

The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה
אַחֲרַ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמְצָה
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

Outline of Hebrews

IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14–5:10)
- B. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- C. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- D. Jesus Is the Mediator of a **New** Covenant That Is ***Far Superior*** to the ***Old*** Covenant (8:1-13)
- E. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

Outline of Hebrews

- A. Jesus Is the Mediator of a *New* Covenant That Is *Far Superior* to the *Old* Covenant (8:1-13)
 - 1. Jesus' Heavenly Priesthood Shows He Is Mediator of a Better Covenant (8:1-6)
 - 2. The *Prophecy* of a New Covenant (in Jer 31:31-34) Shows the *Weakness* of the Old Covenant (8:7-13)

Prophecy of New Covenant Shows Weakness of the Old (8:7-13)

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. ⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says:

“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, ⁹ 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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”
[Jer 31:31-34]

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

What is a Covenant?

- **Dictionary Definition:**

- *A solemn agreement between two or more persons or groups to do or not do a certain thing (World Book Dictionary)*

- **Definition of a Covenant between God and Man:**

- *A covenant is an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship. (Grudem, Systematic Theology p.515)*
- *A covenant given by God is imposed on men. It is entirely from God. Men have no part in any negotiation over it, but it contains stipulations about their conduct and it may also include penalties for disobedience. (Zaspel and Wells, New Covenant Theology, p.5)*

*⁷ For if that **first covenant** had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a **second**.*

- At the close of the **previous** section (Heb 8:6), the author stated that Jesus is the mediator of a **better** covenant, and now in Heb 8:7-13 he explains the **reason** the covenant that Jesus mediates is better.
- This “better covenant” (aka. “new covenant”) is identified here as the “**second**” covenant.
- The author tells us that if the “**first covenant**” had been “**faultless**”, a “**second**” one would not have been instituted – thus implying that the “**first covenant**” is in some way, **inadequate**.
- A similar line of reasoning was used earlier in the letter (Heb 7:11a) regarding the Levitical priesthood:
 - *Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood... what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek?*

⁷ *For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

- When we get to chapter 10, we'll see yet ***another*** argument in the same vein when we're told that if the ***sacrifices*** offered according to the law truly brought forgiveness, there would be no need for ***Christ's sacrifice*** (Heb 10:1-18).
- These ideas are all closely related, since the old covenant, the Levitical priesthood, the Mosaic Law, and animal sacrifices are all very tightly connected since they're all an integral part of the OT Jewish system.

⁸ **For he finds fault with them** when he says: "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..."

- The wording of this verse demands some consideration because of a textual variant in the Greek.
- The ESV translation reads, "*For he [God] finds fault with them*."
- The word "*them*" has been taken by some commentators, as well as the ESV translators, to refer to those *under* the old covenant – i.e., "*the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*".
- However, there is a textual variant — and it has much early manuscript support— where this clause reads, "*for finding fault [with the old covenant] he [God] says to them...*"
- This reading seems to flow more naturally from verse 7, which implies that the first covenant was flawed, and it also fits well with the author's concluding comment in 8:13 that the first covenant has now been made obsolete.

⁸ *For he finds fault with them when he says: "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..."*

- The author then cites Jer 31:31-34 (the longest citation of an OT text in the entire NT) to show that a new covenant was **needed**.
- This text in Jer 31:31-34, which talks about a new covenant that God promised to make at a future date, is taken from a section of the book of Jeremiah (Jer 30-33) where Jeremiah promises hope and future restoration for the people of Israel after they are exiled.
- In other words, their exile was not to be final, for the Lord would eventually bring Israel back to the land and fulfill promises made to Abraham and David.

⁸ *For he finds fault with them when he says: "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..."*

- Israel's future hope was **not** to be rooted in Israel's piety, but in the Lord's transforming grace and his power to change the hearts of his people.
- The promise in Ezekiel (Ezek 36:26-27) that the Lord will put his spirit in Israel and cause them to obey his law expresses a similar idea.
- Notice that the author didn't just ***invent*** the notion of a new covenant, for, as he shows here, the OT ***itself*** promised that a new agreement, a new covenant, would be enacted by God with Israel and Judah.
- Furthermore, this prophecy in Jeremiah as well as other OT Scriptures ***recognized*** that the old covenant was ***inadequate***.

⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: "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..."

- A number of New Testament writers teach that the new covenant was inaugurated with the death of Jesus Christ:
 - *[Jesus speaking:] for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* (Mat 26:28)
 - *And [Jesus] said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many..."* (Mar 14:24)
 - *And likewise [Jesus took] the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood..."* (Luke 22:20)
 - *In the same way also [Jesus] took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* (1Cor 11:25)

⁹ 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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

- Here we see the old covenant and the new covenant are ***different***.
- The Mosaic covenant made with Israel on Mount Sinai had gracious elements:
 - God by his grace liberated Israel from Egyptian bondage. Or, as our text puts it, he tenderly “*took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt*”.
 - The Lord carried them “on eagles’ wings” (Exod 19:4).

*9 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. For they **did not continue in my covenant**, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.*

- Even though Mosaic covenant had gracious elements, it was still **defective** and **inferior** to the **new covenant**.
- Israel had to **keep** the stipulations of the old covenant in order to be **blessed**.
- If Israel **obeyed**, they would receive the **blessings** of the covenant; but if they **disobeyed**, they would experience the **cursing's** of the covenant (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 26-28).
- By the time Jeremiah wrote (around 626 BC), it was apparent that Israel “*did not continue in [God's] covenant.*”
- The northern kingdom of Israel had already been exiled by Assyria in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah would soon be exiled to Babylon in 586 BC.

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

- The claim that Israel and Judah did not “*continue in [God’s] covenant*” was not just an abstract theological proposition.
- Both kingdoms faced **exile** because of their disobedience; the curses of the covenant had become a **reality**.
- The consequences of Israel’s disobedience is that the Lord “*turned away from them*” (NIV). God’s showing “*no concern for them*” is another way of saying they experienced the curses of the covenant.
- Israel and Judah were **responsible** for their disobedience, but at the same time their disobedience reflected the **inadequacy** and **limitations** of the **old covenant** – for the people didn’t obey the Lord and therefore the covenant promises were never realized.

¹⁰ *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- Here the author begins to elaborate on the **benefits** of the new covenant over the old.
- In Jeremiah's context, establishing a new covenant would solve the problem of Israel's continual violation of covenant stipulations.
- The promises made to Abraham can hardly become a reality if Israel continues to transgress what God commands.
- The Lord declares, however, that he will **remedy** the problem, promising to make a **new** agreement, a **new** covenant, with Israel.
- The author believed the new covenant had already been inaugurated in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- The new covenant is distinct from the old in that God inscribes his law on their hearts and minds.
- Under the old covenant Israel knew the law as a written statute **external** to them, but knowing the commands did not give them any inclination to **keep** what God had commanded.
- Jeremiah complained that Israel was “*uncircumcised in heart*” (Jer 9:25).
- The new covenant is an entirely different state of affairs, for now God circumcises the hearts of his people in accord with the promise of Deut 30:6:
 - *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

¹⁰ *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

- Under the new covenant, God's commands are **not an onerous burden** but reflect the desires of their heart since God has **imprinted** the law upon their hearts.
- The fundamental flaw in God's people has been remedied, for now they **delight** to do the will of God.
- Therefore, for those living under the **new** covenant, “[God] will [truly] be their God, and they shall [truly] be [God's] people.”
- This promise has now been fulfilled in the NT church!

¹¹ *And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

- Another dimension of the new covenant over against the old comes to the forefront here.
- The *old* covenant people were a *mixed* community.
- In other words, Israel under the old covenant was composed of both *believers* and *unbelievers* in the covenant community.
- Hence members of the covenant community had to exhort one another to “*Know the Lord*,” for *many* were *unregenerate*.
- Under the *new* covenant an entirely *new* situation is envisioned. There will be *no need* to summon a “*brother*” to know the Lord, for *every* member of the covenant community will know the Lord.
- In other words, every member of the covenant community “*from the least of them to the greatest*” will be *regenerate*.

¹¹ *And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

- To say every new covenant member knows the Lord doesn't deny that some claim to be believers and do not truly belong to Christ.
- In fact, such claimants are not truly and genuinely members of the new covenant, for the new covenant by **definition** means the law is inscribed on one's heart, that one has been given new life by the Holy Spirit.
- The parallel passage on the new covenant in Ezek 36:26-27 bears this out:
 - *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

¹¹ *And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

- The **genius** of the new covenant, then, is that the **Holy Spirit** causes new covenant believers to obey the will of God.
- Hence, no one who is **truly** a new covenant member will **ever** fall away, and **all** new covenant believers are regenerate.
- So if someone does not know the Lord, then, by **definition** they are **not** members of the new covenant. The text is clear here: **all** members of the new covenant, "*from the least of them to the greatest*" "**know the Lord.**"
- Some do fall away from the new covenant community, but by that they show that they are not truly regenerated, as 1 John 2:19 demonstrates:
 - *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

¹² *For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*

- “*For*” explains the basis upon which God’s people truly know the Lord: their new life finds its roots in the **forgiveness** of their **sins**, and when sins are truly forgiven, they are remembered no more.
- The author will expand on this idea in the following chapters: old covenant sacrifices do not fully and finally forgive sins.
- By way of **contrast**, Christ’s sacrifice brings genuine and lasting forgiveness.
- The new heart implanted in believers is based on the sacrificial work of Christ, on the forgiveness secured through his atoning death.
- Such forgiveness was **never** accomplished by OT sacrifices.

¹³ *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

- The **prophecy** of a **new** covenant, in effect, proclaims the **obsolescence** of the **old**.
- The author doesn't envision a situation where the old and new covenants coexist.
- The Mosaic covenant is designated in this verse as "*first*". It is also described as "*old*."
- The old covenant was to be superseded by the new covenant and was therefore "*ready to vanish away*."
- The author isn't suggesting that the old covenant is still in force. Its imminent disappearance was forecast by the prophesy in Jeremiah.
- Now that the new covenant has arrived, the old one is obsolete and no longer plays a role.

¹³ *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

- Jeremiah's prophecy that the old was about to disappear has now become a reality.
- Its days as a legally binding contract are over.
- Therefore we should not consider ourselves to be under it in any way – we are instead under the new covenant and the law that is affiliated with that covenant is described by NT writers as the “law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2)

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- If you are a genuine believer today, then you are a member of the new covenant. As a member of that covenant, we are told that, among other things, God has written his law on your heart, which I understand to be an inner desire to do what God commands. What does this say about the kind of attitude and outlook that we should expect to see in those who claim to be genuine believers?
- Since we are not under the old covenant, are we obligated to obey OT laws that are not repeated either directly or in principle in the NT (e.g. like not wearing cloth made of wool and linen mixed together, not getting a tattoo, etc.)?

*Class Discussion Time

- In some theological circles today, the Ten Commandments are considered a part of God's eternal "moral law."
- But the OT scriptures themselves tell us that the Ten Commandments were given **specifically** to the Nation of Israel a summary of the terms of the **old** covenant:
 - **Exodus 34:27-28** – *And the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." ... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.*
 - **Deuteronomy 4:13** – *And He [the Lord] declared to you **His covenant**, which he commanded you to perform, that is, **the Ten Commandments**, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.*
- Furthermore, the Apostle Paul considered himself to be a minister of the **new covenant**, which he **contrasts** with the letters of the Ten Commandments carved on tablets of stone:
 - **2Cor 3:5b-6** – *Our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a **new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*
- Given this, do you think it is fair to say that, as new covenant believers we are not bound by the Ten Commandments (though nine of the ten commandments are reiterated in the NT and we **would** be bound by those)?