

B. Superior to Israelite Covenant (8:1-10:39)

The beginning of chapter 8 serves as a transition in the flow of the epistle. It draws from the preceding context, as the writer summarized his main argument in comparing Jesus' priesthood with its Aaronic counterpart (8:1-5). At the same time, he made clear that he had a larger concern in drawing this comparison: the superiority of Jesus' enduring priesthood underscores and illumines the superiority of the *covenant* upon which it is founded and which it serves. This covenant theme, then, dominates the rest of chapter 8 and all of chapters 9-10. The writer's approach follows his typical pattern: First, he presented his readers with a pointed comparison of the old (Israelite) and new covenants, and then concluded his instruction with an appropriate exhortation (10:19-39).

1. Again, the first five verses of chapter 8 form a transition in which the writer summarized how it is that Jesus' priesthood transcends the Levitical counterpart. And the heart of that distinction is that it is the *substance* of which the Levitical priesthood was the preparatory and prophetic shadow. And so the relation between the two priesthoods and priestly ministrations is that of promise and fulfillment. The Levitical system prefigured and anticipated the consummate priesthood that belongs to Jesus. As with every feature of the salvation history, priesthood and priestly ministration are "yes and amen" in the Messiah.

The superiority of Jesus' priesthood/priestly ministration derives from the superiority of His person and work, which the writer aptly described in terms of the Melchizedekian categories of kingship and priesthood: He is the unique high priest "*who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*" (8:1). The primary thing that sets Jesus' priesthood above its Israelite counterpart is that He executes it with all power and authority as God's enthroned Image-Son (ref. again 1:1-13, 2:1-13). Jesus' status as *King-Priest* distinguishes Him from the Levitical priests, and yet He, too, is God's ordained *Priest*, and so administers His priestly work in connection with God's sanctuary – His dwelling place. This truth, considered with the fact of Jesus' enthronement "in the heavenlies," indicates that He carries out His priestly ministration in connection with a different sort of sanctuary, one that also exists "in the heavenlies." This is precisely what the writer had in mind in verse 2: Jesus is "*a minister of the holy places, that is, the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man*" (cf. 9:11, 24).

Just as the relationship between Jesus and the Aaronic priests is one of promise and fulfillment, so it is with the respective sanctuaries associated with their priestly work. Aaron and his descendents ministered in an earthly sanctuary (first, the portable tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem temple), whereas Jesus ministers in a "heavenly" counterpart. But, again, the two are intimately related as *shadow* and *substance* (8:4-5). This dynamic – which is fundamental to biblical prophecy – is crucial to the writer's perspective and argument, and so must be properly understood.

- First of all, the relationship between shadow and substance is *intentional* and *analogical*. It's determined and ordered by God such that the shadow reflects the substance and points to it. The shadow isn't the substance, but it *corresponds* to it (as an analogy), so that one learns truth about the substance from its shadow.

- Secondly, a shadow requires the *prior existence of the substance* associated with it; a thing must exist before it can cast a shadow. The reason this is so important is that the scriptural record seems to reverse this order: In the flow of the salvation history, the shadow comes first, and then the substance, even as a promise precedes its fulfillment. So, in the present instance, the earthly sanctuary preceded the one associated with Jesus' ministration, which raises the question of how the writer could regard the prior one as a shadow of the one that came later. The answer is that he recognized the first sanctuary to be a *copy* – an earthly expression of a heavenly counterpart after which it was patterned. This is the sense in which it was a shadow; it reflected another entity that stood behind it.

This is the reason that God dictated every detail of the tabernacle's structure and contents, and then empowered craftsmen by His Spirit to fabricate what He prescribed (Exodus 35-39). Many have sought to find spiritual meaning in the various details of the tabernacle and its materials and contents, but the simple meaning is that Yahweh, through human instruments filled with His Spirit, was replicating on earth a copy of the heavenly reality known only to Him; a copy that reflected as a shadow the preexisting heavenly substance.

Shadows reflect the substance behind them, and yet the Scripture treats them as *promising* their substance (ref. 10:1; cf. also Colossians 2:16-17). But how can a shadow presuppose a thing, while also predicting that same thing? In the present instance, the earthly tabernacle prefigured – and so promised – a future heavenly sanctuary, and yet the Hebrews writer insisted that it was a *copy* of that sanctuary. In this sense, then, the fulfillment preceded the promise. But if something already exists, how can there be a promise of its future existence? All of this may appear terribly complicated and confusing, but the solution is really very simple: *The key is recognizing that the "substance" (fulfillment) exists first as a matter of eternal design and determination, which God sovereignly brings into material existence as the culmination of a process involving preparatory "shadows" (promise).*

Thus shadows are prophetic entities that reflect and express the substance that already exists in God's eternal "now," but as promising the eventual material realization (fulfillment) of that substance. And so, it's true on the one hand that promise precedes fulfillment, but it's equally true that God's promises presuppose the existence (in His determination) of that which He pledges. Thus Paul could insist that God's grace in Christ is an *eternal* bestowal, but one which has now been materially manifested in the appearing of the Messiah (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

- One final thing to note about the shadow/substance (promise/fulfillment) dynamic is that it involves *typology*, not *allegory*. Typology is a form of prophecy in which an actual entity (person, place, thing, event, etc.) depicts, and so predicts, a future corresponding entity (known as the *antitype*). And being a prophetic device, the correspondence between a type and its antitype isn't arbitrary or subjective, but divinely determined and disclosed. This is in contrast to *allegory*, in which men assign correspondence as they see fit (consider Pilgrim's Progress).

In terms of the concepts of shadow and substance, the shadow is the *type*, and the substance is the *antitype*. The type, then, draws upon the reality of the eternally-decreed antitype, as it points forward to the material actualization of the antitype. And, consistent with all forms and expressions of biblical prophecy, types and their antitypes are *messianic*; they pertain in some way to Jesus' person and work.

The fact that Jesus carries out His priesthood as God's Priest-King enthroned in the heavenly realm (cf. Zechariah 6:9-15 with Psalm 110 and Romans 8:33-34) indicates that the sanctuary He ministers in is not an earthly one. Again, the writer suggested the same thing when he stated that this sanctuary is God's true tabernacle, the dwelling place that *He* constructed. So also he described this sanctuary as a *heavenly* one, and the ultimate reality of which the Israelite sanctuary was only a copy and shadow. But there is another proof that Jesus' priestly ministration involves an other-worldly sanctuary, namely the fact that He is a priest of a different order (5:5-10, 7:11-17). He couldn't serve in the earthly sanctuary even if He wanted to, because He isn't a descendent of Aaron (8:4).

The writer recognized that the Israelite tabernacle (and the later temple) was a shadow of God's true dwelling place, but the same was true of the priestly ministration that occurred in connection with it. The Levitical priests "*served a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.*" As a shadow, their ministration reflected a heavenly "substance" that preexisted it and stood behind it. At the same time, that ministration served a *promissory* function, anticipating another priest and priestly order typified in Melchizedek (ref. again 7:11-17). But if the earthly sanctuary and its priestly ministration reflected a heavenly counterpart, this suggests the same thing regarding the *sacrificial* dimension of that ministration. And indeed, that's precisely the case: *The sacrificial work at the center of the Levitical ministration, along with every aspect of that priesthood and the earthly sanctuary, was a copy and shadow of a heavenly counterpart to be materially realized in connection with the promised Melchizedekian king-priest* (ref. 9:22-24).

The Hebrews writer understood this, and so emphasized to his readers that Jesus, the Melchizedekian High Priest, isn't exempt from the obligation that distinguished Israel's high priests. Their work involved offering sacrifices and gifts to God within His sanctuary, and the same is true of Jesus (8:3). But if He is a priest of a different order who ministers in a different sort of sanctuary – a heavenly sanctuary in which He is enthroned as Priest-King, it follows that His offerings are also of a different sort. Most significantly, they (whatever they are) cannot be *earthbound*, since they are presented within a *heavenly* sanctuary. Israel's high priests brought the blood of bulls and goats into a physical, earthly structure (Leviticus 16), but such an offering is impossible in the case of a sanctuary that doesn't rest on earth, but is situated in the heavenly realm.

The writer will return to this theme and flesh it out later in his letter (9:11-10:14; note also 7:26-27), but for now it's sufficient to observe that the priestly offerings associated with Jesus' priesthood must suit the nature, realm, and uniqueness of His ministration. *They must accord with the fact that He is the glorified Image-Son enthroned in the heavenly realm, the ever-abiding Priest-King who performs His priestly work from the place of absolute dominion at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*