

Christ Is Superior to the Old Covenant

"A New Covenant"

Hebrews 8:6-13

This section goes through the end of chapter ten (10:39).

This text - particularly vs. 8-12 - is taken almost verbatim from Jeremiah 31:31-34 and has in its ultimate fulfillment the restoration of Israel during the Millennial reign of Christ. However, that future fulfillment clearly began with the work of our Saviour here on earth in giving His life a ransom for our sins.

In the previous portions of this letter, the person of the Great High Priest was introduced: who He was, why His coming was necessary, His superiority to what had been before. In this portion, the work and ministry of our Great High Priest comes more fully into view.

I. THE MEANS OF THE NEW - VS. 6

A. The means is our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ - "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry."

As the means of the new covenant, Jesus was the way through which the covenant was confirmed; He was the source and substance of the new.

B. "But now" - goes back to verse four and once again makes a comparison between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Christ.

The phrase is to be taken as one of logical reasoning - "as it is, as the case actually stands, contrasted with the case supposed in Heb. 8:4" (Lange).

C. "Hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry" - that of the heavenly sanctuary (vs. 2).

1. We saw the term "more excellent" used in Heb. 1:4 for the superiority of Christ over the angels, even in His name.

Hebrews 1:4

⁴ Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

2. The word for "ministry" is the same as we studied in verse two - that of one ministering outwardly (publicly) for the Lord.

D. "By how much also" - can be understood as a comparison to the earthly priests and their ministry. Christ carries a far more excellent ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in proportion as, or to the extent that He is also the mediator of a better covenant, and since the heavenly is so far superior to the earthly, and the mediatorial ministry of Christ is eternal, then the proportion or extent is also vastly superior.

E. "He is the mediator" (the means) - Jesus is called "the mediator" of the new (better) covenant three times in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 9:15

¹⁵ And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 12:24

²⁴ And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

1. First Timothy 2:5 refers to Him as the mediator between God and man.

1 Timothy 2:3-6

³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; ⁴ Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; ⁶ Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

2. The word "mediator" (μεσίτης) is "one who intervenes between two, either in order to make or restore peace and friendship, or to form a compact or ratify a covenant" (Thayer).

- a) As to the first definition, 1 Tim. 2:5 confirms our Lord as "a mediator in that He interposed Himself by His death, and made possible the restoration of the harmony between God and man which had been broken by sin" (Wuest).

- b) As to the second definition, in the text here in Hebrews 8:6, our Lord is the One who intervenes between two to form a compact or ratify a covenant. His death on the cross for our sins was the confirmation of the new covenant.

F. "Of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises"

1. A covenant is only as good as the promises behind it, and since God promised us eternity with Him based upon the work of Christ as our

mediator, and God cannot lie, then the promises for the better (new) covenant are absolutely and eternally established without the possibility of being revoked. In other words, God won't go back on His word.

2. This is not to say that the old covenant or the promises upon which it was based were faulty (see next point).

“The promises in the first covenant pertained mainly to the present life. They were promises of length of days; of increase of numbers; of seed time and harvest; of national privileges, and of extraordinary peace, abundance, and prosperity. That there was also the promise of eternal life, it would be wrong to doubt; but this was not the main thing. In the new covenant, however, the promise of spiritual blessings becomes the principal thing. The mind is directed to heaven; the heart is cheered with the hopes of immortal life, the favor of God and the anticipation of heaven are secured in the most ample and solemn manner.”
(Barnes)

[Titus 1:2](#)

² In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

[2 Peter 1:4](#)

⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

II. THE MOTIVE FOR THE NEW - VS. 7-9

- A. The motive is stated in verse eight: "For finding fault with them..." The first, or old, covenant wasn't faulty - the Israelites with whom it was made failed to abide by the rules of the covenant and therefore the covenant was broken and the need for a new one was made evident.**

NOTE: Let me make this comment here. God is sovereign and omniscient and knew that once Adam sinned and plunged all of mankind into sin that a Redeemer would be necessary. It didn't surprise Him that the old covenant was broken by man because the original covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden was broken by sin. The only hope man had was a perfect mediator and perfect sacrifice be made for a perfect covenant to be permanently established. That's what this speaks to.

- B. Vs. 7 - This is the continuation of the logic principle seen throughout the letter to the Hebrews, reestablished in verse six in the first two words: "but now." This is seen in the "if...then" statement. The only logical thing to do was establish a new, permanent covenant.**
- C. Vs. 8-9 are primarily a quote from Jeremiah 31 and answer to the question as to the motive or reason for a new covenant.**
1. "For finding fault with them, he saith..." - what a wonderful picture of mercy and grace are summed up in those words. Because the Israelites so miserably failed at keeping the Law (the first covenant), God made another one

with them even though they were the ones at fault.

2. What follows is that quote from Jeremiah mentioned earlier. This is the single longest quotation from the Old Testament anywhere in the New. “That is deliberate, and meant to draw the attention of all readers and listeners to the importance of this point: the New Covenant was prophesied in the Old at length, the very New Covenant which the contemporary Jerusalem believers were neglecting for the sake of returning to and preferring the Old” (Lugenbill).
3. The phrase “the days come” in verse eight is used to affirm that this prophecy by Jeremiah was being fulfilled through the mediatorial and high priestly functions as the sacrifice upon which the new covenant was established.
4. The last half of verse eight - “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” - has a near (immediate) and far (ultimate) fulfillment in mind. The near or immediate, as given in this portion of Hebrews, especially considering what follows in the next two chapters, was begun with the work of Christ as the sacrifice for sins for all people, both Jew and Gentile. This was confirmed by Jesus Himself in the upper room when He established the Lord’s Supper for us.

[Matthew 26:27-28](#)

²⁷ And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, **Drink ye all of it;**

²⁸ **For this is my blood of the new testament, which**

is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Luke 22:20

²⁰ Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

The far or ultimate is when He establishes His kingdom upon the throne of David after the events of the Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon.

5. Verse nine (9) records a brief history of why it was necessary for there to be a new covenant: "because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord."

Judges 2:20-21

²⁰ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; ²¹ I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:

2 Kings 17:15-18

¹⁵ And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. ¹⁶ And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ¹⁷ And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold

themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. ¹⁸ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

Hosea 1:9

⁹ Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

III. THE MARKS OF THE NEW - VS. 10-12

A. The phrase “after those days” in verse ten are to be taken based on the days of Jeremiah, and what was ahead. The context indicates that it’s speaking of the days of the old covenant, and points back to the phrase in the previous verse, “in the day when I took them...out of the land of Egypt.” It was after the days of the old covenant which ended when the new began with Christ.

B. Vs. 10 - “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” - this is to be seen in contrast to the tablets of stone upon which God wrote the commandments.

1. This new work began when the Son of God ascended back to the Father and the Holy Spirit began indwelling the believers. It is the Holy Spirit’s ministry to write God’s word in our hearts.

John 14:26

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 16:13

¹³ Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

This will ultimately be seen with national Israel during the Millennium when Christ establishes His kingdom on the throne of David.

2. "My laws" - what is meant by this is somewhat unclear but considering this text is a contrast between the Old and the New, we can determine that the new covenant written on the hearts of the believer are those laws that were not only part of the old covenant (the sacrificial laws, laws of cleansing, etc.) but are also given to us as part of the new. They would be considered the moral and ethical principles of God's law, summed up in what is called the "Royal Law" (the law of the King, the Supreme Law) in James 2:8.

James 2:8

⁸ If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

Leviticus 19:18

¹⁸ Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the

prophets.

In the future, ultimate fulfillment of this for Israel, it would also include those sacrificial laws that will be restored in the Millennial Temple (Ezekiel 43:18-27; 45:15-25) as a memorial to the finished work of Christ. Much like the Lord's Supper remembers Christ's death. Those laws will be written on the heart and mind of the Israelite believers as that memorial rather than having to rely on the priests to teach them.

(NOTE: There's a lot more to this than what is relevant to this study but is important.)

C. Vs. 11 - This verse is the primary one that has that far, ultimate fulfillment yet to be realized, but it has that near, immediate application for the church and the believer today as well.

1. "And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord" - this is not saying that there isn't a need today for preaching the gospel or for believer's teaching and encouraging other believers - that would contradict other, clear truths of Scripture.
2. "For all shall know me" - they won't have to teach everyone because all will already know Him on a personal level.
 - a) This is speaking in particular of the future fulfillment during the Millennium where all Israelites (all people) will know Him. That doesn't mean all will be saved for salvation is still by grace through faith, but there won't be any

need of someone explaining who the Messiah is because they will all know Him then.

Isaiah 54:13

¹³ And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children.

Jeremiah 24:7

⁷ And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

Ezekiel 34:30

³⁰ Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD.

Habakkuk 2:14

¹⁴ For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

b) For today, this applies to the believer that knows the Lord. It doesn't mean, as some might apply it, that all people will eventually make it to heaven; that God won't send anyone to hell. What it's saying is that every believer has the same access to the Father as every other believer; every believer has the same Holy Spirit as every other believer; and every believer has the same Word of God as every other believer.

3. "From the least to the greatest"

a) Today, it doesn't matter whether rich or poor, king or servant, all believers have the same access. As the saying goes, "the ground is level

at the foot of the cross.” The same is true for the Millennial Reign of Christ for the Israelites.

- b) There will no longer be the hierarchy that existed in the religious life of the Old Testament – there won’t be the sacrifices needed to atone for sin and have a right standing with God. They won’t need a priest to intercede for them with the Lord – that work was finished with Christ on the cross.

D. Verse 12 is a wonderful promise that we can all claim.

1. “For” – carries the idea of “because” – the reason all can know the Lord is because of the mercy of God and the forgiveness of sins. The only way to have part in the New Covenant is to have one’s sins forgiven and the only way that could be possible is through the blood of Christ, the perfect and final sacrifice for those sins.
2. “I will be merciful”
 - a) In classical Greek, this word (ἴλεως) was used in a legal sense, meaning to appease or be favorable toward someone. In biblical usage, it refers to God’s gracious disposition toward sinners.
 - b) There is a related Greek word used in Hebrews 2:17 (ἰλάσκομαι) where mercy is linked with atonement, showing that Christ’s role as High Priest is to secure forgiveness and favor.

Hebrews 2:17

¹⁷ Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be

a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

- c) The Old Testament passage that is quoted here (Jer. 31:34) gives this phrase as "I will forgive their iniquity," showing that connection between mercy and forgiveness.
3. "To their unrighteousness" - the word in Jeremiah 31:34 translated "iniquity" is a word indicating sin that is particularly evil, conveying the idea of deliberately perverting God's laws (natural, moral, and/or biblical laws). This word shows that no matter how great the sin or how long the person's been in sin, God's mercy is far greater.
4. "And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" - what a wonderful truth!!
- a) "Sins" and "iniquities" - similar to the Old Testament use of these words interchangeably. Every sin of every type and condition is forgivable.
 - b) This New Covenant that is based on the work of Christ for our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins stands in contrast to the old covenant and the sacrifices that would remind of sin.

Hebrews 10:1-3

¹ For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once

purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

³ But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

- c) When we confess our sins and ask forgiveness, God, in His abundant mercy, and because of the payment that has already been made for those sins, chooses not to remember them again - they are forever gone!!

The expression "will I remember no more" is emphatic in the Greek text, two negative particles occurring before the word "remember." Under the First Testament, sins were brought to mind every year by reason of the constant repetition of the sacrifices. Under the New Testament sins are forgotten, and for the reason that they have been paid for. God remembers them no more. (Dr. Wuest)

- d) Some explain that because God is omniscient and knows all things that He doesn't actually forget them, He just won't hold them against us again. While I agree that God is omniscient, I also believe that if God chooses to not remember something then He has removed it from His memory. In the quote above, Dr. Wuest mentions the double negative in the Greek before the word "remember." In Greek, a double negative isn't the same as in English where it the second negates the first. It does the opposite - it reinforces it and makes it much more emphatic. Literally translated (οὐ μὴ) as not not, means not at all or no never.

Vincent translates it: "I will by no means remember any more."

Think about that: When we confess our sin, God

forgives and chooses not to remember them again - ever!

Psalm 103:10-12

¹⁰ He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 43:25

²⁵ I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Isaiah 44:22

²² I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Micah 7:18-19

¹⁸ Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. ¹⁹ He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

IV. THE MIGHT OF THE NEW - VS. 13

The might is in the first sentence: once the new had been stated (vs. 8), it made the old obsolete. The new is far greater than the old because of the mighty hand of God being seen in the redemption of mankind.

This is a concluding verse pointing back to verses six and seven and summing up the reason a new covenant

was necessary - because the old was made obsolete by the sacrificial work of Christ.

The Geneva Bible notes puts it this way: "The conclusion: Therefore by the later and the new, the first and old is taken away, for it could not be called new, if it did not differ from the old. Again, that same is at length taken away, which is subject to corruption, and therefore imperfect."

Conclusion: As stated at the beginning, this portion begins the central teaching of the book of Hebrews: that the sacrifice and redemptive work of Christ was far superior to anything the old covenant could do and that our hope and guarantee of eternal life is based upon this superior work - and it gives great detail as to why.

We saw in these verses the means of the new covenant: Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

We saw the motive for the new covenant: to provide a final and perfect redemption that finished the work the old covenant could only point to in type (although salvation was still faith in the work of the new that was represented in the old).

We saw the marks of the new covenant: God's word written on the hearts and minds of the believer and the absolute mercy and grace of God to forgive sins so completely that they are remembered by Him "no more."

The "might" of the new covenant is the power of an Almighty God to do what is necessary for fallen man's redemption.