

Hebrews 8:4-6 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST
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The Epistle to the Hebrews				
INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18			EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25	
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18			Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13:25
BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1-10:18	BETTER LIFE
MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST			MINISTERS FOR CHRIST
DOCTRINE			DUTY	
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD				

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

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Hebrews 8:4 **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** ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [ei men oun en \(3SIAI\) epi ges. oud' an en \(3SIAI\) hierous. onton \(PAPMPG\) ton prosperonton](#)

[\(PAPMPG\) kata nomon ta dora](#)

Amplified: If then He were still living on earth, He would not be a priest at all, for there are [already priests] who offer the gifts in accordance with the Law. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law of Moses. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: If indeed therefore He were on earth, in that case He would not be a priest, there being those who offer the gifts according to law,

Young's Literal: for if, indeed, he were upon earth, he would not be a priest--(there being the priests who are offering according to the law, the gifts,

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: ei men oun en (3SIAI) epi ges oud an en (3SIAI) hiereus onton ton prosperonton (PAPMPG) kata nomon ta dora:

- Hebrews 7:11, 12, 13, 14, 15; Numbers 16:40; 17:12,13; 18:5
- Hebrews 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

he "if" in this verse introduces a second class conditional statement which expresses a contrary to fact statement (He is not a priest on earth!)

Not be a priest at all - Not just not a high priest, but not even a lesser priest. Why? For one thing the office was already filled! The Old Covenant strictly regulated all of the concerns regarding the priesthood and by this very law Christ was excluded from the priestly office because of lineage. Christ was from the Tribe of Judah, not Levi, and was not eligible under the Old Covenant (**according to the Law**) to be an earthly priest. On earth Jesus functioned as a "layman" and strictly speaking He performed no priestly functions in the earthly Temple. Those functions were carried out by the Aaronic priests as ordered by God in the first covenant. As discussed, Christ's priestly functions are exercised in the true Tabernacle in heaven at the right hand of the Majesty.

The Law stated the following regarding the priesthood...

as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman **who is not of the descendants of Aaron** should come near to burn incense before the LORD; that he might not become like Korah and his company-- just as the LORD had spoken to him through Moses. (Numbers 16:40)

King Uzziah tried to bypass God's laws and paid a dear price...

And they opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful, and will have no honor from the LORD God." 19 But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. (2Chronicles 26:18,19)

In describing the the new order (the priesthood of Melchizedek) the writer dealt with Jesus' inability to be an earthly priest in Hebrews 7 - Heb 7:11-15 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest (**JESUS**) to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 13 For the One (**JESUS**) concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar (**JUDAH**). 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,

Spurgeon - In the tabernacle everything was done according to the pattern seen in the holy mount by Moses; in the temple no sacrifice was presented but according to divine command. The whole Aaronic ritual was very impressive. The priests in their holy robes, pure white linen garments, the golden altar, candlestick, and table, the fire, the smoke, the incense; the whole thing was calculated very much to impress the mind. The first covenant provided a very magnificent service, such as never will be excelled, but for all that, costly, divinely arranged, impressive, yet it could not put away sin; and the evidence of this is found in the fact that after one day of atonement they needed another atonement next year. God set aside that first covenant. He put it away as an outworn and useless thing; and He brought in a new covenant—the covenant of grace; and in our text we see what is the tenor of it: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Jer 31:33). This is one of the most glorious promises that ever fell

from the lips of infinite love. God said not, "I will come again, as I came on Sinai, and thunder at them." No, but, "I will come in gentleness and mercy, and find a way into their hearts." He said not, "I will take two great tables of stone, and with my finger write out my law before their eyes." No, but, "I will put my finger upon their hearts, and there will I write my law." He said not, "I will give promises and threatenings that shall be the safeguard of this new covenant"; but, "I will with my Spirit graciously operate upon their minds and their hearts, and so I will sweetly influence them to serve me—not for reward, nor from any servile motive, but because they know me, and they love me, and they feel it to be their delight to walk in the way of my commandments."

Related Resource:

- Excellent review of [Hebrews 8:1-13 Hebrews and the New Covenant](#) - Dr S Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 8:5 **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**." (**NASB: Lockman**)

Greek: [Hoitines hupodeigmati kai skia latreuousin \(3PPAI\) ton epouranion, kathos kechrematistai \(3SRPI\) Mouses mellon \(PAPMSN\) epitelein \(PAN\) ten skenen, Hora \(2SPAM\) gar. phesin, \(3SPA\) poieseis \(2SFAI\) panta kata ton tupon ton deixthenta \(APPMSA\) soi en to horei](#)

Amplified: [But these offer] service [merely] as a pattern and as a foreshadowing of [what has its true existence and reality in] the heavenly sanctuary. For when Moses was about to erect the tabernacle, he was warned by God, saying, See to it that you make it all [exactly] according to the copy (the model) which was shown to you on the mountain. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: They serve in a place of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the design I have shown you here on the mountain." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: who are of such a character as serve the copy and representation of the heavenly things, even as Moses was divinely commanded when about to be completing the tent. For, See, He says, make all things according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain.

Young's Literal: who unto an example and shadow do serve of the heavenly things, as Moses hath been divinely warned, being about to construct the tabernacle, for `See (saith He) thou mayest make all things according to the pattern that was shewn to thee in the mount;') --

WHO SERVE A COPY AND SHADOW OF THE HEAVENLY THINGS: hoitine hupodeigmati kai kai skia latreuousin (3PPAI) ton epouranion:

- Hebrews 9:9,23,24; 10:1; Colossians 2:17
- Hebrews 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE SHADOW OF THE OLD

Who serve - Refers to the Levitical priests.

Serve (3000) (**latreuo** from **latris** = hired servant or **latron** = reward, wages) means to work for reward, for hire or for pay, to be in servitude, render cultic service. **latreuo** was used literally for bodily service (e.g., workers on the land, or slaves), and in the NT speaks of rendering service to God, to worship, to perform sacred services or to minister to God in a spirit of worship. This verb is one of the key words in Hebrews with 6 uses of a total of 22 NT uses (All the uses = Hebrews 8:5, 9:9, 9:14, 10:2, 12:28, 13:10)

In secular Greek **latreuo** meant to work for wages, then to serve without wages. It originally referred predominantly to physical work then later was used more generally.

Vine adds that **latreuo**, and its corresponding noun **latreia**, originally signified the work of a hired servant, as distinguished from the compulsory service of the slave, but in the course of time it largely lost that significance, and in its usage in Scripture the thought of adoration was added to that of free obedience.

John MacArthur explains that **latreuo** "might best be translated "to render respectful spiritual service." True worship goes beyond praising God, singing hymns, or participating in a worship service. The essence of worship is living a life of obedient service to God. "Do not neglect doing good and sharing," exhorts the writer of Hebrews, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). True worship involves every aspect of life. ([MacArthur, J. Philippians. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

Latreuo can therefore convey either the idea of **worship** or **service** and frequently appears to mean both which suggests that **service** cannot be separated from **worship**.

Paul alludes to the OT "**shadows**"

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the **substance** belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17+)

Who serve a copy and shadow - What he is referring to here is the fact that the ministry of the Levitical was a "typical" ministry or a type (Typology = the study of types) of that which was to come. The doctrine of **typology** seems to be largely neglected in the modern church either because of ignorance or because of exposure to some proponents who have grossly distorted this interpretative method. Some may have heard such fanciful typological interpretations, that they automatically tend to shy away at any mention of the word **type** or **typology** (I was once in this group, primarily because of ignorance).

Smith agrees lamenting that "It is exceedingly unfortunate that modern scholarship has succeeded in almost eliminating the investigation and teaching of **typology** as a valid interpretive pursuit. So much has been lost of the richness and practical illustrative value which I believe God intends we should have through an understanding of types... **Typology** is a bad word in many theological circles, but it is not difficult to see that God has a use for it, even if we do not. It is easy to see why many have reacted adversely to this field of biblical interpretation, for one only needs to read some of the writings of the past centuries to see the tendency to overreach in this obviously fascinating use of figurative language. ([Smith, Bob: Basics of Bible Interpretation - see chapter on Allegories and Types](#))

Dr S Lewis Johnson defines **typology** as "the study of spiritual correspondences between persons, events and things within the historical framework of revelation." ([Lectures and transcripts on Typology in Leviticus](#)- 12 part audio series on Leviticus is highly recommended if you are struggling to understand the relevance of Leviticus to you as a NT believer. You will be edified and blessed! If you are really serious I would also recommend downloading **Lesson 1** [[click to download Pdf including diagrams of Tabernacle and depictions of each offering - burnt, grain, peace, sin, guilt](#)] from Precept Ministries, which will give you an excellent introduction to Leviticus as Lesson 1 covers chapters 1-7. If you want more, get the book and do the all 7 lessons.)

I like **Bob Smith's** definition of **type**...

I see a **type** as being a premeditated resemblance which God has built into the Bible and history to illustrate and teach truth---to make it easier to grasp than if it were only stated in prosaic and propositional terms. It is a kindness of God to stir our minds and imagination by the use of types --to make an unforgettable impress. I see it as God's way of "putting his brand on our brain" so that we cannot escape the impact of truth. ([Smith, Bob: Basics of Bible Interpretation - see chapter on Allegories and Types](#))

The essential components of typology include...

(1) Correspondence - There is a correspondence (agreement of things with one another) between the events of the OT and their fulfillment in the NT. Stated another way, the **type** and the **antitype** (see Gk antitupon) have a natural correspondence or resemblance.

Example: The **type**, the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12 provided redemption by his blood **corresponds** with the **antitype**, "Christ our Passover" (1Cor 5:7), by Whose blood we have been redeemed (cf 1 Peter 1:18-note; 1Pe 1:19-note).

(2) Historicity (historical actuality or authenticity) - The types are historical and are not allegorical (symbolic representations) and speak of events which actually occurred in time and space in the Old Testament. In short, typology deals with events that are historically true and actually happened. To reiterate, typology should not be confused with **allegorical interpretation** which assigns so-called "deeper meanings" to biblical persons, events, things or institutions. Donald Campbell emphasizes this distinction explaining that...

A **type** is based upon a recognition of the literal meaning of a given text of Scripture. Springing from that literal meaning, however, is a foreshadowing of someone or something yet to come. The **allegory** minimizes and often destroys the literal and historical, "the milk," in favor of the secondary sense, "the meat." **This method of**

interpretation is to be avoided at all costs. (Ibid - emphasis in bold mine)

The actual history of the biblical story is unimportant in allegorical interpretation whereas in typology the history is essential. And thus the original **historical** event is viewed as the **type** and the later **corresponding** event is the **antitype** that parallels, fulfills and/or even transcends the type (as Christ the antitype did Adam the type - see note above). (See Tony Garland's helpful discussion on the [Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#))

The historical context and grammatical meaning of the Old Testament texts must to be sought out and adhered to diligently or otherwise the OT events would have had no validity if they had not actually happened. **Typology** seeks to interpret how these historical texts foreshadowed the historical Christ.

(3) Predictiveness - This feature arises out of the fact that God works according to the patterns that are revealed in the OT and they find their fulfillment in the NT. It follows that the **types** of the Old Testament point forward to their ultimate fulfillment in the NT. **Type** is similar to prophecy in that both point to the future, but the difference is seen in the form of prediction. In addition prophecy is the more specific and may be used to teach a doctrine, whereas a **type** should be employed to illustrate a doctrine elsewhere taught. (see more detailed discussion of Typology)

And so here the writer of Hebrews is referring to the temporary tabernacle which prefigured an eternal, heavenly tabernacle. The tabernacle passed away, but the truth it was meant to teach endures and this subject will be explained in more detail in Hebrews 9.

These Old Testament pictures and types were like a child's picture book, but these pictures did serve a purpose for they pointed ultimately to the real, eternal **heavenly things**. In Colossians Paul gives us a good "application" in light of this truth concerning what is really "real"...

If then you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking** (present imperative - do this frequently, habitually, even as your lifestyle) the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind** (present imperative - do this frequently, habitually, even as your lifestyle) on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (See **notes** Colossians 3:1; 3:2)

Comment - Paul's point is that believers must continually, consciously cultivate this heavenly mindset rather than getting seduced into the trap of this world system. Looking by faith [founded on truths as in Colossians 1 and Colossians 2] to the eternal is a good preventative to keep us from getting caught in the mire of the transitory. The earthly is but a shadow and the things are heaven are the reality. As John said "the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17+)

Copy ([5262](#)) (**hupodeigma** from **hupo** = under + **deiknúo/deiknumi** = to show, to point to something, to make known the character or significance of something) means literally that which is shown below. It means an example, pattern, illustration. It refers to a sign suggestive of anything, an outline, a delineation, a suggestion.

Here **hupodeigma** is used as a representative copy or likeness of the original and/or genuine. What Moses saw on the mountain was the original, and the constructed tabernacle [and the furnishings] the copy which reflected the original, as well as the model which pointed to the original.

Barclay writes that **hupodeigma** means "a specimen, or, still better, a sketch-plan."

Vine writes that **hupodeigma** signifies "(a) a sign suggestive of anything, the delineation or representation of a thing, and so, a figure, "copy"; in Heb. 9:23; (b) an example for imitation, John 13:15; Jamess. 5:10; for warning, Heb 4:11; 2Pet. 2:6. ([W E: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary](#))

Richards notes that "In the NT the pattern is nearly always established by a person whose words and actions provide a living expression of that which Scripture calls for from all believers. At times the example found in the Bible is negative (Hebrews 4). But the concept of example is essentially positive. ([Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

Here are the other NT uses of **hupodeigma**...

Hebrews 4:11 (note) Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same **example** of disobedience.

Hebrews 9:23 (note) Therefore it was necessary for the **copies** of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

2 Peter 2:6 (note) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to

ashes, having made them an **example** to those who would live ungodly thereafter; **Comment:** The meaning of **hupodeigma** is similar to Hebrews 4:11, where the example is a "negative" one, something that should be avoided.)

James 5:10 As an **example**, brethren, of suffering and patience (literally a long holding out of one's mind before giving room to passion = reflects emotional calm in face of provocation or misfortune - see makrothumia), take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

What did the patience or endurance of the prophets demonstrate? They serve as an example of the perseverance of the saints demonstrating that it is possible to endure to the end (in His power not our power).

Shadow (4639) (**skia**) refers to a pale shadow, as contrasted with a sharp, distinct one.

Skia is used of a literal **shadow** (the shape cast by an object as it blocks rays of light) in Acts 5:15 and of literal **shade** in Mark 4:32 (Here **skia** refers to the shelter from light and any heat associated with it), but the other 5 NT uses are figurative. Two uses describe the "shadow" of death, that sphere of existence which of men in which they are alienated from God (Mt 4:16, Lk 1:79) and into which Messiah comes as the Light of the world. Poetically the OT Septuagint (see below) speaks of the sheltering **shadow** of God's wings. Other OT uses speak of human transitoriness (see examples below from Job and the Psalms). The Jewish historian **Josephus** uses **skia** to in his description of a besieged city in **Jewish War** 6.194 where only the **shadow** of food seemed to be available.

Wuest paraphrases Expositor's Greek Testament which explains that **skia** in this verse is ""*an adumbration* (imperfect portrayal or representation of a thing) *of a reality which it does not embody*." A shadow has no substance in itself. It has no independent existence. It merely is proof of the fact that there is a reality back of it. It is not itself solid or real. Just so, the earthly tabernacle gave proof of the fact that there was a real one, the heavenly one where God Himself dwelt, where Messiah officiates as High Priest. The Aaronic priests performed their priestly rites in the representation of the heavenly tabernacle. ([Hebrews 8 Commentary](#))

The point is that the Mosaic covenant including the institutions of the priesthood and the tabernacle were pale shadows of the "light" and substance that Christ would bring.

Jewish Rabbis used **skia** literally but also compared human life to the **shadow** of a flying bird. The rabbis gave advice that it is better to eat simply and sit in the **shade** than to eat dainties and be exposed to creditors.

The figurative uses of **skia** in Colossians and Hebrews describe a mere representation of something that is real. In this figurative use Old Testament historical truths were like shadows cast by those objects (truths) and which represented the form or substance of that truth. Or stated another way, the OT truth was the type which foreshadowed the NT fulfillment, the antitype (see discussion of **Typology** - Study of Biblical types, rationale, cautions, guidelines, contrasts with allegory)

The Aaronic priesthood, and its associated ceremonies and rituals were only a **pale shadow** of the things Christ would bring. They were **form** without **substance**.

NIDNTT writes that in Classical Greek **skia** has...both a proper and a transferred meaning. On the one hand, it means a shadow, thrown by an object (e.g. a tree or a rock) or a person. On the other hand, it can assume the meaning of skotos and indicate the sphere of darkness. A particularly important example of this is in the expression *skia thanatou*, shadow of death. **Skia** here underlines the suggestion of threat already contained in the concept of death. But apart from this combination, **skia** can also be used to signify the vanity (Empty, art. *mataios*) of human actions (e.g. Lucian, Hermetimus 79, *to pursue a shadow, a fiction*) and of man in general (e.g. Pindar, Pyth. 8, 95f., *man is the dream of a shadow*). Occasionally **skia** may be translated image, reflection. In Plato it is used alongside **eikon** almost as a synonym for that term, which like **skia** describes a mere likeness of the true and eternal realities (cf. Rep. 6, 510e; 7, 517d)... In apocryphal literature also the term "shadow" is used chiefly to demonstrate the nothingness of human life (cf. Wis. 2:5; 5:9) and effort (cf. Sir. 34:2, "As one who catches at a shadow ... is he who gives heed to dreams"). But the lit. meaning is also found (cf. Wis. 19:7, cloud; Bar. 5:8, plant); and the term can also refer to an (earthly) empire (cf. Bar. 1:12). ([Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

There are 7 uses of **skia** in the NT...

Matthew 4:16 "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, And to those who were sitting in the land and **shadow** of death, Upon them a light dawned." **Comment:** Here the land and **shadow** of death denote the Gentiles to whom the Messiah comes with the light of salvation. In this context **skia** in the sense of darkness, gloom, such as the foreboding "shadow of death," meaning the thickest darkness)

Mark 4:32 yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its **shade**." (Here **skia** refers to the shelter from light and any heat associated with it. The shadow of the mustard plant affording shelter to the birds indicates a place of

security offered by nature.)

Luke 1:79 To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the **shadow** of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

Acts 5:15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his **shadow** might fall on any one of them.

Colossians 2:17 (note) things (things related to the Law - food or drink or... a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day) which are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. **Comment:** The law was a shadow of future things in contrast to Christ the reality and fulfillment of those OT shadows. Since there is no body without shadow, the shadow points to the body).

Hebrews 8:5 (note) 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."

Hebrews 10:1 (note) For the Law, since it has only a **shadow** of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.

There are 43 uses of **skia** in the **Septuagint (LXX)** (Judges 9:15, 36; 2 Ki. 20:9ff; 1Chr. 29:15; Job 3:5; 7:2; 8:9; 12:22; 14:2; 15:29; 16:16; 24:17; 28:3; Ps. 23:4; 44:19; 57:1; 80:10; 88:6; 102:11; 107:10, 14; 109:23; 144:4; Eccl. 6:12; 7:12; 8:13; Song 2:3, 17; 4:6; Is 4:6; 9:2; 38:8; 51:16; Jer. 6:4; 13:16; Lam. 4:20; Ezek. 17:23; 31:6; Amos 5:8; Jonah 4:5,6) Here are some representative uses of **skia** in the Septuagint. One of the more famous uses of "shadows" in history is recorded in 2 Kings...

And Isaiah said (in answer to King Hezekiah's query for a sign that Jehovah would heal him), "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the **shadow** (Hebrew = tsel = shadow, shade, symbolic of transitoriness of life; Lxx = skia) go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?" (**2 Kings 20:9**, skia also in Lxx of 2 Ki 20:10, 11)

(King David praise to Jehovah upon the willing provision of His people for the building of His Temple. David declared...) We are sojourners before Thee, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a **shadow** (Hebrew = tsel = shadow, shade, symbolic of transitoriness of life; Lxx = skia), and there is no hope. (**1Chronicles 29:15**) (**Comment:** This verse is immediately applicable for it serves as a good reminder of the brevity of our life, so that we might redeem the time before we step into eternity. - see note Ephesians 5:16)

(Bildad wasn't the best counselor but he was right when he declared) we are only of yesterday and know nothing, Because our days on earth are as a **shadow** (Hebrew = tsel = shadow, shade, symbolic of transitoriness of life; Lxx = skia). (**Job 8:9**)

Even though I walk through the valley of the **shadow** (Hebrew = tsalmaveth = deep shadow; Lxx = skia) of death , I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. (**Psalms 23:4** - [Spurgeon's note](#))

Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, for my soul takes refuge in Thee; and in the **shadow** (Hebrew = tsel = shadow, shade, symbolic of transitoriness of life; Lxx = skia) of Thy wings I will take refuge, until destruction passes by. (**Psalms 57:1** - [Spurgeon's note](#))

Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow (Hebrew = tsel = shadow, shade, symbolic of transitoriness of life; Lxx = skia). (**Psalms 144:4** - [Spurgeon's note](#))

To emphasize the more excellent ministry of Messiah, the concept of **acopy and shadow** is repeated throughout this section...

symbol for the present time (See **note** Hebrews 9:9)

copies of things in the heavens (See **note** Hebrews 9:23)

not a copy of the true one but into heaven itself (See **note** Hebrews 9:24)

JUST AS MOSES WAS WARNED WHEN HE WAS ABOUT TO ERECT THE TABERNACLE SEE HE SAYS THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN: kechrematistai (3SRPI) Mouses mellon (PAPMSN) epitelein (PAN) ten skenen hora (2SPAM) gar phesin (3SPAI) poieseis (2SFAI) panta kata ton

- Hebrews 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE PATTERN FOR THE OLD

How important is this divine instruction in the Lord's mind? God devotes some 50 chapters to construction of the TABERNACLE and only 2 to the CREATION STORY (although of course there are mentions of creation elsewhere in individual verses).

Warned (5537) (**chrematizo** from **chrema** = an affair, business) originally meant to transact business, to advise or to give answer to those asking advice and so to give a response to those who consult an oracle. Then it meant to give a divine command or in the passive to be commanded. Stated another way, **chrematizo** means to impart a divine message or make known a divine warning by giving a message.

The writer quotes from the **Old Testament**...

And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain. (Ex 25:40)
(The writer quotes from the Septuagint - LXX, but changes the verb tense of "shown" from perfect in the Lxx to aorist in Hebrews.)

Compare -

According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it. (Ex 25:9)

Then you shall erect the tabernacle **according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain** (Ex 26:30)

Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold; from its base to its flowers, it was hammered work; **according to the pattern which the LORD had showed Moses**, so he made the lampstand. (Nu 8:4)

In Exodus 25, the warning to follow the **pattern** was given in the midst of minute instructions about the ark, the table, the lampstand, and the size, shape and materials specified to build the Tabernacle.

According to the pattern - Specifically how this pattern was communicated or what exactly was shown to Moses is not stated in Scripture, so it is best not to speculate as did the **Jewish rabbis** who postulated ideas like the following...

An ark of fire and a table of fire and a candlestick of fire came down from heaven; and these Moses saw and reproduced (Tal Menahoth 29a).

Other Rabbis added the groundless speculation that Gabriel in a workman's apron showed Moses how to reproduce the articles he was shown!

Pattern (5179) (**tupos** from **túpto** = strike, smite with repeated strokes) literally refers to a visible mark or impression made by a stroke or blow from an instrument or object. What is left after the stroke or blow is called a print, a figure or an impression. For example, the most famous reference to a literal mark (tupos) is when Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection from the dead declaring

Unless I shall see in His hands the **imprint** (tupos) of the nails (John 20:25). (See also [ISBE Article](#))

Stated another way **tupos** properly means a model, pattern or mold into which clay or wax was pressed (or molds into which molten metal for castings was poured), that it might take the figure or exact shape of the mold. Our English word **type** is similar and originally referred to an impression made by a die as that which is struck.

Tupos also came to be used figuratively of a pattern, mold, model, or copy of the original of something, whether a physical object, such as a statute, or a principle or virtue. Thus in a technical sense **tupos** is the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made. In an ethical sense, **tupos** is a dissuasive (tending to dissuade) example, a pattern of warning or an example to be imitated, this last meaning being seen in Paul's charge to Timothy to...

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an **example** (tupos - a pattern they believers are to emulate) of those who believe. (1 Ti 4:12).

Similarly Titus was "to be an **example** [tupos] of good deeds" [Titus was to live so that his life would be cast

like a "spiritual die" that would impress itself on others - all believers should strive to be "spiritual dies" to those around them, but this applies especially to leaders] see note Titus 2:7; Paul's exhortation "Brethren join in following my **example**", see note Philippians 3:17, the Thessalonian saints became "an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" see note 1Thessalonians 1:7 of 2Thes 3:9.

Type is used to denote a resemblance between something present and something future. For example, in Romans 5:14 (see note), **tupos** prefigures a future person in this case Adam being called a **type** of Jesus Christ, each of the two having exercised a preeminent influence upon the human race (the former destructive, the latter, saving) Adam's act had universal impact and was a **type** of Christ's act, which also has universal impact. The point of similarity between Adam and Christ is that what each did affected many others. Each communicated what belonged to him to those he represented.

Related Resources:

- [Main Article on Typology](#) - preceptaustin.org - caveats regarding typological interpretation
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Type, typology](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Type, Typology](#)
- CARM Theological Dictionary [Type, typology](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Typology](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Typology](#)
- Torrey Topical Textbook [Types of Christ](#)
- American Tract Society [Type](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Type](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Adam, a Type Type](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Type](#)
- Morrish Bible Dictionary [Type](#)
- Hawker's Poor Man's Dictionary [Types](#)
- Whyte's Bible Characters [Moses, the type of christ](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Type](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Type](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Type](#)

Hebrews 8:6 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**. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [nun\[i\] de diaphoroteras tetuchen \(3SRAI\) leitourgias, hoso kai kreittonos estin \(3SPAI\) diathekes mesites, etis epi kreittosin epaggelias nenomothetetai. \(3SRPI\)](#)

Amplified: But as it now is, He [Christ] has acquired a [priestly] ministry which is as much superior and more excellent [than the old] as the covenant (the agreement) of which He is the Mediator (the Arbiter, Agent) is superior and more excellent, [because] it is enacted and rests upon more important (sublimar, higher, and nobler) promises. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: But our High Priest has been given a ministry that is far superior to the ministry of those who serve under the old laws, for he is the one who guarantees for us a better covenant with God, based on better promises. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: But now a more excellent ministry He has obtained, by how much also He is a mediator of a better testament, which is of such a character as to have been enacted upon the basis of better promises.

Young's Literal: and now he hath obtained a more excellent service, how much also of a better covenant is he mediator, which on better promises hath been sanctioned,

BUT NOW HE HAS OBTAINED A MORE EXCELLENT MINISTRY: [nuni de diaphoroteras tetuchen \(3SRAI\) leitourgias:](#)

- Hebrews 8:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; 2 Cor 3:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
- Hebrews 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BUT NOW!

JESUS BRINGS A BETTER COVENANT.

But now - Introduces a **contrast** - whenever you encounter a contrast in your reading, pause to ponder what the author is contrasting. In so doing you are in effect practicing the blessed discipline of **meditation** on the Scripture (cp Josh 1:8-note, Ps 1:2-note, Ps 1:3-note). Most observers favor this contrast as a reference to the quality of priestly ministry -- the ministry of Jesus is "differing" or "more excellent" than the Levitical priestly ministry.

Vincent for example writes that the particle **now** (nun) in this context "is **logical**: *as the case now stands*. The statement of Hebrew 8:4 is taken up. "**If he were on earth he could not be a priest;**" etc., **but now**, since Christ is a priest, and must have a sanctuary and an offering, He has a more excellent ministry.

Spurgeon - The old covenant, the old ceremonial law, the old spirit of bondage, and the whole of the old leaven Jesus has purged out of the house, and He has admitted to a new dispensation wherein grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

Wuest ([Hebrews 8 Commentary](#)) observes that **Hebrews 8:6** "is a pivotal verse in the epistle. It closes the first major argument. The book was written to prove the following proposition: The New Testament in Jesus' blood is superior to and takes the place of the First Testament in animal blood. The writer has proved this to be true on the basis of pure logic and the Old Testament Scriptures. Using the logical argument that a superior workman turns out a superior product, he has shown that Messiah, the Founder of the New Testament is better than the founders of the First Testament, who were the prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron. Therefore, the testament He brought in is superior to and takes the place of theirs. In the light of this, we can better understand the words "**but now he has obtained a more excellent ministry.**"

- Superior order (Heb 7:1-17)
- Superior calling (Heb 7:21)
- Superior tenure (Heb 7:23, 24)
- Superior character (Heb 7:26)
- Superior sanctuary and covenant (Heb 9:1ff)
- Superior sacrifice (Heb 10:1ff, 7:27)

Expositor's Greek Testament agrees noting that "the ministry being a part of the work of mediating the better covenant, it must participate in the superior excellence of that covenant. And the superiority of the covenant consists in this that it has been legally based on better promises... what these better promises are he shows us in Hebrews 8:8-12.

Has obtained ([5177](#)) ([tugchano/tyrchano](#) probably from **tucho** = the idea of effecting) properly "hit" as of hitting a mark and comes to be used in the sense hit upon, light upon, and thence obtain, as in this use. It also conveys the sense of to experience something.

Note that the **perfect tense** of **has obtained** speaks of a past completed action with present ongoing effect/benefit, emphasizing Jesus' continual/permanent possession of this ministry. He will forever be our great High Priest! This is indeed good news for sinners.

More excellent ministry - Referring to the ministry of the heavenly sanctuary. And what do priest do? They offer sacrifices, even as do believers as "believer priests" do today, the writer of Hebrews explaining that...

Through Him (Jesus our Great High Priest and Mediator) then, let us continually **offer up a sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (see notes Hebrews 13:15; 16)

Our sacrifices of course have no atoning value, for Christ's sacrifice of Himself was sufficient for all time.

More excellent ([1313](#)) ([diaphoros](#) from **diaphéro** = be different, superior from **dia** = through + **phero** = bear/carry) is from the idea of carrying different ways and then means that which is different or unlike and as in the present context means more excellent (the comparative of diaphoros), distinguished or remarkable.

In Hebrews 1 **diaphoros** was used to compare Jesus to the angels, the writer explaining that Jesus has...

become as much better (kreitton) than the angels, as He has inherited **more excellent** (diaphoros) name than they. (see note Hebrews 1:4)

Ministry ([3009](#)) ([leitourgia](#) from **leitourgos** = public servant) was a public service or office, such as in Athens and elsewhere, administered by the citizens at their own expense as a part of the system of finance. In the NT, **leitourgia** referred to service or

ministry as of the public ministrations of the Jewish priesthood.

Leitourgia is regularly used in **Septuagint (LXX)** of the service of priests, particularly their service at the altar (Nu 16:9; 18:4, 6; 1Chr 9:13, 19, 28; 2Chr 31:4; 35:16) Thus writer's use of this word in a sense shows how Jesus' Priesthood was the reality the **shadow** had been pointing to for centuries.

Messiah has a **more excellent ministry** than that of the Aaronic priests.

BY AS MUCH AS HE IS ALSO THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT WHICH HAS BEEN ENACTED ON BETTER PROMISES: kai kreittonos estin (3SPAI) diathekes mesites etis epi kreittosin epaggeliais nenomothethtai (3SRPI):

- Hebrews 7:22; 12:24; Galatians 3:19,20
- Hebrews 7:22; 9:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
- Hebrews 8:10, 11, 12; Romans 9:4; Galatians 3:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; Titus 1:2; 2Peter 1:4
- Hebrews 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BETTER MEDIATOR BETTER COVENANT

More excellent... better - Observe that there are three contrasts between the old and new orders, the new order possessing...

- (1) More excellent ministry
- (2) Better covenant
- (3) Better promises

Mediator (3316) (**mesites** from **mésos** = middle, in midst) is one who stands in the middle between two people and brings them together. It is basically a neutral and trusted person in middle (mesos), a so called "middle Man" (arbitrator). It is one who works to remove disagreement and thus serves as a mediator, go-between or reconciler.

Three of the five NT uses of **mesites** are in Hebrews...

And for this reason (since His blood cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God) He is the **mediator** of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (see note Hebrews 9:15)

(But you have come to Mount Zion...) and to Jesus, the **mediator** of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (see note Hebrews 12:22)

Notice that these passages substitute **new** covenant for **better** covenant as in the present passage.

In short, Jesus is the **Mediator**, the One Who stands between men and God to bring them together on the basis of the New Covenant. He will quote from Jeremiah 31 which describes the New Covenant, which is God's new arrangement for those who enter that covenant to live and which our better high priest **mediates** and **guarantees** (see **note** Hebrews 7:22).

Paul uses **mesites** in the three other NT occurrences (total of 6)...

1Timothy 2:5 there is one God, and one **mediator** also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 2:6 Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.

Vincent comments that...

As the one God, so the one mediator implies the extension of the saving purpose to all. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

Galatians 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a **mediator** (a reference to Moses), until the Seed (Messiah - see Gal 3:18 **your seed," that is, Christ**) should come to Whom the promise had been made.

Vincent has a long note on **mesites** in this passage...

Mesites is a later Greek word, signifying also umpire, arbitrator, and appears in LXX only in Job. 9:33. The

mediator here (Gal 3:16) is **Moses**, who is often so designated by rabbinical writers. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

Galatians 3:20 Now a **mediator** is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

There is one use of **mesites** in the Septuagint...

Job 9:32 For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, that we may go to court together.**33** There is no **umpire (mesites)** between us, who may lay his hand upon us both.

Job acknowledges that as a mere man he himself had no right to mediate his plight or complaint with God and so he expresses his longing for a mediator between God and himself, but he finds none in the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant we encounter the Mediator Who could meet our deepest need, the God-Man, Christ Jesus (1 Ti 2:5). **Matthew Henry** adds that...

Job would gladly refer the matter, but no creature was capable of being a referee, and therefore he must even refer it still to God Himself and resolve to acquiesce in His judgment. Our Lord Jesus is the blessed Days-Man (KJV word for umpire or arbiter), Who has mediated between heaven and earth, has laid His hand upon us both; to Him the Father has committed all judgment, and we must. But this matter was not then brought to so clear a light as it is now by the gospel (Ed note: And the New Covenant revealed in the Gospel), which leaves no room for such a complaint as this.

J Vernon McGee commenting on Job's predicament writes...

Job is saying in effect, "If He were a man, I could talk to Him." This is the reason God became a Man, my friend—so man could talk to Him and walk with Him and realize that he cannot meet God's standards. The only Man who ever met God's standards was the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what makes some of the contemporary plays and literature such a curse. They insinuate that Jesus was not only a man, but that He was a sinful man! Liberalism has been saying this for years. However, they cannot find in the Word of God that there was any sin in the Lord Jesus Christ. They find the sin in their own dirty hearts, because Jesus was without sin.

Because Jesus was a Man, I can go to Him. He died for me on the cross! And He shows me by His life that I cannot meet God's standards, that I need a Savior. By His death He can save me. This is what poor old Job was longing for.

Job's complaint was that there was no mediator between him and God. His cry is this: "Oh, if there were only Someone who could put His hand in the hand of God and who could put His other hand in my hand and bring us together. If He could do that, then I would have a mediator." In the New Testament Paul wrote to a young preacher, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

The song that says, "Put your hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee" is only half true. The Man of Galilee has another hand, and that hand is in the hand of God. Jesus is God, my friend; He is the God-Man. What a glorious, wonderful truth that is. Oh, how Job longed for Him! ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Or listen to his [Mp3](#)) (Ed note: Beloved, how much more should we who abide on this side of Calvary long for Him, for as mere men God still has ample cause for complaint against us, and so we have abundant, continuing need for our heavenly Great High Priest to mediate for us with such a holy and awesome God! Let us long for and rely upon the mediating ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, our "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous... the propitiation for our sins" Hallelujah! 1John 2:1,2)

Wuest explains that a **mediator** "refers to one who intervenes between two, either to make or restore peace and friendship, to form a compact, or to ratify a covenant. Here the Messiah acts as a go-between or **Mediator** between a holy God and sinful man. By His death on the Cross, He removes the obstacle, sin, which caused an estrangement between man and God. When the sinner accepts the merits of Messiah's sacrifice, the guilt and penalty of his sin is his no more, the power of sin in his life is broken, he becomes the recipient of the divine nature, and the estrangement between himself and God, both legal and personal, disappears. Messiah became the **Mediator** not only in order that He might pay the penalty of sinners who live since the Cross, but also that He might do

so for those who lived before the Cross (**Ed note:** As indicated by the phrase "the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant" in Hebrews 9:15 [see note]; Thus Job's cry for an "umpire" was answered!). Sinners who were saved under the First Testament were actually saved, not by it or by any sacrifice offered under its jurisdiction, but through the atoning work of Messiah under the New Testament. (**Ed note:** They were saved by faith in the gospel just as Abraham was - cf Gal 3:8, Genesis 12:3, 15:6). ([Hebrews 8 Commentary](#))

Has been enacted (3549) (**nomotheteo** from **nomos** = a law + **títhemi** = to put, set; cp **nomothetes** = "lawgiver" referring to God) is literally to put a law and means to enact laws, make laws, give laws or establish as law (legislate).

In the passive voice it means -- laws are enacted or prescribed for one, to be legislated for, furnished with laws.

TDNT writes that...

This word means either a. "to give laws" or b. "to settle matters legally." In the passive in Hebrews 7:11 the point is receiving the law - the whole law and not just cultic legislation. In Hebrews 8:6 the reference is to the general enactment of either the ministry (*leitourgia*) or the covenant (*diatheke*) most likely the former, although nothing essential is at stake.

The only other NT use of **nomotheteo** is in Hebrews...

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people **received the Law**), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? (see **note** Hebrews 7:11) (the people received the Mosaic law established upon the foundation of the priesthood)

There are 9 uses of **nomotheteo** in the **Lxx** (Ex 24:12; Deut 17:10; Ps. 25:8, 12; 27:11; 84:6; 119:33, 102, 104) and in most of these uses this word carries the sense of to instruct or to teach

Psalms 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He **instructs** (Lxx translates with **nomotheteo**) sinners in the way.

Psalms 27:11 Teach (Lxx translates with **nomotheteo**) me Thy way, O LORD, And lead me in a level path, Because of my foes.

Psalms 119:33 Teach (Lxx translates with **nomotheteo**) me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end.

Better (2909) (**kreitton/kreisson** comparative of **agathos** = intrinsically good) means better (in sense of more useful or more profitable).

Better covenant... better promises - Clearly the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant, because the New Covenant has better promises than the Old Covenant.

What are those **better promises**? Jeremiah summarizes them as (1) An inner understanding of God's laws which are God will put in their minds and write on their hearts; (2) An intimate relationship with God for they shall be His people and all shall know Him from the least to the greatest; (3) Mercy for their iniquities so that their sins will absolutely not be remembered by Him (which equates with forgiveness of all sins).

Vincent observes that "Both here and in the following chapter, the ideas of the sanctuary and the covenant are closely united. God's covenant was embodied in the sanctuary. The ark was "the ark of the covenant"; the tables of the law were "the tables of the covenant." The essence of a covenant is the establishment of a relationship. The sanctuary was the meeting-place of God and man. The ritual of sacrifice adjusted the sinner's relation to a holy God. All the furniture and all the ordinances of the tabernacle assumed the covenant between God and His people. Thus the two ideas belong together. The minister of the Levitical sanctuary was the mediator of the old covenant. A new covenant implies a new ministry, a better covenant implies a better ministry. Christ's priesthood implies a sanctuary. The new sanctuary implies a new covenant. This covenant is a better covenant because it was **established upon better promises** ([Hebrews 8: Word Studies](#))

COVENANT: WORD STUDY

Note that **covenant** is such a vitally important word in the Old and New Testaments that the following **word study** will attempt to

only mention the highlights. For a more thorough discussion of covenant, including rituals associated with covenant, practical implications of covenant (including the marriage covenant), etc see...

- Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage
- Covenant: Why Study It?
- Covenant: Introduction
- Part 1 Covenant: Summary Table
- Part 2 Covenant: The Exchange of Robes
- Part 3 Covenant: The Exchange of Armor and Belts
- Part 4 Covenant: Solemn and Binding
- Part 5 Covenant: A Walk Into Death
- Part 6 Covenant: The Oneness of Covenant
- Part 6a Covenant: Oneness Notes
- Part 7 Covenant: Withholding Nothing from God
- Part 8 Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic
- Part 9 Covenant: New Covenant in the Old Testament
- Part 10 Covenant: Why the New is Better
- Part 11 Covenant: Abrahamic vs Old vs New

Covenant (1242) (**diatheke** from **diatithemi** = set out in order, dispose in a certain order <> from **dia** = two + **tithemi** = to place pictures that which is placed between two Thus, a covenant is something placed between two = thus an arrangement between two parties) literally conveys the idea of a testament, as in one's last will and testament.

Remember that there were 3 **unconditional covenants** in the Old Testament, the Abrahamic (which is the basis on which we are saved today), the Palestinian and the Davidic covenants. The question might arise as to how or on what grounds will God fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant?

Dr Johnson explains that these questions...

Raise the issue of **redemption**, for those who had any understanding of spiritual matters would know that it is not possible for God to give an unconditional covenant to sinners, if some provision were not made for their sins. Being a holy and righteous God, He must make provision for their sin, if He is to convey blessing to them. So it raises the question of upon what grounds are the promises to Abraham and David to be fulfilled? The New Covenant begins the explanation of the grounds on which those promises are to be made a reality, because the New Covenant has to do with **redemption**. He states at the end of this covenant that their sins and their iniquities God will remember no more. The New Covenant is of course the one that our Lord ratifies with His death on Calvary's cross, even as He had explained beforehand at the Lord's Supper when He took the cup and said "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of their sins." (Mt 26:28) The significance of the Lord's Supper is that it speaks of a sacrifice and a completed **redemption** which in effect makes it possible for the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants also to have the certainty and assurance of their ultimate fulfillment as well.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties that binds them together and conveys the associated ideas of very close fellowship (even oneness and identity as for example in the marriage covenant where two mystically become one flesh).

Cleon Rogers describes **covenant** in the ancient world as...

the uniting and community of the souls and wills of the two, which results in a common purpose, common friends, common enemies, mutual confidence, loyalty, and exclusion of strife. In all of this the will of the stronger was the dominating force. This resulting harmony is often described by the word Shalom which stresses the wholeness, harmony, and unity of the two. Along with this unity there was also the obligation to help or aid one another in time of trouble. Because of these tremendous implications it was always advisable to proceed with caution before making a covenant with anyone. ([The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting. Bibliotheca Sacra. Volume 127. Issue 507. Page 240. 1970](#)) ([See Covenant with Moses](#))

The 3 major meanings of **diatheke** in the NT can be summarized as...

- (1) A legal technical term used when one settles an inheritance and known by our familiar English term "last will and testament"
- (2) A binding contract between two or more persons, as in Galatians 3:15 where the covenant is between men.

(3) The major NT (and Septuagint use) is a declaration of the will of God in "concerning His self-commitment, promises, and conditions by which he entered into relationship with man covenant, agreement" ([Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament. Baker Academic](#))

Diatheke was commonly used in the **Greco-Roman world** to define a legal transaction in settling an inheritance (used in this sense in Hebrews 9:16; 9:17) which we often refer to as one's last will and testament. In this sense it referred to the disposition which a person made of his property in prospect of death.

Vine - Etymologically considered the (English) word **covenant** is formed from two others meaning "coming together," and thus describes a mutual undertaking between two or more parties who severally make themselves responsible for the discharge of certain obligations. But the Greek word **diatheke**, from which it is translated, does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it means rather an obligation undertaken by one alone. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

NIDNTT adds that in classical Greek usage **diatheke**...

occurs from Democritus and Aristoph. onwards in the sense of a will or testament. It is not thought to be derived from the act. diatithemi, distribute, allocate, regulate, but only from the mid. diatithemai, control persons and things (Xen.), and especially dispose of by will (so private legal documents among papyri). It denotes, therefore, an irrevocable decision, which cannot be cancelled by anyone. A prerequisite of its effectiveness before the law is the death of the disposer. Hence diatheke must be clearly distinguished from syntheke, an agreement. In the latter two partners engaged in common activity accept reciprocal obligations. diatheke is found only once with this meaning (Aristoph. Birds, 1, 440). Elsewhere it always means a one-sided action. ([Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

Covenant has profound implications and is the most solemn, binding, intimate contract known in the Bible. Covenant was considered a binding agreement among the ancients, and so was **not entered into lightly**. After pieces of the sacrificial animal were laid opposite one another, the individuals who were cutting covenant would walk between the flesh. This walk represented the so-called **walk into death** indicating their commitment to die to independent living and to ever after live for their covenant partner and to fulfill the stipulations of their covenant (See this practice in Jer 34:8ff, esp Jer 34:18-19). Furthermore, this **walk into death** was a testimony by each covenant partner that if either broke the covenant God would take their life, even as had been done to the sacrificial animal. In short, we see the gravity of entering into and then breaking covenant. Covenant was a pledge to death. A pledge cut in **blood**. In covenant the shedding of **blood** demonstrated as nothing else could the intensity of the commitment. By cutting covenant the two parties were bound for life. Thus the shedding of **blood** in the cutting of covenant established the gravity and binding nature of this transaction. Both the Old and the New Covenants were inaugurated with blood. The practice of cutting covenant is found throughout history with traces or remnants of covenant truth in every quarter of the globe. (See Introduction to Covenant and Summary of Major Biblical Covenants)

As noted, most of the NT uses of **diatheke** refer to God's declaration of His will concerning His self-commitment, promises, and conditions by which he entered into relationship with man.

Diatheke denotes an irrevocable decision, which cannot be cancelled by anyone. A prerequisite of its effectiveness before the law is the death of the disposer and thus **diatheke** was like a "final will and testament".

In reference to the divine covenants, such as the Abrahamic covenant, diatheke is not a covenant in the sense that God came to agreement or compromise with fallen man as if signing a contract. Rather, it involves declaration of God's unconditional promise to make Abraham and his seed the recipients of certain blessings.

All covenants are based on promises. Sometimes the promises are by only one party, sometimes by both. Sometimes the promises are conditional, sometimes they are not. But promises are always involved. As far as God's covenants are concerned, it is always His promises that are significant. Men break their promises, God does not. The benefits and the power are always from God's side, and therefore the significant promises are always from His side. Consequently, it is God's promises in the New Covenant that here are called "better."

Here are some general aspects of **covenant** as recorded in Scripture

(1) Initiated by one of the parties - In covenants with God, He is the Initiator (with Noah, Ge 6:18, with Abraham, Ge 17:7, cf Ge 12:1, 2, 3, 4, with Moses and Israel Ex 34:27, Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant, Mt 26:28, Lk 22:20, cf Isaiah 42:8, Mal 3:1). Examples of men who initiated covenants with other men include Abimelech with Abraham, Ge 21:27, 32; Abimelech with Isaac, Ge 26:28, Laban with Jacob, Ge 31:44).

(2) Sacrifice is usually involved - clean animals Ge 8:20, animals in Ge 15:10, Jesus' body and blood in the New Covenant, Mt 26:28. The spillage of blood is usually a central part of the establishment of the covenant.

(3) Offspring are affected by the covenant- see Ge 6:18, 9:9, 9:12 (every living creature included here).

(4) Often accompanied by a promise or an oath - see God's promise in Ge 8:21 "I will never again destroy every living thing as I have done." In Genesis 17 (see initial promises in Genesis 12:1-3) God promises Abram (Abraham) "I will multiply you exceedingly... for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations... an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you. "And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

(5) A sign or witness often accompanies the establishment of covenant - Genesis 9:13 "My (rain) bow in the cloud... shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth." Cf circumcision in Ge 17:14. The "well of seven" (or of the oath) in Genesis 21 between Abraham and Abimelech.

(6) There is often a covenant meal - Isaac and Abimelech Ge 26:30, Laban and Jacob, Ge 31:54, meal in Ex 24:11 with the Mosaic covenant, the "Passover meal" (= Lord's Supper = communion) in Luke 22:30.

In our modern society and even in the evangelical church, we have for the most part forgotten the profound significance of **covenant** in Scripture. Yes, we can recite the covenants but few understand the symbolism and seriousness of Biblical covenants which were the closest, most indissoluble union two parties could make. Today we make "covenants" with fine print that allows one to "get out" of the agreement with relative ease. Take for example the sacred marriage covenant, which has all but lost its holy character in society in general (some are even talking of doing away with this covenant, and many are living together without marrying which in effect is an abolition of this covenant. See *Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage*) and tragically even in the evangelical church where surveys show divorce rates as high as among non-believers!

Andrew Murray, the gifted nineteenth century writer emphasizes the importance of more than a superficial understanding of covenant writing... :

Blessed is the man who truly knows God as his God; who knows what the Covenant promises him; what unwavering confidence of expectation it secures, that all its [covenant's] terms will be fulfilled to him; what a claim and hold it gives him on the Covenant-keeping God Himself. To many a man, who has never thought much of the Covenant, a true and living faith in it would mean the transformation of his whole life. The full knowledge of what God wants to do for him; the assurance that it will be done by an Almighty Power; the being drawn to God Himself in personal surrender, and dependence, and waiting to have it done; all this would make the Covenant the very gate of heaven. May the Holy Spirit give us some vision of its glory. ([Murray, Andrew: Two Covenants](#)) (See discussion of Covenant: Why Study It?)

The covenant between Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel 18 highlights the seriousness of covenant as it was understood by the ancients (see discussion of Covenant - Solemn and Binding and A Walk Into Death). When covenant was cut, there was a surrender of rights and a merger of individual natures, so that the two became one, signifying a oneness and identity with the other party. As a result of this oneness and identity each party became the other party's covenant defender. For more background on these profound concepts see *Covenant -The Exchange of Robes and Exchange of Armor and Belts*. The idea of two becoming one (cp the mystical union of marriage in Genesis 2:24) has several aspects including the co-mingling of blood, the sharing of a common life, the exchange of names, the sharing of a meal, the idea of friendship and the establishment of a memorial (eg, wedding rings, Lord's Supper "Do this in remembrance of Me!"). For a more thorough discussion the reader is encouraged to study the topics *The Oneness of Covenant* and *Covenant: Oneness Notes*. Finally, we would be remiss if we did not emphasize that covenant conveyed responsibilities (see *Covenant: Withholding Nothing from God*). Finally, Scripture says "let the redeemed of the Lord say so" and my personal testimony is that as I began to study covenant, God used these profound truths to literally (and supernaturally) save my marriage covenant of 25 years (and 15 years as a believer). I firmly believe that if the truths of covenant were understood in churches across America, divorce rates would be drastically, supernaturally reduced as these truths transformed husbands and wives. (see *Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage*).

Without question the best way to truly understand covenant in the way I have attempted to summarize it, is to study these Biblical truths for one's self. And the best course available is the 11 week course of [Covenant \(click to download 20 page Pdf of Lesson 1 - the overview\)](#) produced by Precept Ministries International. This study will transform your life, your marriage, and your ministry. As one of my old medical school professors used to say "you can't not know" these truth about covenant. They are too important. Consider the fact for example that the Greek titles of the Scriptures are the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant" and our English word "Testament" is taken from the titles prefixed to the Latin versions. Covenant is what the entire Bible is about beloved. You can't not know!

Diatheke is used over 330 times in Septuagint (LXX) most often (some 270 times) to translate the Hebrew word [Beriyth](#) ([01285](#)).

See the excellent **ISBE** article [Covenant In The Old Testament](#). As discussed elsewhere, the ordinary Greek word for a compact was **syntheke** but this term was avoided by the Septuagint translators because it suggested the equal rank of the two parties, whereas the OT **Beriyth** is used for "a relationship between God and man graciously created by God, and only accepted by man".

Here are the NT uses of **diatheke**, all translated as **covenant**... (See the **ISBE** article [Covenant, The New](#))

Matthew 26:28 for this is My blood of the **covenant**, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. (see New Covenant in the Old Testament)

Mark 14:24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the **covenant**, which is poured out for many. (see Why the New is Better)

Luke 1:72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy **covenant**, (reference to Abrahamic)

Luke 22:20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new **covenant** in My blood. (see Abrahamic vs Old vs New)

Acts 3:25 "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (reference to Abrahamic see Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4)

Acts 7:8 "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision (Mosaic); and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

Romans 9:4 (note) who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the **covenants** (see Abrahamic vs Old vs New) and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

Romans 11:27 (note) "And this is My **covenant** with them (refers to New Covenant initially given to the Jews in Jer 31:31-34, inaugurated by Jesus with His Jewish disciples, Lk 22:20), When I take away their sins."

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new **covenant** in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

2 Corinthians 3:6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new **covenant**, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old **covenant** the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.

Galatians 3:15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's **covenant**, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

Galatians 3:17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a **covenant** (reference to Abrahamic) previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Galatians 4:24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two **covenants** (Abrahamic versus Mosaic), one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.

Ephesians 2:12 (note) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Hebrews 7:22 (note) so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better **covenant** (see Why the New is Better).

Hebrews 8:6 (note) But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better **covenant** (see Why the New is Better), which has been enacted on better promises... **8:8** 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 (see New Covenant in the Old Testament); **8:9** Not like the **covenant** (Mosaic) 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** (Mosaic), And I did not care for them, says the Lord. **8:10** "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 upon their hearts. And I will be their God, And they shall be My people.

Hebrews 9:4 (note) having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the **covenant** covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant... **15** And for this reason He is the mediator of a new **covenant** (see Why the New is Better), in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first **covenant** (Mosaic), those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**16** For where a **covenant** is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.**17** For a **covenant** is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives... **20** saying, "This is the blood of the **covenant** which God commanded you."

Hebrews 10:16 (note) "This is the **covenant** that I will make with them After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, And upon their mind I will write them," He then says, (see New Covenant in the Old Testament)

Hebrews 10:29 (note) How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the **covenant** by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 12:24 (note) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new **covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 13:20 (note) Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal **covenant**, even Jesus our Lord,

Revelation 11:19 (note) And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His **covenant** appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The choice of **diatheke**, rather than **suntheke**, which is the common word for covenant, is no doubt deliberate. **Suntheke** was the common word in the OT for agreements and for covenants and usually implied that the parties to the covenant contracted on equal terms. **Suntheke** referred to covenants in which the two parties had obligations. **Diatheke** in ancient times generally referred to a man's will (or so-called last "will and testament"). A man's will is not something that depends on the obligations on the part of two people. In other words we don't think of the one who receives the benefits as an obligation. It is a benefit and something you receive by the will of the person who had died and convey something to the recipient. As already alluded to the more common word **suntheke** is passed over when we come to the New Covenant, which stresses that the New Covenant is one in which only one person has obligation and that is the Lord God. It is an unconditional covenant, a one way disposition of the benefits which the Lord Jesus Christ has won for us. When God enters into this covenant He disposes everything, as a man disposes of his property by making a will. Clearly, this points to the truth that it is a covenant of grace!

Barclay adds that...

the normal Greek word for a covenant between two people is **suntheke/syntheke** (not used in the NT), which is the word everywhere used for a marriage covenant or an agreement between persons or states. In all normal Greek in all ages **diatheke** means, not a 'covenant', but a 'will'. *Kata diatheken* is the regular term for 'according to the terms of the will'. In a papyrus a testator leaves houses and gardens in accordance with the dispositions (*diathekas*) which are deposited in the temple of Aphrodite, with Eunomides the governor, and with Ctesiphon the lawyer. Why should the NT never use **suntheke** and always **diatheke**?

The reason is this. **Suntheke** always describes 'an agreement made on equal terms', an agreement which either party can alter. But the word 'covenant' means something different. God and man do not meet on equal terms; it means that God, of his own choice and in his free grace, offered man this relationship, which man cannot alter or change or annul, but which he can only accept or refuse. Now the supreme example of such an agreement is 'a will'.

The conditions of a will are not made on equal terms. They are made by one person and accepted by the other, who cannot alter them and who could not have made them.

Our relationship with God is not something into which we entered in our own right and on our own terms; it is something given to us solely and completely on the initiative and in the grace of God. ([Barclay, William: New Testament Words: Westminster John Know Press, 1964](#))

Enacted (3549) (**nomotheteo** from **nómos** = law + **títhemi** = to put, set) means to legislate, to make or give laws, establish as law. The **perfect tense** indicates these **better promises** were enacted at point in time and remain in effect.

Upon (epi) - Upon the basis of better promises. At every point Christianity is seen to be better than Judaism.

Better promises - The chief of the better promises is forgiveness of sins.

Promises (1860) (**epaggelia/epangelia** from **epí** = intensifies verbal meaning + **aggéllō** = to tell, declare) originally referred to an announcement or declaration (especially of a favorable message) but in later Greek came to mean a declaration to do something with the implication of obligation to carry out what is stated (thus a promise or pledge). **Epaggelia** was primarily a legal term denoting summons, a promise to do or give something, but in the NT speaks primarily of the promises of God.

Epaggelia is used in Hebrews 14 times in 13 verses (27.4% of all 51 NT uses) (See **notes** Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 6:12, 6:15, 6:17, Hebrews 7:6, Hebrews 8:6, Hebrews 9:15, Hebrews 10:36, Hebrews 11:9, 11:13, 11:17, 11:33, 11:39)

TDNT summarizes this word group writing that it has the following nuances- **a.** The first sense is “to indicate,” “declare,” “declaration,” “report.” **b.** When the state declares something, it becomes an “order.” **c.** In law we find the senses “accusation” and “delivery of a judgment.” **d.** We then find the senses “to declare an achievement,” “to show one’s mastery,” “to profess a subject.” **e.** Another sense is “to offer,” “to promise,” “to vow.” As regards promises, tension between word and deed is felt, so that promises are often seen as worthless. **f.** A special type of promise is the “promise of money,” and in this sense the idea of a “subscription” or “donation” arises (state liturgies, gifts to rulers at their accession, priests promising gifts in support of their candidature). **g.** In the Hellenistic period we also find a sacral use for the “proclamation” of a festival. Among all the instances, only one example has been found for the promise of a deity. ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

A Better Way - We are always looking for better ways to do things. We have faster computers, more efficient cars, and better-sounding compact disc players--vast improvements over the abacus, the Model-T, and the Victrola. God is the originator of the better way. The author of Hebrews said that animal sacrifices were only a "shadow of the heavenly things" of which Christ and His death on the cross are the reality (Heb 8:5; 9:11-15).

Before Jesus came, people waited for the annual Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place. The Jews call this special day Yom Kippur. In that awe-inspiring place where the ark of the covenant was located, the High Priest offered the blood of animals on behalf of himself and the Israelites. When Jesus Christ came to earth, something better was revealed. He Himself became our High Priest by sacrificing His life and shedding His blood to atone for our sins. Now, when we accept His gift of forgiveness, we can rejoice that the penalty of our sins has been paid and our guilt removed. Salvation through Messiah Jesus is the only way we can be forgiven and have fellowship with God. Have you found this better way? --J D Branon ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

*Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus. --Lowry*

Christ's sacrifice is exactly what God desired and our sin required