

WRESTLING WITH THE BIBLICAL TEXT

“Our Minister in Heaven” (Hebrews 8:1–2)

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Before I share some of the results of my study on Hebrews 8:1–2, let me say something about the context of Hebrews chapter eight.

Chapter eight expands the presentation about Jesus as royal priest introduced in chapter 7. The expansion begins in chapter 8 but ends in chapter 10. In chapter 8, Jesus is in heaven where he ministers (vv 1–6). An important aspect of his ministry concerns the mediation of a better covenant, which he contrasts with the Mosaic covenant. This contrast draws from Jeremiah 31:31–34 (LXX 38: 31–34). Jeremiah divulges God’s displeasure with his people, discloses the coming of a new covenant, and draws attention to the termination of the Mosaic covenant (vv 7–13).

So Hebrews 8:1–2 underscores Jesus’ ministry in heaven. Verses 1–2 reads, “The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man” (NIV). These verses tell me three important things about Jesus ministry.

First, Jesus is our “high priest.” Earlier in Hebrews we learn that Jesus is not like the high priest or any appointed Levitical priest of the past, he is God’s appointed *royal* high priest (cf. 5:4–6; 7:21–22) and superior to them all (cf. 7:23–28).

Second, Jesus has authority. The phrase “who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” speaks about Jesus authority. In the ancient Near Eastern culture, iconic images present kings sitting at the right hand of a pagan god. They symbolized a king’s honored position with that god and the king’s rule sanctioned by the god. In the Old Testament, Davidic kings were also depicted as sitting at God’s right hand (figuratively speaking) to symbolize his honored position as God’s chosen leader to rule over Israel (Pss 2, 72, 110). Although God was enthroned in heaven (Pss 2:4, 9:7, 29:10; Isa 6:1), God extended his rule on earth through the Davidic king (Pss 80:17, 89:21). So what does Jesus have? He has ruling authority sectioned by God. Where does Jesus rule? Unlike Davidic kings of the past, Jesus rules from heaven and in God’s presence.

Third, our royal high priest serves in God’s sanctuary. The phrase “who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man” underscores what Jesus does. He “ministers” (λειτουργός). Similar words are used to describe angels worshiping and *ministering* in heaven (Heb 1:7, 14) and priests *servicing* in an earthly tabernacle (Heb 9:21; 10:11). Jesus ministers, however, in “the true tabernacle” that God himself “set up” and “not man” (οὐκ ἄνθρωπος; cf. Heb 8:5). So unlike priests who ministered in an earthly tabernacle, Jesus ministers in a heavenly one in the presence of the living God. His ministry is a superior one (cf. Heb 8:6).

What strikes me about Hebrews 8:1–2 is simply this: I have a royal high priest, who rules and ministers in God’s presence on my behalf. He is someone I can approach with confidence, receive mercy, and find the grace I need to make it through another day (cf. Heb 4:16).

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