

Hebrews 8:1-2

“Yeshua as High Priest Seated in Heaven”

“Now the main point in what has been said is *this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.”

Hebrews 8:1 opens with the statement, “Now this is my main point” (NEB). What readers consider or identify as the “sum” (YLT) of the author’s argument is of key importance for a correct interpretation of what he will proceed to say.²⁰⁵ The author of Hebrews plainly says, “Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven” (Hebrews 8:1, NLT). Evans, among Christian commentators, notes, “We have come to the third and final section of doctrine—the ministry of the High Priest.”²⁰⁶ Guthrie likewise remarks, “the focus falls on what the high priest has to offer and where he performs his ministry.”²⁰⁷ This High Priest is undoubtedly Yeshua the Messiah. But while these commentators, and others, rightly identify the main point as Yeshua’s priesthood and continuing ministry in Heaven, the conclusions readers often draw, may not always be as rooted within the text as much as they should.

To emphasize how important it is to understand Yeshua’s High Priesthood operating in Heaven, our author employs the term *kephalaion* (κεφάλαιον), meaning, “a **brief statement concerning some topic or subject, main thing, main point**” (BDAG).²⁰⁸ The majority of his remarks from the beginning of his composition, where he talks about Yeshua’s superiority over angels, His humanity and humbling, the penalties for rejecting Him, and how He functions in the office of Melchizedek—now leads to him discussing what this priesthood has brought to the redeemed. deSilva describes what is about to be discussed as the “leading idea.”²⁰⁹ Lane offers an excellent description of what the author of Hebrews is about to do, saying that “The ‘crowning affirmation’ is not simply that [Believers] have a high priest who has taken his seat at God’s right hand (v 1) but that he is the ministering priest in the heavenly sanctuary (v 2).”²¹⁰

The remark that Yeshua has “sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 8:1, NIV) is a major indicator of how much power the Son actually and truly has. Implicit in our author’s statement are some of his constant references to Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (cf. Hebrews 1:13). A possible secondary reference is Zechariah 6:13 from the Septuagint, which notably includes the phrase *ek dexiōn autou* (ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ), “on his right hand” (LXE), which is absent from the Hebrew, which only has *kohen al-kiso* (כֹּהֵן עַל-כִּסֵּאֵוֹ), “priest on His throne.” This text is certainly Messianic in nature, as it relates to “a man whose name is Branch” (Zechariah 6:12). We have to remember that many of our author’s theological arguments are derived from the subtle differences seen in the Greek LXX when compared to the Hebrew MT:

²⁰⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²⁰⁶ Evans, 143.

²⁰⁷ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 170.

²⁰⁸ BDAG, 541.

²⁰⁹ deSilva, 279.

²¹⁰ Lane, 47a:204.

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ZECHARIAH 6:13 (MT)	ZECHARIAH 6:13 (LXX)
<p>He shall build the Temple of the LORD and shall assume majesty, and he shall sit on his throne and rule. And there shall also be a priest seated on his throne, and harmonious understanding shall prevail between them (NJPS).</p>	<p>And he shall receive power, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and there shall be a priest on his right hand, and a peaceable counsel shall be between <i>them</i> both (LXE).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">וְהוּא יִבְנֶה אֶת־הַיְכָל יְהוָה וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב הוֹד וְיָשֵׁב וּמֹשֵׁל עַל־כִּסֵּאוֹ וְהָיָה כֹהֵן עַל־כִּסְאוֹ וְעֵצַת שְׁלוֹם תְּהִיָּה בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם:</p> <p><i>v'hu yivneh et-heikal ADONAI v'hu-yisa hod v'yashav u'masal al-kis'o v'hayah kohen al-kis'o v'atzat shalom tiheyeh ben shenei'hem</i></p>	<p>καὶ αὐτὸς λήμψεται ἀρετὴν καὶ καθίεται καὶ κατάρξει ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσται ὁ ἱερεὺς ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ βουλὴ εἰρηνικὴ ἔσται ἀνὰ μέσον ἀμφοτέρων</p> <p><i>kai autos lēmpsetai aretēn kai kathietai kai katarxei epi tou thronou autou kai estai ho hiereus ek dexiōn autou kai boulē eirēnikē estai ana meson amphoterōn</i></p>

Our author makes it clear that Yeshua the Messiah “is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 8:1, RSV), and the “right hand” does have some critical significance. First of all, as the Son of God, Yeshua has literally “taken his seat” (NEB) and is present right next to God the Father in Heaven. Secondly, the Son has the supreme authority, as it is Yeshua who is upholding the universe by His word (cf. Hebrews 1:3-4).

What makes Yeshua’s priesthood very special for the redeemed is that He has gone in and sat directly beside His Father. Levitical priests were limited in their service to God, because they could only be in the presence of God in the Tabernacle or Temple. The Son, however, sits right next to the Father in His service, and is able to *continually mediate*, without having to leave as a mortal priest would. As Ellingworth summarizes it, “the author will explore what Jesus is now doing at God’s right hand.”²¹¹ This is an awesome thing for any of us to consider, because it is by means of Yeshua’s priestly service—*continually in Heaven*—that He has inaugurated the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8-12).

Yeshua the Messiah “ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands” (Hebrews 8:2, NLT). The Tabernacle on Earth was incomplete because it is a copy of the one that exists in Heaven, where God Himself sits upon His throne. Take note of the fact that in our author’s vocabulary he does not concern himself with the Temple, but instead the Tabernacle (Grk. *skēnē*, σκηνή), just like Stephen (Acts 7). This is a likely reflection on him being a Hellenistic Jew, as Hellenistic Jewry in the Diaspora focused more on the Tabernacle in its theology, which they knew from the Scriptures, than the Temple, which Judean Jewry had present among them in the Land of Israel.

One’s view of Hebrews 8:2 should not be significantly altered by the writer of Hebrews only employing “tabernacle,” instead of “temple.” The key in properly understanding what he is trying to communicate is that the edifice where Yeshua serves has not been built by “any mortal” (NRSV). This place in Heaven is *alēthinos* (ἀληθινός), “*genuine, authentic, real*” (BDAG).²¹² We see a possible allusion to Numbers 24:6 in the Septuagint, which adds that Israel is “as tents which [*the Lord*] pitched” (LXE), *hōsei skēnai has epēxen Kurios* (ὡσεὶ σκηναὶ ἃς ἔπηξεν

²¹¹ Ellingworth, 400.

²¹² BDAG, 43.

κύριος). This is only a slight difference from the MT, but it may indicate that as Yeshua is serving in Heaven before the Father, He is indeed serving Israel—and by implication all who are served by Him and who are redeemed, are regarded a part of an enlarged community or Kingdom realm of Israel:

NUMBERS 24:5-6 (MT)	NUMBERS 24:5-6 (LXX)
<p>How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel! Like palm-groves that stretch out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the water (NJPS).</p>	<p>How goodly <i>are</i> thy habitations, Jacob, and thy tents, Israel! as shady groves, and as gardens by a river, and as tents which [the Lord] pitched, and as cedars by the waters (LXE).</p>
<p>מִה־טֹבֹו אֱהִיֶּיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ כְּנַחְלִים נָטְיָו כְּנִגְתַּי עַל־יְנַחַר כְּאַהֲלִים נִטְעַי יְהוָה כְּאַרְזִים עַל־מַיִם׃</p> <p><i>mah-tovu ohalekha Ya'akov mishkenotekha Yisrael. k'nechalim nitayu k'ganot 'alei nahar k'ahalim nata' ADONAI k'arazim alei-mayim.</i></p>	<p>ὡς καλοὶ σου οἱ οἶκοι Ἰακωβ αἱ σκηναὶ σου Ἰσραηλ ὡσεὶ νάπαι σκιάζουσαι καὶ ὡσεὶ παράδεισοι ἐπὶ ποταμῶν καὶ ὡσεὶ σκηναὶ ἃς ἔπηξεν κύριος ὡσεὶ κέδροι παρ' ὕδατα</p> <p><i>hōs kaloi sou hoi oikoi Iakōb hai skēnai sou Israēl hōsei napai skiazousai kai hōsei paradeisoi epi potamōn kai hōsei skēnai has epēxen Kurios hōsei kedroi par' hudata</i></p>

Building upon his statement that Yeshua as High Priest has sat down at the right hand of His Father, our author asserts that he is “a minister in the holy places” (Hebrews 8:2, ESV) or in *tōn hagīōn* (τῶν ἁγίων). The Greek appears in the plural, literally meaning “the holies,” or perhaps also “the holiest.” There is no doubt that this is a reference to the Holy of Holies (Heb. *ha'qodesh ha'qodoshim*, הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים), especially when we consider the specific work that Yeshua now to be regarded as performing before the Father in Heaven. The high priest on Earth was only allowed entry to the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*:

“He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on *the ark of the testimony*, otherwise he will die. Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat” (Leviticus 16:13-15).

The intercession that the Earth-bound high priest had to perform before God in the Holy of Holies could only be done once a year, whereas Yeshua’s intercession before His Father *occurs continually*. Lane indicates, “By means of a typological interpretation of the OT, the writer asserts that Christ has achieved what the sacrificial action of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement only foreshadowed.”²¹³ Yeshua the Messiah is sitting constantly at His Father’s right hand, constantly interceding for the affairs of humankind, and most especially the redeemed in Him.

While all of this is indeed a most wonderful and greatly beautiful picture to behold, our author’s words were likely met with some hostility when they were composed in the First

²¹³ Lane, 47a:210.

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Century. Many in the Jewish community, either in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora, had been raised in a culture that relied upon the high priest in the Temple to intercede for them before God. While this work was indeed important, with the ministry of Yeshua before the Father in Heaven, the Levitical service is not as necessary as it once was. Lane observes, “The point emphasized in v. 2 is that the possibility of access to God through a Levitical and earthly arrangement no longer exists because of their intrinsic inadequacy. Access is possible only through the ministering priest who serves in the heavenly sanctuary.”²¹⁴

Yeshua’s priesthood taking over where the Levitical priesthood leaves off is part of the “change of law” (Hebrews 7:12), or rearrangement that the Torah has experienced as a result of His sacrifice for human sin. Access to God the Father in a priestly context, for Hebrews’ First Century audience, would soon *only* be available through the Son functioning as High Priest in Heaven. To a largely Jewish audience that stood on the verge of the Temple’s destruction, these would have been candid words to cut to the quick of the problem of those denying or thinking about denying the Lord. The priestly service of Yeshua in Heaven is most superior to the best service any human priest could offer on Earth. Some would have been offended by this, and sadly today, there are some—even in the Messianic community—who still are to a degree. This is because there are those in the Messianic movement, who for whatever reason, fail to study the Torah from the perspective of how Messiah Yeshua has come in fulfillment of its sacrifices for sin, and the priesthood that was to regulate those sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:13-14

“The Messiah, the Spirit, and God”

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Hebrews 9:13-14 introduce a *qal v’chomer* or “light and heavy” argument of the importance of Yeshua’s shed blood, over that of goats and bulls.²¹⁵ Neither the blood of bulls or goats could provide internal redemption, but were limited to only providing external redemption. Bruce points out, “The blood of goats and bulls’ is a general term covering not only the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement but other sacrifices as well.”²¹⁶ Our author introduces the Greek word *tauros* (ταῦρος) or “bull,” not used previously in Hebrews 9:12, which was a specific reference to the *Yom Kippur* offering. *Taurus* is generally used in the LXX to render the Hebrew *baqar* (בָּקָר), often rendered as “ox” in our English Bibles.

There is a curious connection, though, with our author’s reference to “the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled” (Hebrews 9:13). This act was specifically intended for those who contacted a corpse, so they could become ritually clean again:

“The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, *and then* he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean” (Numbers 19:11-12).

²¹⁴ Ibid., 206.

²¹⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²¹⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 214.