

The End of All Earthly Religion

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Date: 24 November 2019

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to the Bible and to our reading this morning, which you'll find in Hebrews in chapter 8. That's page 1005, if you have one of the church Bibles.

And last time we looked at chapter 7, we're going to read actually from the last paragraph of chapter 7, which takes us into this passage in chapter 8, and we'll read through to the end of the chapter. Chapter 7, where we learn that Jesus is not a priest like the Levites, whose whole setup and operation was purposely designed to show that it must be of itself incomplete, must be superseded. And as promised in the prophetic Psalms, the coming one would be a totally different kind of priest, a priest king. Like this Melchizedek who was preeminent, preceding Abraham and all the priesthood of Moses and so on, and was made to be like the Son of God, to be shown to be someone who would be a priest forever, of a totally different order.

And chapter 7, verse 26 says, For it was indeed fitting, it was entirely appropriate, that we should have such a priest, holy, innocent, unstained, and separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

[1 : 27] He has no need, like those high priests of old, to sacrifice daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all, when he offered up himself.

For the law, the old covenant, appoints men in their weakness as high priests. But the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

Now the main point, the crowning message in what we are saying is this, we have such a high priest. One who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

A priestly minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices.

Thus it's necessary for this priest also to have had something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all. Since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law, they serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

[2 : 41] For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better.

As his ministry is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault, and I think the footnote reading here is probably better.

He finds fault with it when he said to them, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

They did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

He's talking there about the coming exile, when Israel was put out of the land for their disobedience. But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my laws into their mind and write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

[4 : 04] And they shall not teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, Know the Lord. For they shall all know me, and the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what's becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. All right, let's turn to Hebrews chapter 8.

And here is a chapter about the end of all earthly religion. You might find the message this morning surprising, because what this passage tells us very plainly is that Jesus Christ came into this world not to find the Christian religion, but to put an end to it.

That's right. There's only ever been one true earthly religion given by the one true God of heaven, and that was the Christian religion.

[5 : 20] That is the religion that was from the start all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose and ascended to the glory of the throne in heaven, he brought that earthly religion to its end forever.

Because he fulfilled, he consummated, he brought to perfection the entire purpose of all earthly religion, which is to connect mortal man to the immortal God.

But through Jesus Christ, human beings have now been not only connected to the immortal God, but reunited with him forever and ever. And so the place of all earthly religion, that is even true God-given religion, well, it's been made, in the words of Hebrews 8, verse 13, obsolete, belonging to a former age.

The former days when God spoke to our fathers by the prophets and by these shadowy forms of earthly religion. But now, in these last days of this world, as we've seen, God has spoken to us by his Son, the final word to the world.

And he has done his finished, final work for this world. And he has brought that whole era of religion to an end. He's relegated it to the museum.

[6 : 42] He's made it obsolete. And what is obsolete, says verse 13, is growing old and ready to vanish away. That's what the prophet Jeremiah said hundreds of years before Jesus came.

What he calls the first covenant, the Christian religion, what we call the Old Testament. Many people, many Christians even are very confused. They think that the Old Testament is about Judaism and the New Testament is where the Christian religion begins.

In fact, the absolute opposite is the case. The Old Testament, the Old Covenant, is the era of the religion of Christ, which the coming of Christ brings to an end and consummates forever.

Because it inaugurates the reign of Christ and his eternal kingdom. Judaism as a religion, as we know it today, began only after the coming of Christ and after his death and resurrection.

Because it's not a religion of the Christ. It's just an empty shell of a religion now. Without Christ, in that regard, it's no different to Islam or to Hinduism or to any other earthly religion.

[7 : 49] Because it's utterly incapable of putting anyone in touch with the living God, made known at last in Jesus Christ. See, all human earthly religion is about putting mortal people in touch with the divine because the world of the divine is separate from humanity.

Every religion will give its own reasons for that separation with all their different mythologies. If you read the ancient Babylonians, they say, well, the human race, it was just an accidental fallout from great warring in the skies between the gods.

And every religion has its mythologies. It's about how that separation came to be. Some of it's very outlandish. You read the Scientologists and stories about spaceships and all that kind of mumbo-jumbo.

That's what the Hollywood stars like to go for. But every religion has its ideas. But the Bible alone gives us the true reason because it's revealed by the only true God.

And it tells us that the heavenly world, the eternal world of the eternal God, is a world in which God created himself, the physical world within that eternal world.

[9 : 02] And he came to dwell in that physical world with man, with the creatures that he created for that purpose, for fellowship with him. That's what the Garden of Eden is all about in Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

God dwelling with man, bringing his heavenly kingdom, planting it literally on earth. And he gives man the commission to spread out that heavenly kingdom throughout the whole of creation to fill the earth, to subdue it, to fill it with God's kingly rule in God's kingly image.

But of course, man's rebellion put an end to all of that. And he became separated from God, cast out of Eden because of sin. Sin is what truly separates human beings from God.

Not ignorance, not lack of wisdom, not lack of enlightenment, not lack of merit, not lack of anything that you might be able to find yourself on this earth. But sin, sin against heaven itself, against God himself, against the eternal God of heaven.

And so that eternal heavenly problem is what separates man from God. And that, of course, is a problem man can never by himself solve because he's not heavenly and immortal.

[10:18] He's earthly and mortal. And we're all condemned, aren't we, to our mortality, to our death under the curse of sin. But God promised in his extraordinary grace and mercy that he would put things right.

He, because it could only be he, he would bring an end to the curse. He would overcome sin and the source of sin, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, as he's called in Revelation chapter 12.

And he would do it through the offspring of man himself, through the seed of the woman who at last, he promised, would crush the head of that ancient serpent.

Now, so it's there, isn't it, in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, that the Christian faith begins. Because that's the promise that came at last to its climax in the one who was the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that took countless generations of human history to unfold. Why? Well, one reason is because sin is such a vast, vast problem.

[11:37] It's put the whole creation into bondage to decay. And so it was a vast undertaking, even for God, to put right what man had so disastrously made wrong.

Human beings, though, human beings have never grasped just how much greater is the problem of sin than we can ever possibly imagine. Never grasped it. It's part of the essence of sin, you see, to think absurdly.

That it's we as human beings who are actually wise and powerful beings. And it's God who's rather foolish and powerless. It's the essence of sin that we think absurdly, we think irrationally about absolutely everything.

And so that's why we think that we can put ourselves right with God or the gods. And that's what we see all around us today. So the right politicians and leaders could solve the world's ills.

Or the right technology can solve the world's ills. Or the greatest absurdity we're seeing all around us today is that human beings can determine to save the planet and the entire universe by joining the Extinction Rebellion and returning the human race to the Stone Age.

[12:53] Mankind has never seen the real problem for what it is and never taken sin truly seriously. Because I've said, the essence of sin is that it distorts our whole entire view of reality, of the whole world.

And so that is why, you see, as soon as God gave His promise of salvation, right at the very beginning, He began to institute for His people a whole way of life.

That is a religion designed to teach them about sin and about how salvation could actually be achieved and about how it would come and of course about how it could be experienced by sinful human beings.

And so God gave in the whole Old Testament revelation, which is the Christian revelation, the only true religion. And He gave a religion that was centered all around God's prescribed sacrifice for sin. That's the only way to ever approach God as the sole means ever of connecting sinful humanity with the divine presence in the holiness of heaven.

[14:06] That's why right away after Genesis chapter 3 and that first promise, what do you read about in Genesis chapter 4? It's a chapter all about the right and acceptable sacrifices for sin.

Abel follows God's direction, takes God seriously in his sacrifice and he was accepted by God because he had faith. He obeyed God's word. Cain, quite the opposite.

Not a man of God's word, but a man of the world. He said, well, I'll do religion the way I want to do it. I'll offer sacrifices the way I want to offer them. And discovered to his great cost, that is not the way for man to be connected with God.

What's the message? Well, any old religion, any old sacrifice, doing it my way with Frank Sinatra will not do with God. Only God's sacrifice, only God's way.

And that is what the true religion of Israel taught God's people. And so right through the history of Israel as it unfolds, that's what we see. Why does Abraham build altars to God under God's direction?

[15:09] We saw last time Melchizedek appears early in the story as a priest of the Most High God, way before Moses taught anything about priests and tabernacles. Why? Because the only way to fellowship with God has always been only through the priestly sacrifice that speaks of

appeasing God's righteous anger at sin.

and achieving forgiveness of sins without which there cannot be fellowship with God. That's why under the law of Moses when Israel was at last redeemed out of Egypt, at the very heart of everything was what?

Was the tabernacle with priests and an altar and sacrifices for sin. See, at the very heart of the Old Testament faith, of God's own revealed religion on earth, the only true earthly religion there's ever been.

At the heart of it was an apparatus designed deliberately by God to show His people and through His people to show the whole world just how utterly central, how utterly serious was the issue of sin. And the very heart of true religion spoke about the need for atonement for sin. But more than that, the very nature of that religion itself as we've seen with its constantly repeating sacrifices and with its continuous replacing of mortal priests, that showed what we saw last time in chapter 7, verse 11, that perfection, that fulfillment, that completion of the task of dealing with sin was never going to be attainable through that earthly Levitical priesthood.

[16 : 54] Earthly religion could never ever affect the lasting heavenly reconciliation that was needed. No earthly power can do that. Only God's divine power can bring that everlasting restoration, that everlasting righteousness that the world was created for.

So the entire Old Testament religion was designed to teach and to lead people to long for something more, for something beyond itself, for a consummation to come, for the intervention of God himself who alone could actually bring about forever, truly, all that that religion promised, but never ever through its merely earthly rituals could ever achieve.

And that, of course, meant that intrinsic to that religion was the understanding that one day it would be superseded because the reality of everything it promised would have arrived and the whole era of promise with all its religious earthly activities would be over.

So when the Old Testament spoke as it did in the Psalms, like Psalm 110 of the promised messianic king when he came becoming a priest forever, like Melchizedek, to finally bring the perfect restoration that the law with its merely earthly religion could never achieve, enabling human beings through him to draw near to God, to be saved to the uttermost, as we now can be with Jesus Christ.

Well, then when that happened, obviously, everything must change. in verse 28, you see, of chapter 7 sums it up, doesn't it? That era of human priests with all their weaknesses, it's over.

[18 : 45] Superseded by the Son of God who's become the perfect priest forever, the one who actually brings the restoration that the whole Old Testament longed for.

And that's why, as chapter 7, verse 12, puts it, there's been a change in the priesthood, there's been a seismic change indeed, and so also, inevitably, there's going to be a seismic change in the law, as far as all religious matters are concerned.

Everything to do with altars and sacrifice and priests, everything like that must change. And the change, in fact, as chapter 8 tells us here, is that they must all vanish away because they've done their job.

The Christian religion of the former days has passed away because the Christian reality of the world to come has begun already in these last days of this present world.

That's the message of the book of Hebrews. That's the message of the whole Christian gospel. Jesus Christ did not come to this world to find a new religious cult. He came to usher in and inaugurate a newly restored creation.

[20 : 00] And he did so by fulfilling at last the great central need of every single human being.

The need that all Old Testament religion repeatedly, incessantly reminded of with every single sacrifice. He did it by bringing at last lasting forgiveness for sins.

He's done it for his people. Chapter 7 verse 20 27 Once for all when he offered up himself.

Therefore and that's the heart of the message of Hebrews in this whole great section from chapter 8 right through to chapter 10 verse 18.

In fact chapter 10 verse 18 sums it up. Where there is forgiveness now there is no longer any offering for sin. Promised reality at last has come.

And so prophetic religion has died away. I've taken a long time this morning just looking at that big picture because it's so important we get that big message clear.

[21 : 09] It's the main thing in the whole book. Chapter 8 verse 1 says it. This is the main point. It's the crowning affirmation of the whole letter. But let's look now in the time life at chapter 8 a bit more carefully because it shows us three things.

It makes three things very clear to us that we have as Christians living in these last days on the verge of the world to come. That we have because of Jesus finished work.

We have now in Jesus his exalted priestly reign. And that has therefore superseded all earthly prophetic religion. Because it's inaugurated, it's begun the everlasting permanent reality of the new creation of the kingdom of Christ which will never be shaken.

So verses 1 and 2 first. They speak about the exalted priestly reign of Christ and his kingdom. He's saying because the son has been perfected forever, now in the superior powerful ministry of the risen Christ, we have an exalted ruler who is the true priest.

priest. Because he reigns actually where it matters, in heaven. This is the main point of everything I'm saying he says. That the exalted king of heaven is himself our eternal priest in heaven.

[22 : 35] The son of God is exalted to the highest place. Look at verse 1, the right hand of the majesty on high. And it's him, verse 2, who is our priestly minister in the high places, in the true tabernacle, in the true temple, in God's true house, the one he himself has set up, not man.

We have an eternal effective priest who will always give us access to God's actual dwelling place. Not an earthly copy, but God's real house in heaven.

And he can guarantee that to us because as we've seen already, he's the son. It's his house. He is over the whole house. And so his powerful majesty can affect that perfect ministry for us.

He is the priest king, like Melchizedek. He's unique. He's eternal. That's what the Messiah was, as promised. God's kingly son was also his kingly priest forever.

And now in Christ's death for sins once and for all, and his resurrection to glory as promised, all of it, all of it is now fulfilled for us. God's king is sitting enthroned in heaven.

[23 : 51] Remember chapter 1 verse 3. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Just as it says here, it says the same thing again in the end of chapter 10 verse 14.

He sat down at the right hand of the majesty. And he's waiting for all his enemies in this world to be made his footstool, just as the psalm promised. Same again in chapter 12 verse 2.

He is seated at the right hand of God. He is the king of the universe. And now all the promises for God's Messiah king that his people had looked for all through the ages are fulfilled.

And his kingdom has begun. Fulfilling all the longing of the prophets for a kingdom that will fill the whole earth at last with the glory of God. And what does that mean?

That means there will never be again any earthly kings over an earthly nation of Israel anymore because God's king is now king over the whole wide world, not just a tiny part of it.

[24 : 51] And in the same way, there can never be any earthly priests offering earthly sacrifices anymore because the son is the true priest, the kingly priest like Melchizedek.

And his majestic power has a ministry of perfection forever where it really matters, not on this earth, but in heaven before God which is the bar of judgment before which we will stand, not an earthly one.

He has been made perfect, perfectly fitted for his destiny as our savior through what he suffered.

Do you remember chapter 5? And so he has become the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

And the whole point of everything I'm writing says the writer here in chapter 8 is we have that now in Jesus. In his death and resurrection, this fulfillment of every covenant promise of God from the very beginning.

And so as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, in Christ already there is new creation begun. And so obviously everything must change.

[26 : 03] Where there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. And now we have an eternal priesthood and so all matters pertaining to earthly priesthood are now obsolete.

Not because they were a failure, but because they've now been fulfilled. When he talks about the true tent, the true tabernacle here in verse 2, he's not saying it's true as opposed to a false one in the past.

He's saying it's true as opposed to the preparatory, the prophetic one in the past, the preliminary one. In a way, a sketch of something is preliminary to the main fully painted up work of art. That's what Israelite religion, which was the only true religion on earth, the true Christian religion, that's what it was. It was preparatory. It was prophetic. As God designed it to be for its time. And that's what verses 3 to 6 are about, you see, about the earthly prophetic religion of Christ and his kingdom in its time. The point he's making is that in former days, before the Savior had come, in the shadowy preparatory ministry of the old covenant, there was an earthly religion which was truly prophetic because it was revealed truly from heaven by God, unlike all other human religions. [27 : 27] The whole reason, verse 3, you see, that every earthly priest was appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins was to point to the necessity of the ultimate priest having something to offer.

Notice the singular there. Speaking of the once for all sacrifice, which would at last come and actually make purification for sins. But that priesthood could never have been merely an earthly one, could it?

Because it was of a totally different order altogether. And that's what verse 4 is saying. Jesus wouldn't have even qualified as a priest under the law. He wasn't of the right tribe, the tribe of Levi. He wouldn't have qualified it, not because he wasn't great enough, but he was far too great. He'd be rather like one of the great World Cup champion heroes, one of these superstars. And he wouldn't qualify, though, would he, to play in this play in the schoolboys match that is the warm-up to the main match. Is that because he's not good enough? No, it's because he's of a totally different order altogether.

[28 : 36] Those little kids are playing a game of rugby, rugby. But it's only when the real game starts that you get the real rugby. Prior to that, it's just a, well, it's verse 5, isn't it?

It's a copy. It's a shadow of the real thing that's still to come. It can be quite useful if you're watching rugby with your sister who's totally ignorant about anything to do with rugby.

And then during that little warm-up game, they can ask you all those questions. Why aren't they throwing the ball forwards instead of backwards? Why is he kicking it off the park instead of this and all that kind of thing? So when you get to the real game, they can shut up and you can actually watch it.

It is real rugby, but it's not the real thing, is it? But it can foreshadow the real thing because it actually is a real copy of the real men's game.

But when that game begins, well, it just fades into the background. It's been helpful. It's been educative. It's been enjoyable as a warm-up. But now it's obsolete.

[29 : 40] And that's what the entire Old Testament religion was like, is what verse 5 is saying. Copies and shadows of real heavenly eternal realities that were still to come.

And notice the language. Notice it carefully. They served faithfully, these things, as good and true copies of heavenly things. It was God-given revelation.

It wasn't just man-made religion. Look at the end of verse 5. It's quoting Exodus 25. Moses followed exact divine instruction. The pattern was a heavenly pattern for the earthly tabernacle.

And that's why, as good and true representations of the heavenly realities, of the ultimate realities, this earthly religion of Israel, the only earthly religion, was able to put sinful human beings in touch with God in heaven.

It did enable our forefathers in Israel to commune truly with the living God. It brought them into real fellowship with the invisible God in the invisible world so they could know him, so they could trust him by faith, as they surely did.

[30 : 49] Read Hebrews 11. But nevertheless, he says here in verse 5, all this true earthly effect of religion was, but a shadow.

Foreshadowing. That is, the fulfillment that was still to come in time and history. Not fake. Not empty shadows. Because the eternal heavenly reality predated the thing that these earthly priests and sacrifices and tabernacles pointed to, didn't they?

Christ's eternal priesthood as Savior was ordained before even the foundation of the world, Paul tells us. And it was that eternal reality that cast these shadows right back into human history.

You need something real and substantial, don't you, before you can have a shadow. It's there, isn't it? But when the light then is turned on, the real thing, switched on, the shadow is cast past the object right back into the distance.

And when the light of God's revelation of himself and his saving purposes in the sun, when it shone throughout history, those shadows were cast right back into the earliest days of God's people's story.

[32 : 10] And because all Israel's religious apparatus, because their ceremonies and their sacrifices and so on, were true copies of the heavenly things, and shadows, therefore, of fulfillment to come, well then the believers under the Old Testament times, they were guided by them to rejoice in true fellowship with the invisible God.

And they were guided to rejoice in the true future and the world to come, which they were to share in. The Old Testament wasn't a world of unreal religion, pretend religion.

It was a world of real faith. It was a world of real saving knowledge of God. It was a world of real hope. Hebrews 11's plain. They desired a better country.

They were looking for a heavenly city that God had prepared for them, even as he's prepared it for us. Theirs was a real salvation. It was real, true Christian faith, as real and true as yours and mine. But by its nature, it was in an era of the preparatory, of the prophetic. Not yet living in the era of the permanent glory of the kingdom of God on earth.

[33 : 25] Of God's kingdom come, of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. Israel, when it was in the land under Moses' law, his instruction under God's truth for life, and especially later under the kingship of David and Solomon, it was a true copy of God's heavenly kingdom projected into human history and into this world.

But of course, the problem of human sin was never far away, was it? And so Israel's religion, Israel's whole cultus of priests and altars and sacrifices was a constant reminder in the middle that sin had not yet been fully dealt with.

And that earth and heaven were not yet fully reunited. And that righteousness was not yet universally restored to the world. And that it never could be merely by earthly priests and earthly religion.

So a true understanding, you see, of the religion of Israel was, of course, that you must trust and hope in God. Cast all your hope on him because at last he has promised to bring that true heavenly restoration, to deal ultimately with sin, to bring lasting forgiveness, which alone could usher in the world to come, where darkness would be truly defeated, where Eden really would be at last restored, where permanent forgiveness of sins would make possible at last permanent fellowship with God once again.

And when humanity being restored to the true image of God, well, the whole creation would be loosed from its bondage to decay. And heaven and earth at last would be reunited together.

[35 : 15] And as you read the prophets of the Old Testament, especially the later prophets, the writing prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and so on, that is what they spoke of.

That's what they foresaw. When God would at last remake the world and dwell with his people forever in a kingdom of everlasting righteousness and peace and everlasting life.

And that is what has begun with the coming of Jesus Christ.

That's what verse 6 here is saying. Christ's superlative, ultimate fulfillment of everything that Israel's priesthood pointed to, but could never achieve it now mediates a whole new covenant era, which is a surpassingly excellent.

As his priesthood excels everything in the earthly order. Because his priestly ministry, you see, is enacted on far better promises than the Levites ministry.

[36 : 19] Same word is used there in chapter 7, verse 11, about the enactment of the laws about their earthly priesthood. And the point is that their appointment was an earthly preliminary enactment.

But Christ's is an eternal, permanent enactment. It's sealed with the oath of the everlasting God himself. And so because God has now brought a final, ultimate change to the priesthood, he has brought a final, ultimate change to the law also, as chapter 7, verse 12 said there would be.

There's been a change to the whole covenant setup. So radical. But it's described here as a shift from the old to the new. Verse 7 talks about the first covenant and the second.

You could call it just as well a movement from the first to the last. That's the language Paul uses when he talks about the two eras of the first Adam and the last Adam. He's meaning from the earthly to the eternal.

From this world to the world to come. Remember chapter 2, verse 5. It's the world to come that I'm talking about all through this letter. That's the main point in everything that he's saying.

[37 : 35] That we have now, in Christ's exalted priestly reign, begun. We have the future.

So we no longer have earthly prophetic religion anymore at all. What we have now is the beginning of the everlasting permanent reality of Christ and his kingdom.

And that's what verses 7 to 13 are telling us. Because sin has now at last been dealt with forever when Christ offered himself up once and for all.

And so we have, in the superseding permanent mediation of the new covenant, we have an eternal reality which is now truly permanent. Because it does actually restore, once again, earth and heaven.

And that's what these verses quoted here from the prophet Jeremiah are ultimately speaking about. They're speaking about the new creation. Where every person the world over, from the greatest to the least, verse 11, knows the Lord.

[38 : 39] And where the curse of sin is finally eradicated forever. In the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus. In the kingdom which will never, ever again be shaken by sin. And what he's saying is that has begun.

Now, in these last days of this present world, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All God's covenant promises throughout the Old Testament prophesied.

And they look forward to this, to the kingdom of Christ. From the very first glimmerings in Genesis, through the promises to Noah, to Abraham, through Moses, through David.

The promises shone brighter, clearer, more wonderfully, all the way through as the story unfolded. But the whole Old Testament faith could be put into this one phrase that you get so many times through the Old Testament.

He, the Lord, remembered his covenant. And it's that redemptive covenant grace that at last reaches its zenith.

[39 : 40] In the full and the final realization of the promise through Christ. To whom all the covenants pointed. And of whom all the covenants prophesied.

Because just as the institution of the tabernacle and the sacrifices, just as they intrinsically bore witness to a fulfillment that had to be beyond themselves.

So God's covenant promises bore witness through their intrinsic faultiness and inadequacy of what is merely earthly. That they had to look for something more.

For the days that would be coming, as verse 8 puts it. Or after those days, as verse 10 puts it. Or the great day of the Lord. Again and again in the prophets, you get the longing for that day and for those days.

When at last God would fulfill himself. All his promises to judge all evil. To restore righteousness to the world. To save his people forever at last from their sins.

[40 : 44] And Jeremiah's words here are pointing ultimately to that great hope. Even after the calamity of Israel's exile because of her persistent sin. God would do a new thing, he said.

And at last he would fulfill all his promises from the beginning of the whole world. It's not that this covenant is new. In terms of bringing in a new and different way of salvation.

Not at all. Sometimes people think that. That is absolutely not the case. There is nothing new in the content of God's promised redemption here. Everything here in the content is in all his other covenant promises.

But what is new here? And what the writer focuses on in verse 13. Exclusively. It is the only thing he is interested in. It is not the content. But the consummation. He is saying that the prophet himself, Jeremiah, when he was speaking these words.

He foresaw himself a day when the entire old order of religion would at last be obsolete. When it would have grown old and died away and vanished altogether.

[41 : 50] Because all preparatory and prophetic religion would have given way to the promised permanent restoration. When the earthly gives way to the eternal.

And earthly religion fades away in the face of everlasting reality. Because at last all the covenants promising the coming Christ are fulfilled in the Christ who actually has come.

And actually has once for all brought forgiveness of sins. And that's why he's saying. Therefore all earthly religion. All sacrifices.

All altars. All priesthoods. All sanctuaries. All holy places and shrines. All holy men. Have vanished away altogether forever.

And he repeats it as I said in chapter 10 verse 18. Where there is forgiveness. Where the new creation has begun. There is no longer any offering for sin. The old order of religion is gone.

[42 : 52] Jesus Christ came to bring an end to all earthly religion. Because he fulfilled the only true earthly religion the world has ever seen.

The Christian religion. Which was the Old Testament Israelite faith. He came to bring Christian reality. Fulfilling all of that. Once.

Once upon a time in its day. It was a wonderful religion. It brought saving faith to our ancestors of old. Through trust in the promises. The covenants of the Christ the Savior who is to come. But friends.

What he's saying is we have something far better. Something far more excellent. Because already we have the permanent. Perfect. Powerful forgiveness of God.

It's accomplished. Once for all. And that means we can have far greater assurance. We can have full assurance. He says in this letter of salvation. Full assurance of intimate fellowship.

[43 : 49] With the invisible God above. Full assurance of an ultimate future. In the glory of the world to come. We have in Jesus. And we have in Jesus alone. The guarantor.

He says. Of a better covenant. And we can be absolutely assured of that. If. And we must never forget the ifs of Hebrews.

Must we? If we indeed hold fast. Our original confidence in this gospel to the end. That's why he's saying all the way through. Let us hold fast.

To our confession. That's a great exhortation. All the way through. Don't go back. Hold fast to what you have. Why? Why does he have to keep saying that? Well because these Hebrew Christians. Are being tempted back. To something visible. To something earthly. To something that can be seen. And touched. And smelt. In the sacrifices.

[44 : 44] To a temple. To an impressive priesthood. To all of these things. All that earthly religion. But he's saying all of that is now obsolete. It's empty. It's vanished away.

It has no spiritual power. Whatsoever. And so if you turn to those. You're not adding to your Christian faith. You're wiping it out. In fact you're turning away from God. And apostatizing altogether.

Neglecting this great salvation. He's given you. Now the mark of real faith. In the real Christ. He says. Is that you are seeking.

The invisible God. In heaven by faith. To seek God in the visible. Now in this new age. Is unbelief. It's anti-Christian.

Christian. Why is that important for us? Well it's because of this. If you. Are seeking assurance. To add to your Christian faith. By any kind of religion.

[45 : 41] Might be the. Rituals of Jewish religion. As they were doing then. As some Christians today. Are tempted to do. Or more often. It's the impressive religious rituals. That take place. In religions.

That call themselves Christian. But meet in temples. That they call sanctuaries. And have priests in them. And altars in them. And offer sacrifices in them.

It's what you find in the Roman Catholic religion. And the Eastern Orthodox religion. If you are seeking those things. You're seeking something. Whose age has passed. And you're turning away. From the true heaven reality. Whose age has come. You're looking for an empty shell. Which is utterly devoid. Of any spiritual life. Any presence of God. Because Jesus came to make.

All such things. Utterly obsolete. And the same goes. Exactly for those. Who are seeking their assurance. In the visible. Tangible. Great temples.

[46 : 38] Of the prosperity gospel. With great charismatic leaders. Strutting. Their stuff on the stage. Promising all their blessings. Sometimes. Of course. For a fee. But all of that.

Even at its best. And that is it. At its worst. All of that. The apostle is saying. Is dead. Gone. Buried. Fading away. Obsolete. And yet.

What do you see. All over the world today. People going into. Christian. So-called temples.

Sanctuaries. Of all these different kinds. Seeking their assurance.

In the visible. But the true Christian gospel. Friends. Calls us not backwards. Into prophetic religion. But forward.

Into present reality. Where our hope is truly fixed. In the world to come. And upwards. To the present. Priestly reign of Christ. Where all. Our present help.

[47 : 34] Is to be found. Not in visible religion. But in the invisible world above. In the invisible. But utterly real.

Restored. Relationship. That you and I have. With God in heaven. Through Jesus Christ. Forever and ever. We have the real thing. We have a majestic priest.

Where it really matters. In heaven. With God on the throne. At the throne of judgment. Where every one of us. Will one day stand. We don't have to go back. To the shadows. We can't go back.

To what is now. An utterly false assurance. Of earthly things. Whether it's religious things. Or indeed. Whether it's material things. Where so many of us. Seek our assurance. In wealth.

In money. In education. In fulfillment. In any of these things. Don't hark back. To the shadows. He's saying to us. Hold fast.

[48 : 32] To the substance. And the real assurance. Of what is eternal. That's what it means. To have Christian faith. In this new era. We walk by faith. Not by sight.

Because as the apostle Paul tells us. We know. Don't we? The things that are seen. Are. Transient. Ephemeral. Merely earthly.

But the things that are unseen. Now. Ours. Truly. In Jesus Christ. Christ. These are the things that are. Truly.

Eternal. Let's pray. How we thank you. Oh Lord. Our God. That we have. Such a high priest.

A great king. Seated. At the right hand. Of the majesty. In heaven. And a great priest. In the holy praises. In the true temple. Where you welcome us.

[49 : 32] And bring us. As we draw near. In faith. Through Jesus Christ. Your son. And him alone. Help us. Lord. We pray. To keep seeing. The invisible.

To keep drawing near. Through our great savior. To keep looking up. And to keep looking forward. Never looking back. And help us.

We pray. To help one another. To exhort one another. Every day. As long as it's called today. Until that great day. When at last we see your face. And when at last.

The possession. Of our heavenly bodies. Seals forever. The fullness of our salvation. That we have now. By faith and trust in Jesus. So until that day.

Lord. Of our great visible. Justification. Before the whole world. Guard us. And keep us. As we pray. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.