testament was the word of God. Therefore, it is a good idea to quote the Old Testament in order to support the arguments that the writer is making in Hebrews.
 - b) OK John, now that I know that, what does this verse mean? It means that if there were nothing wrong with the Jewish system of offering sacrifices for sins, why would Jeremiah ever even speak of another covenant? To put it another way, the "New Testament" is not just a "New Testament idea", it was discussed back in the Old Testament.
 - i) So how do I know that what Jeremiah says does actually speak of what is taught in the New Testament? Well, we are on Verse 7 and that is the topic of Verses 8-12, so be patient and we'll go over those verses. ☺
 - c) The main point of Verse 7 is that if the Jewish system of forgiveness of sins didn't have any problems, why would Jeremiah even speak of their being another system? In other words, why would God ordain one system for a very long time and then say there is going to be a future day coming when a different system would be put into place?
 - i) The problem with the Old Testament system wasn't that it was a bad idea. Think of the Old Testament as a bunch of rules saying in effect, "Do this and don't do that". When one reads through those laws, one can come to the conclusion that this is the right way to live not only to please God, but in order to live a good life.
 - ii) The problem isn't with the laws themselves, but with people's ability to obey them. In other words, what the Old Testament laws lacked was any source of power to obey those laws. It would be like given a brand new car to drive, and that car did not have an engine. I then told you to go drive that car. Well, it may be legal and acceptable to drive that car, but there was no power to make it go.
 - iii) The point being is that if the Old Testament laws were good and right, but people on their own, don't have the power to obey those laws. To say it another way, we all sin and fail to obey those laws, because on our own, we don't have the power to do so. God was well aware of this problem in that there is a whole system set up to forgive sins. The Old Testament a whole series of rituals in effect to say, "When you mess up, here is what you have to do to get right with Me again".
 - iv) All of this leads to the question: if this system was set up for many, many centuries why would Jeremiah speak of a future coming day when God would in effect set up another system? The answer is that like that car, we lack the "engine" to obey God. The reason that new system was not put into place for many centuries was to show that people on their own can not obey God based on their own willpower.
 - v) To say it another way, God gave mankind lots of time to see if we can be obedient to Him based on our own willpower. Jeremiah speaks of a future day where God says in effect, "That's enough of that. There will come a future day where I God, will provide the engine so that You can be obedient to me."
 - d) OK John, you are talking about car engines and Jeremiah, and you have lost me in terms of what any of this has to do with either the bible study or my life in general. Let me tie all of this together and in effect, "bring it home": The point for us as Christians is that the only way we can be pleasing to God the Father is not by trying harder, but by relying on His strength and His power in order to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - i) The other morning, I woke up confused in the sense I'm dealing with some issues where I don't know what the answer will be. I had to remember that God is my "engine" that will see me through the issues I am dealing with at the present time.

- e) That in effect, is the point of this whole lesson. We can't be pleasing to God based on trying hard or making an effort for Him without His help. He wants us to use His power in order to make a difference in this world. OK, how do I do that practically?
 - i) It may be a simple matter of praying, "Dear God, I don't know what to do next in this situation, so I am depending upon You to guide me through it. I will just make the best decision possible and trust that You are guiding me through it.
 - ii) Let's say there is some potentially sinful issue we are struggling with. It may be a matter of saying, "Dear God, this is Your problem. I can't deal with it."
 - iii) It is amazing to look back at my life and realize how God has gotten me through situations that I could never have made it without His help. By remembering how God has worked in our past, often gives us the strength to remember that He still desires to guide us through our present situations.
 - iv) In effect, that is the reason Jesus is our priest. It is so that He could be the engine (for the back of a better word) that gives us the power to deal with whatever situation we have to face in our lives. It is a matter of trusting that "engine" and trusting that Jesus is more than willing to guide our lives and His guidance is far greater than any and all efforts we can make on our own.
 - f) But John, what about people of other religions? Can't they just say, they are trusting in God to guide them? How does trusting in Jesus differ from other religions that way?
 - i) The answer with other religions is that one can never be 100% sure that one is fully forgiven of all of one's sins. That is why it was necessary for Jesus to become a man in order for us to understand we are forgiven. Once we accept that, then we can "go on to maturity" (as the book of Hebrews calls it in an earlier chapter) to realize that Jesus wants to do far more than die for our sins. He also wants to be the power source to guide us in order to live the type of life He desires for us.
 - ii) With that speech out of my system, I think we are actually ready to start studying what Jeremiah predicted, which is the next five verses here in Chapter 8.
9. Verse 8: But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
- a) The great question I pondered as I thought about these verses is in effect, "Is this new covenant for us Gentiles (people of non-Jewish backgrounds) or just for Jews?"
 - i) That question is important because here in Verse 8, God is saying that He will soon make a new covenant (remember "covenant" and "testament" are in effect the same word) with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.
 - ii) In other words, if this "New Testament" is just for the Jewish people. How can I or any other non-Jewish person claim the New Testament is for us "gentiles" when this verse clearly say it is for the "House of Israel and the "House of Israel".
 - iii) To explain first remember that when Jeremiah wrote that prediction, there were two separate Jewish nations. There was the nation of Judah that was about to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Then there was the nation of Israel that had already been taken into captivity a century or two before Jeremiah.
 - iv) The point is that Jeremiah was saying that this new covenant is going to be for all Jewish people no matter which nation they are living in at the present moment.
 - v) Now remember that Jesus has 12 Jewish disciples. Jesus primarily focused His ministry to the nation of Israel. To use a quote I like to state every now and then, "The mistake most Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah. The problem most Christians make is we fail to see Jesus as the God of the Jewish people". This promise of a new covenant (i.e., The New Testament) was first made to the Jewish people. Eventually us "gentiles" were brought under this promise (as described in the book of Acts) as we too have learned to trust in Jesus as our priest and power source to be obedient to this "God of the Jewish people".

- b) OK, John, so now we know the "who" of this new covenant and we get an idea of the "when" of this covenant (when Jesus died and is now our High Priest). How about we now break down and discuss exactly what is this new covenant? The answer to that question begins in Verse 10 and the last time I checked we are still on Verse 8.
 - i) In other words, be patient. We will get to the specifics of what this new "covenant" is about in two verses. What we have here in Verse 8 is simply the reminder that God will (as of the time of Jeremiah) one day give a New Covenant for the Jewish people. That covenant is in effect that Jesus will one day be the power source in order for us to live the type of life that God desires us to live.
10. Verse 9: It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.
- a) My translation of this verse: "I (God) made a deal with the Jewish nation when I lead them out of Egypt. The deal was in effect, you people obey me and trust me to guide your lives and I (God) promise to protect you and guide you." The problem with this agreement was not that it was too hard to keep. The problem was that the Israelites lacked the "power source" to consistently obey Him.
 - b) If you want proof that a New Testament was necessary, all one has to do is look at the long and ancient history of Israel as told in the Old Testament. For the most part, it is a story of failure, as that nation failed to trust God to guide their lives. There is a long and continuous pattern of "Trusting God, God blessing them, the Israelites then got lazy and turned from God, He then sent them problems to get their attention again, and then out of desperation, the Israelites turned back to Him again." That pattern is a good summary description of most of the narrative books of the Old Testament.
 - i) The point being is that if one studies the Old Testament, a conclusion one comes to is that the Israelites lacked a power source in order to keep on trusting God with their lives through their problems. They were often good for "awhile" (just as will power can give us some strength to accomplish a goal), but eventually they would turn their back on God and that is when their problems started.
 - ii) The idea of the "New Covenant" is to realize we have this all powerful "engine" that is more than willing to guide us through our lives. This power source (Jesus) never gets tired of helping us and never gives up on us as long as we willing to trust in Him to guide our lives. If one gets that, even when we still fail and make mistakes one has become a "mature" Christian, which of course was the main topic of the last few chapters of the Book of Hebrews.
 - c) Let me stop for a moment and say to everyone, "What if I already know this stuff? What if I already believe in Jesus as my guide for my life as well as one who died for my sins? Why should I keep reading if I know this stuff? The answer is to think about the Israelites in the Old Testament and their constant pattern of "Repent, blessed, get lazy, sin, and then ask for God's help again". We can all say we know this stuff, but if we fail to constantly remind each other of God's truth, we can be like sheep that easily wander away.
 - i) However, if we do stick close to God, remind ourselves regularly of the "engine" that we have to guide our lives, we can live the type of life that God desires that each of us live. We can use that power not only to help our own lives, but we can also work to make a difference in the lives of other people around us as we work as a "team" in order to make a difference for Jesus in this world.
 - ii) This is a good time to remind us of the purpose of life itself. When one looks back at one's life, does one want to say, "I made "x" amount of money, or does one want to say here is how I made a difference for God in this world? In other words, there is a judgment day coming, and we are not judged by how successful we are, we are judged by how much of a difference for God we have made in this world.

11. Verse 10: This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- a) As I read this verse a few times, I kept coming back to the issue of whether or not this verse is just meant for Israelites or was it meant for non-Israelites as well. After all, the verse makes the point that it was given to Jewish people. Let me explain why this is an issue to ponder:
 - i) If it is just for the Jewish people, the verse could be describing some literal future day (future to us) when God the Father will make it obvious to all Jewish people of how to act and there won't be any more sin. The verse reads like it is describing some sort of future utopia (ideal lifestyle) when a day is coming where sin will no longer be an issue in this world as all Jewish people would recognize God.
 - a) Obviously if that view is true, it hasn't happened yet. One can argue even as a devout Christian that there is coming a future day when God will once again focus His attention on the nation of Israel.
 - ii) It would help to remember a few key points from the book of Romans: One point is that since the time Jesus came into our world there are no "Jews and Gentiles" as far as God is concerned. There are only believers and non-believers. That is the essential point of Romans Chapter 10. There will be also be a future day when God focuses again on the nation of Israel as a separate entity. That is the main point of Romans Chapter 11. The point as it relates to this verse here in Hebrews, is that one can hold the view that this verse speaks of that future "utopia" when God Himself will once again work primarily through the nation of Israel.
 - b) With that said, we probably have enough problems in the world right now then to worry about some future "utopia" day when God will work through the nation of Israel. In other words, why should I care about this promise to them when I have a life to live now? If this utopia statement is true, what does the text mean when it says "the laws are written on their hearts"?
 - i) If you are a believing Christian, is it your desire to please God? Is it your desire to grow in the knowledge of Him? In that sense, His laws are written on our hearts. We as "Gentiles" (again, non-Jewish by birth) were brought in to trust in this "God of the Jewish people" as we trust in Him to guide our lives.
 - ii) My point is this promise to the Jews is also a promise to gentiles, as we trust in this Jewish God to guide our lives. Like I stated earlier, the biggest mistake most Jews make today is fail to see Jesus as God. A big mistake Christians can make about the future is a failure to see God as a "Jewish God".
 - c) OK John, enough of the "Jews and non-Jews" stuff. Explain what "laws written on our hearts" mean practically? It means that when we read the bible, we somehow know in our hearts it is the word of God. When we come into a situation that is potentially sinful we know it is the wrong thing to do, because in effect God's laws are in our hearts (our thoughts) as it is our desire to please Him. It is our desire to make a difference for God, because God Himself placed that desire within us in order to make a difference for Him in this world. In other words, that "engine" gives us the strength to accomplish what He wants us to accomplish was placed within our "innermost being" by God Himself.
 - i) Accessing this "engine" (Jesus) gives us the ability to be pleasing to God. We don't have to go anywhere to get this engine, because God Himself has already placed it inside of us when we accepted Jesus as God and as the one who has already paid the full price for our sins, past, present and future.
 - d) Let me end on this thought: Did you or I have any interest in helping others before we were born again? Even if we cared before we were saved, we didn't have the "engine" within us to make that difference for Him. If that believes that, one is a "mature" believer.

12. Verse 11: No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.
- a) Whenever I have doubts that I have "gone off the deep end" in what I have been saying, I read the next verse and realize that God had me on the right track in the first place. That is just another example of using our "engine" to guide our lives.
 - b) Think of it this way: Do we as believing Christians "Know the Lord" now that we trust in Jesus to guide our lives? Of course. Are we required to read about this relationship in a book to know it is true? I'm not putting down bible study. I'm just saying that when we as believers hear people preach God's truth, we know in our hearts what we hear is truth.
 - i) In other words, when we read the bible or when we read or listen to lectures based on biblical truth, we know it is right because "in our heart" we know it to be true.
 - c) With that said, let me return to the utopia view of these verses. If you talk to religious Jewish (non-Christian) scholars, they will argue that Jeremiah is talking of some future day when the Messiah (eternal king) comes to rule and everyone who is Jewish will trust in that King to obey God's laws. This is what Christians call "Jesus Second Coming".
 - i) My point is there will be some future day of this utopia for religious Jews to happen. As a non-Jewish Christian, we have to keep in mind that God did make promises to the Jewish nation that are yet to be completely fulfilled. That promise is in effect that the Jewish people would inherit the land of Israel forever and He would rule over them. That was an oath given on God the Father's behalf and the Jewish people can't lose that promise if they tried.
 - ii) It is necessary to bring this point up here, as it leads perfectly into Verse 12.
13. Verse 12: For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
- a) Translation for us Christians: When this New Testament started, God completely forgave all of our sins, including ones we are not aware of, and all we commit in the future. That doesn't excuse bad behavior. It is just a reminder that we are fully forgiven of our sins.
 - b) Translation for the Nation of Israel in the future: Despite the sins you as a nation have committed. Despite the fact you as a nation have rejected Jesus, there is coming a day when I will remember your sins no more. In other words, God's promise to the nation of Israel is "nonbonding" on their behavior, as it is an unconditional promise. That is why the New Testament book of Romans spends three chapters (9-11) discussing the fact that God's promises to the Nation of Israel is not based on their behavior, but based on His unconditional promise to that nation.
 - i) Speaking of Romans, have you ever considered the idea that Chapters 1-8 speak of how Christians are "justified" (just as if we never sinned) before God the Father and then the topic changes to God's relationship with the nation of Israel?
 - a) Why does the book switch topics like that? When Paul wrote Romans, his key point was that God's unconditional promises couldn't be broken. For us Christians that means we can't sin enough to lose our salvation. Being saved is strictly about our faith in Jesus as God and our sin payment. Paul then goes on in Chapters 9-11 to state in effect, "Just as God is not capable of going back on His unconditional promises to us Christians, so He can't go back on His unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel."
 - c) OK John, that is neat. What does it have to do with Verse 12 here in Hebrews? This verse is another reminder that there is coming a future day when God will fully forgive the nation of Israel for their sins. In that sense, religious Jews are right that this promise stated by Jeremiah does speak of a future day when the Messiah (Jesus) returns.
 - i) But John, how could God forgive them if they don't believe in Jesus? For that to happen, first the Jewish people need to be "in the land", which is what is occurring at the present time. Then they must collectively (not all, but a large group of them) realize their mistake and accept Jesus.

- ii) This is why the Book of Revelation (Chapter 7, Verses 4-8) talks about 144,000 witnesses for Jesus. I believe this group is specifically called to spread the word to spread about Jesus during that future (unknown) date to Jewish people.
 - iii) My point here is to show that in effect, how religious Jews view this prediction by Jeremiah about a future "utopia" is partially correct.
 - a) What Jeremiah said applies today as the Christian church grasps the concept of Jesus paying the price for our sins.
 - b) It also will also apply to a future date of God once again, working through the nation of Israel, again, as taught in Romans Chapter 11 and through much of the Book of Revelation.
 - c) Ok enough prophecy. ☺ Let's go on to the last verse of the chapter.
14. Verse 13: By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.
- a) To finish the debate about whether or not this prediction by Jeremiah is "present tense" or "future tense", Verse 13 gives us the answer. This verse clearly states that the promises of the new covenant (i.e., "The New Testament) make the old one "obsolete".
 - b) Translation: Now that we have an "engine" that gives us guidance for our lives and now that the price for sin has been paid, the system of offering sacrifices for our sins is no longer needed and will soon disappear.
 - i) It is interesting to consider how literal this came true. When Hebrews was written, the system of sacrifices was made at the same temple we read of during the life and times of Jesus. Yet, within one generation of when this book was written, the Romans destroyed that Jewish temple. That temple has never been rebuilt since then. Today, Jewish people just confess their sins to God and there are no more blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. In that sense, not only has the "Old Testament" been made obsolete, but it no longer exists as far as God is concerned.
 - ii) But John, doesn't Revelation speak of a new temple being built? Yes it does, and at that future unknown date, religious Jews may bring back animal sacrifices. Why? Not for the forgiveness of sins, but to remember what Jesus has done. The point is not to know the future, but to understand that because the price for our sins has been paid, the "Old Covenant" is no longer necessary. Also, this prediction about the "Old Covenant" soon disappearing has literally come true for roughly the past two thousand years.
15. OK, John, why didn't you call this lesson, "starting our engine" or something like that? Why is this lesson about our rituals we perform as Christians? It is to understand that whatever rituals we do perform don't get us any points with God the Father. They may be beneficial in other ways, but we can't get more saved performing by such rituals.
- a) The point as it relates to the Old Testament, is that entire system was based on trying to prove one's value to God by one's sacrifice. The New Testament in effect says that such sacrifice or other rituals are no longer needed as the complete price for our sins has been paid. So if we can't prove our worth to God, what do we do? We live out of gratitude to make a difference for Him. We don't do good works to earn points in heaven, but our motivation should strictly be to do good works out of gratitude for what God has already done for us. If one can remind ourselves of that concept, then one is "living by faith" and one is a mature Christian (no matter how often we mess up trying).
16. Heavenly Father, Help us to be a good witness for You out of gratitude and not out of necessity. Help us to realize that You provide all the power we need of what You desire that we accomplish for You in this lifetime. Help us to use that "engine" to make a difference for You with our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.