

Hebrews 8:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

Analysis

If Christ were on earth, He 'would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law.' This counterfactual highlights the incompatibility of earthly Levitical priesthood with Christ's heavenly Melchizedekian priesthood. They can't coexist - the new replaces the old. Christ's priesthood is exercised in heaven (8:1), where He intercedes with the efficacy of His once-for-all sacrifice.

Historical Context

When Hebrews was written, the temple still stood (destroyed AD 70), and Levitical sacrifices continued. The author argues that this earthly system is obsolete (8:13), soon to disappear, rendered moot by Christ's superior priesthood.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What does Christ's heavenly priesthood accomplish that earthly priesthood cannot?

2. How should the obsolescence of the old covenant system affect how you view religious rituals today?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	μὲν	γὰρ	ἦν	ἐπὶ	γῆς	οὐδ’	ἂν	ἦν	ἱερέων
if	G3303	For	be	on	earth	not	he should	be	a priest
G1487		G1063	G2258	G1909	G1093	G3761	G302	G2258	G2409
ὄντων			τῶν	ἱερέων	τῶν	προσφερόντων	κατὰ		
seeing that there are			G3588	a priest	G3588	that offer	according		
G5607				G2409		G4374	G2596		
τὸν	νόμον	τὰ	δῶρα·						
G3588	to the law	G3588	gifts						
	G3551		G1435						

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 5:1 (Parallel theme): For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

Numbers 18:5 (Parallel theme): And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.

Numbers 16:40 (Parallel theme): To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.