

“The Superiority of the New Covenant”

Heb. 8:7-13

- INTRO. - ILL. – Imagine with me (for a moment) a man going on the Internet to secure a foreign bride. He looks at bios and finally settles on certain woman. He corresponds with her and makes arrangements for her to come to America. The anticipation builds until the day she arrives. But then he does a very strange thing. When she arrives he totally ignores her. Instead of interacting with her, he pulls out her picture and stares at it. He goes back to all that correspondence with her and thinks about it over and over. There she is in person, but he continues to cling to the pictures and the symbols instead of the real thing.
- Of course, that would be a very strange thing indeed, but that is exactly what it is like for the Jews to hang on to the old covenant and to miss the new one. It is foolish indeed, and it has been a primary theme in this book.
- Our text today deals with the subject of the new covenant. In fact, we see it referred to that way in v. 8 and v. 13.
- This ties in with what we dealt with last week. In v. 6, it says, “He [Christ] 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.”
- *Now* (in vv. 7-13) he is going to tell us what those “better promises” are. He is going to give a long quote from Jer. 31:31-34, which is the most extensive passage in Scripture on the New Covenant.
- But it is critical that we understand – the New Covenant is *not* just new in point of time – it is radically new in quality. There are two Greek words for “new.” One of them means an exact reproduction of something in the past. In other words, something new in time, but not necessarily different in nature.
- *That* is *not* the word that is used here. The word used here means something brand new – something totally different. And we’re going to see (in vv. 8-9) that the new covenant is not simply a new one that repeats the form and content of the earlier one. And in vv. 10-12 we are going to see some critical ways in which the New Covenant is different from the old covenant.
- In fact, what we see in this passage is an introduction to the New Covenant, a description of it from the negative perspective, a description of it from the positive perspective, and then a summary of what this means.
- That’s (kind of) an overview (although our outline will be a little different). We really have already

been introduced to the concept of the new covenant (in our study of this book). We have already been told that Jesus is both the *Guarantor* and the *Mediator* of this superior covenant. *Now* we're going to see what that new covenant is.

- In theological terms, we will see the author of Hebrews stress *both* continuity and discontinuity. We're going to see some similarities of the two covenants, but we are also going to see some very important differences.
- Now, we also see other references to the new covenant elsewhere in the NT. Of course, in Luke 22:20 we see Jesus speaking of the "cup" at the Last Supper as being "the new covenant" in His blood.
- This is reiterated by Paul in his instructions on the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:25. And in 2 Cor. 3:6 Christians are called "servants of a new covenant." But nowhere else in the NT is there such an extensive treatment of the new covenant than like what we see here in the Book of Hebrews.
- So let's move into this examination of "the superiority of the new covenant," and we begin with:

I. THE DENOUNCEMENT (v. 7)

- Look with me at v. 7, "For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."
- The first point that is being made here, is that the first covenant was faulty. The logic is simple: The announcement of a new covenant proves that something had been wrong with the first one.
- Now, this "first covenant" is obviously the Mosaic covenant. It cannot be the Noahic covenant or the Abrahamic covenant because those covenants were unconditional (and there are no "faults" in those covenants).
- No, the covenant that is being referred to in v. 7 is the Mosaic covenant – and it was a covenant with "faults" due to the fact that the people could never keep it and it could *not* bring God's people to salvation.
- In fact, it was never meant to do that. The old covenant accomplished what it was intended to accomplish – which was to show that we can never live up to God's standard of righteousness and to turn to Christ for imputed righteousness through faith in Him.
- The word "covenant" is a very important word in this section of Hebrews, but it is important for us to understand that there is more than one word for covenant in the Greek language.

- The most common word for “covenant” is a word that pointed to any kind of agreement between two individuals. This is the word that was used when two parties came together on equal terms, negotiated with each other, and then made a covenant based on that agreement.
- In this kind of agreement, if either of them went back on his word, the agreement became null and void. Interestingly, *marriage* is this kind of covenant. But in this kind of covenant, the fulfillment of the agreement depended upon *both* parties.
- *That is not* the word that is used for “covenant” in Hebrews. The word that is used here is a covenant that was more closely akin to a “will.” A will does *not* depend on two people – it only depends on one. In a will, one person makes the will and says (in effect) “this is what I am going to do.”
- In this kind of covenant, the person making the will says, “This is what I am bequeathing. This is what I want to happen to my possessions. I am establishing my will, and this is the way it is going to be.”
- Then the person who is the beneficiary of the will only has one choice. He cannot change or alter the will – he can only choose to accept it or *not*. This is the word that is used for “covenant” in Hebrews.
- These are covenants that are established by God – and the beneficiaries of those covenants have to decide if they are going to *accept* the benefits or *not*.
- And (of course) with both the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant, there are conditions as well – so the beneficiary also has to decide if he will accept the conditions of the covenant.
- But the point being made in v. 7 is that the Mosaic covenant was faulty, and that is why the new covenant was established. The “faults” of the old covenant were pointed out by one of Israel’s major prophets – the prophet Jeremiah.
- The bulk of this passage is a direct quote from Jer. 31:31-34, and writer is saying (in essence by quoting this), “Look at your own Scripture and you will see that God Himself has determined to bring in a new covenant. In fact, you should have been looking for this new covenant, knowing that it is superior to the first one. You should have known this because one of your greatest prophets proclaimed this hundreds of years ago.”
- Now, you and I know this, but the amazing thing is, there are still millions of Jews all over the world who still don’t get this. They are still hanging on to the old, Mosaic covenant – and are *not* even *looking for* the New Covenant.

- Their own Scriptures proclaim that God would be establishing a new covenant – clearly described by Jeremiah hundreds of years ago – but they totally don't get it.
- Here in Heb. 8:7 the Bible tells us that the old covenant needed to be replaced by a new one. In fact, the “faults” of the old covenant are going to be clearly laid out over the next few chapters.
- One “fault” was the fact that the people could *not* keep the Law (upon which the first covenant was based). In other words, it was a covenant of Law rather than grace.
- A second “fault” was that it involved the sacrifice of animals that could never fully atone for sin. The new covenant was built on a better sacrifice – the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
- Ron Phillips wrote, “The old covenant could declare what was wrong, but *not* correct what was wrong. It was a stop sign *not* a road map. It could condemn, but *not* save.”
- You say, “Didn't God Himself establish the Mosaic covenant?” Of course He did. And that “first covenant” accomplished exactly what God intended for it – which is to be a tutor to lead us to Christ. It was given to show us our sin and our

inability to keep the Law, and to show us our need for Christ.

- But what we have to keep in mind is the fact that, even when God gave the Mosaic covenant He already had determined to replace it with the New Covenant of grace.
- What Jeremiah is writing about is no afterthought. It is the plan God had all along. It was never God's plan for us to be saved by the old covenant. That has always been the plan for the New Covenant.
- As we saw back in 7:11, the first covenant brought nothing to “perfection.” It could *not* accomplish the atonement and salvation of the people of God. Only the New Covenant could do that. So that leads us (secondly) to:

II. THE DECREE (V. 8)

- Look with me at v. 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...’”
- Notice some really important things here. First of all, notice that this is entirely by God's initiative. God Himself is making this new covenant. The dominant use of the first person pronoun in this passage makes that abundantly clear.

- This emphatically underlines the divine initiative: “I will make...I will put...I will write...I will be...I will forgive...I will remember...” This is *all* of God.
- He Himself is establishing this new covenant, and He Himself will carry it out. In addition to the person pronouns, we also see this passage punctuated with the phrase “says the Lord.” That is the same as saying, “God says.” This is something that God Himself has decreed.
- As John MacArthur puts it, “The New Covenant in Christ, the Messiah, is based solely on God’s sovereign terms.” God has decreed, “I will effect this new covenant.”
- Secondly, notice the *finality* of this new covenant. The phrase in the English “will make” is the Greek word “sunteleo.” It is an intensive form of the word “teleo,” which means to fully accomplish something.
- But it carries with it the element of finality. This is really saying, “I will make this one and no other.” In other words, the new covenant is God’s final covenant.
- Thirdly, notice who this covenant is made with. Is it the church? NO. It is the house of Israel and the house of Judah. That (of course) points to the

divided kingdom, but in essence it means that this covenant is being made with the Jews.

- A lot of people mistakenly think that the new covenant was made with the church, but that is *not* the case. It was made with Israel. We get to be beneficiaries of it, but only because we have been grafted into the vine (so to speak).
- God has never made a covenant with Gentiles. This (like all the covenants) is made with Israel. Now, here is where the continuity comes in. The new covenant is *like* the old one, in that both of them were made with Israel.
- George Guthrie has written, “Any adequate understanding of Christianity must grasp its Jewish roots and the implication of those roots for Christian belief.”
- We must always remember that “salvation is from the Jews” (as Jesus said in John 4:22). Christianity is *not* a Gentile religion – it is a religion built on the foundation of Judaism. The discontinuity of the new covenant should never be totally divorced from its continuity with the old.
- And we also must keep in mind that the Bible declares that someday “all Israel will be saved.” Read Romans 11. One day Israel will be grafted back into the trunk of covenant salvation – and we

who are Gentile Christians are saved because we are the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

- Paul wrote (in Gal. 3:7-8), “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you.’”
- We get the privilege (by God’s grace) to be beneficiaries of the Abrahamic covenant when we accept the one requirement of that covenant – which is faith in the Lord’s Messiah.
- Gal. 3:29 says, “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” That’s how we Gentiles get in on this covenant made with Israel. We become the spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith in Christ.
- But we always need to remember that the covenants are made with Israel. Very quickly, let’s move thirdly to:

III. THE DISTINCTION (v. 9)

- Look at v. 9, “Not like the covenant 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, and I did not care for them, says the Lord.”

- Here is the *negative* side of the description of the new covenant. He is telling us what it is NOT like. It’s *not* like the covenant God made with Israel when He led them out of Egypt.
- Here’s the discontinuity. This new covenant is *not* like the former one. It’s *not* just a slight modification of the first covenant – it is a radically different kind of covenant. It’s *not* like that first one.
- And remember, this is God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah. And here we’re told the main problem with the first covenant – the people did *not* keep it. This was a conditional covenant based on the keeping of the Law, but the people did *not* keep it, and this led to the Lord forsaking them.
- God’s continued care for them was contingent upon their keeping His Law, and they failed in that. The disobedience of Israel led to their loss of the blessings of the covenant. Why? Because this was a covenant of Law.
- But *not* so with the New Covenant. It is different from the old covenant. This covenant is a covenant of grace. The only condition for becoming a recipient of the blessings of this covenant is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Pause) So the author of

Hebrews moves to the *positive* side, in what I am calling:

IV. THE DESCRIPTION (vv. 10-12)

- In vv. 10-12 we see what this covenant is LIKE. We see what it consists of. The marks of the new covenant are spelled out (here) by the Lord Himself.
- Here we see three positive characteristics of the new covenant, and each of them is given in the form of two parallel clauses. Notice, first of all, this covenant is:

A. Internal

- Look at v. 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.”
- The new covenant has a different kind of law. It is *not* a law that is written on tablets of stone. It is a law that is written in our hearts. Under the old covenant everything was *external* – under the new it is *internal*.
- Under the old covenant obedience to God was primarily motivated by fear – under the new covenant it is motivated by love.

- And we know that there are some major differences under the new covenant. The Bible tells us that those who come to Christ under the new covenant are spiritually transformed. They are spiritually regenerated on the inside. They become brand new.
- Paul said, “...if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Cor. 5:17) Under the new covenant God changes us on the inside. He changes our “want tos” so we desire to do His will.
- This is what it means when it says He puts His laws into our minds and writes them on our hearts. We should see “minds” and “hearts” (here) as a reference to the inner man.
- He gives us a new nature and puts His own desires in us to obey Him and live for Him. And (of course) another difference under the new covenant is that He also puts His Holy Spirit in us. This enables us to do His will.
- In fact, there are some other OT passages that talk about the new covenant, and one of those passages describes this very well. It is Ezek. 11:19-20. Here’s what it says, “And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them.

Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.” This is saying the same thing.

- But the point (here in Heb. 8:10) is that the new covenant is *not* external (like the old one). It is *not* all about rituals and ceremonies. It is *not* about an outward conforming to rules and regulations. It is a genuine transformation of the inner man that results in loving obedience to Christ. It is a new heart that results in a new life.
- Heb. 8:10 is *not* just about memorizing Scripture. It also points to the spiritual regeneration of the gospel that changes us and causes us to want to obey Him. And the “law of love” is what drives obedience under the new covenant.
- Listen, external rules may change a person’s behavior, but they can’t change his heart. Only spiritual regeneration can do that. Only the transformation of Christ at the point of conversion can do that. God’s laws must be written on our hearts.
- One more thing before we move on – notice that phrase, “And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” That reflects Exodus 6:7. This has always been God’s intention, but it did *not* happen under the old covenant. It took the new covenant to accomplish that.

- Herschel Hobbs writes, “What God intended before Israel’s redemption out of Egypt will be realized through Christ under the new covenant.”

- Of course, there is a sense in which that will not be ultimately fulfilled until the Millennial Kingdom, but the new covenant has made that possible. A second positive attribute of the new covenant is that it will be:

B. Individual (v. 11)

- Look with me at v. 11, “And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.”

- The point here is that this is for each and every individual believer in Christ. This doesn’t mean that there should *not* be any teachers in the church. It doesn’t mean that we should *not* be involved in evangelism or discipleship.

- No, this is emphasizing the fact that each and every believer can have a personal relationship with God. We have the HS (the resident truth teacher) inside of us that illumines God’s truth to our inner man.

- It is in *that* sense that we don’t need to depend on someone else. We don’t need a human priest. We have direct access to God through our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

- Really, what this verse is talking about is the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers.” It means we don’t *need* a priest – we *are* a priest. Each and every one of us (individually) has direct access to God and we can “know” Him.
- The word for “know” (in v. 11) is the word “ginosko.” It means “to know by experience.” Every genuine believer can “know the Lord – from the least to the greatest.”
- You see, under the old covenant, the concept of knowing God was a national concept, *not* an individual one. This is another uniqueness of the new covenant. The transformation of the gospel would allow for each and every believer to have an intimate knowledge of God.
- O’Brien says, “Such intimate knowledge increases until it reaches its consummation, when all of us will know fully as we are fully known.” There will an ultimate fulfillment of this someday in His presence, but for now we can have a personal relationship with Him.
- But there is a third, very important positive quality of the new covenant, and that is, it is:
 - (Sorry folks, that is the best I could do...) Look with me at v. 12, “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”
 - This is the pinnacle of the new covenant. This is the most important. We don’t need justice – we need mercy. We need grace. We need the forgiveness of our sins. And that is what we are promised under the new covenant.
 - The old covenant could *not* provide full and final forgiveness for sin. The best *it* could provide was a temporary covering over of sin. But there had to be a continual flow of blood. There had to be the daily sacrifices that could never fully deal with sin once and for all.
 - The new covenant (on the other hand) provided full and complete and permanent atonement for sin by the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
 - As a result of that once for all sacrifice for sin, God forgives our sins completely, and has chosen to “remember them no more.” This is a willful forgetfulness by God.
 - Of course, we know that God never forgets anything because He is omniscient. This doesn’t mean He no longer remembers our sins – it means He no longer holds them against us.

C. Iniquity-Forgiving (v. 12)

- Because of Christ's substitutionary atonement, He looks on us with mercy. He chooses to treat our sin and if it never happened. It is in that sense that He remembers them no more.
- By the way, it is this one characteristic that separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. Only the biblical gospel has the power to truly pardon and cleanse from sin. No other religious system can do that. They may have philosophies and ethics, but they cannot bring pardon and atonement for sin.
- But under the new covenant God has promised to be merciful toward our sin, and to remember them no more. He forgives and forgets. He treats our sins as if they never happened. (Pause) Well, there is one last thing we see in this passage of Scripture, and that is:

V. THE DISAPPEARANCE (v. 13)

- Verse 13, "When He said, 'A new *covenant*,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."
- This is the biggest stumbling block for the Jews. They are often offended when anyone makes the point that the Bible declares the old covenant is obsolete.
- It is very difficult for a Jew to believe that God does *not* honor that covenant anymore. Since they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah, it is extremely difficult for them to believe that God has replaced the old covenant with something far superior.
- It is difficult for them to let go of all the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism and embrace the gospel. That's why most of the Jews today are still in unbelief.
- Of course, there is a sense in which this verse was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. When the author of Hebrews wrote that the old covenant was "becoming obsolete and growing old [and] ready to disappear" he had no idea that within 5 years the entire temple (with all the rituals and ceremonies) would be gone. But the HS knew that, and these were inspired words that (in a sense) predicted that.
- But the point of v. 13 is that God Himself, with the establishment of the new covenant, declared the first one to be obsolete. That is a word that means "no longer valid."
- In the ancient world, the person who made a covenant (or a will) had the right to change it or annul it. And this is what we have here. God is the one who established the Mosaic covenant, and He has the right to declare it obsolete (no longer valid).

- In contrast, the new covenant is eternal. It will last for all eternity. It will never be replaced. It is absolutely permanent.
- Now, this runs directly contrary to Jewish beliefs. There are a number of Jewish writings that declare the Mosaic covenant to be everlasting. But here the Word of God declares it has become obsolete. It has been replaced by the new covenant and it is no longer valid.
- That's why we (as Christians) should never hang on to things like keeping the Sabbath (or any other aspects of the ceremonial law). That covenant has been superseded.
- This is a stumbling block for most Jews, but it is the absolute truth of Scripture. The question is, "Are you a new covenant recipient? Are you under the new covenant? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?"
- PRAYER