

## Hebrews 8 • A Better Covenant

### Introduction

Up to this point, the writer of Hebrews has meticulously established that Christ's heavenly priesthood is of a better order. Over the next several chapters he now explains that this High Priest ministers through a better covenant, whereas the Levitical priesthood ministered in accordance with the Old Testament Covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai. This should be evident just from the fact that God Himself calls it an "Old" Covenant by introducing a "New" Covenant. The Levitical priesthood has been replaced by the cross and one of the problems the writer of Hebrews is dealing with is people who want to go back to Aaron and the Old Covenant. One of Satan's earliest and most-used tricks throughout history is to "Judaize" Christians, to get them to attempt to live under two covenants instead of living exclusively according to the New Covenant. (This is what the whole of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians deals with.) The writer of Hebrews spends much time dealing with this issue because it not only was a serious problem in his day, but continues with us to this day with groups like the Seventh-day Adventists and many strains of Messianic Judaism which persist in the deception of living under both Covenants.

<sup>1</sup>Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

### [Read v.1]

#### **Q: How does v.1 fit with the verses and chapters leading into it?**

A: This is a summary of the previous arguments proving that Christ is the High Priest superior to Aaron.

#### **Q: Why is Christ superior?**

A: Since His work of redemption is finished, Christ has sat down. No earthly high priest ever sat down because their work was never finished, it being only a temporary covering and teaching of the ultimate work to be fulfilled by the Messiah.

#### **Q: Why would it be logical that a New Covenant accompany a New High Priest?**

A: The repeated keywords used throughout Hebrews are "better" and "best". Just as Christ is the "better" High Priest, it logically follows He would minister a "better" Covenant from Heaven.

**Application:** Christ the superior High Priest mediates a new and superior Covenant.

<sup>2</sup>a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. <sup>3</sup>For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. <sup>4</sup>Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; <sup>5</sup>who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

### [Read v.2-5]

#### **Q: What is the argument being presented to support the assertion that the New Covenant is superior to the Old?**

A: The New Covenant is administered from a superior place – heaven, whereas the Old Covenant could only be administered from an earthly place derived from a copy of the heavenly.

#### **Q: What is the first thing to keep in mind when it comes to the Old Covenant?**

A: The earthly sanctuary (both the Tabernacles and the Temple) along with all the rituals and priesthood are but a copy Moses was given from a pattern revealed by God. (Ex. 25:9, 40) From the very beginning it was revealed that there is a superior heavenly original.

**Application:** To go back to the Old Covenant is to forsake the superior heavenly original for the limitations of the earthly copy.

<sup>6</sup>But now He 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.

<sup>7</sup>For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. <sup>8</sup>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;  
<sup>9</sup>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.

<sup>10</sup>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 ON  
THEIR HEARTS.  
AND **I WILL** BE THEIR GOD,  
AND THEY SHALL BE MY  
PEOPLE.

### [Read v.6-9]

**Q: On what is the “better covenant” of Christ’s ministry based?**

A: It “has been enacted on better promises”. (v.6)

**Q: What is revealed about the Old Covenant?**

A: The description “if that first covenant had been faultless” indicates that it was something temporary and always intended to give way to something superior.

**Point:** For some reason the Christians who insist on living under both Covenants often portray the Old Covenant as “perfect” and even “superior”, whereas Scripture plainly teaches it was a shadow and teaching of the perfect fulfillment through Christ to come.

**Q: In quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:9-12, what is the repeated phrase which characterizes the New Covenant as being based on “better promises”?**

A: Seven times through Jeremiah God says, “I will”.

**Point:** The New Covenant emphasizes what God will do for His people – an expression of His grace, whereas the Old Covenant is most often characterized as what they must do for Him. The Old Covenant was a yoke of bondage demanding perfect obedience; the New Covenant is freely given by God’s grace!

**Q: What is identified here as the biggest problem where the Old Covenant is concerned?**

A: Its failure could not be blamed on any specific weakness within the Old Covenant itself, but on the weakness of human nature and its inability to keep the Old Covenant. “For they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them”. (v.9)

**Application:** What the Law could not do because of human weakness, God’s grace accomplished through the cross. The New Covenant is based on the better promise of God’s grace.

### [Read v.10]

**Q: What do all four of these “I will” statements have in common?**

A: They all describe an inner change of the heart.

**Q: How is this a drastic change from the Old Covenant?**

A: The Old Covenant was written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, but the New Covenant is written by the Spirit on the human heart and mind.

**Q: Can an external law ever change a person?**

A: No. Even the Old Testament Law stipulated that it must become a part of one’s inner life to have a chance of actually changing behavior.

“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your

house and on your gates.”  
— Deuteronomy 6:6–9

**Application:** *The New Covenant is based on the better promise of inner change by the Holy Spirit to be able to actually obey and put God’s Word into practice.*

<sup>11</sup>AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH  
EVERYONE HIS FELLOW  
CITIZEN,  
AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER,  
SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’  
FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME,  
FROM THE LEAST TO THE  
GREATEST OF THEM.

**[Read v.11]**

**Q: Has this taken place already? To what is this speaking?**

A: This points ahead toward the ultimate fulfillment of the New Covenant in the Millennial Reign and mirrors what is taught through Isaiah.

*They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.*

— Isaiah 11:9

**Application:** *The New Covenant is based on the better promise of unlimited blessing. Whereas the Old Covenant was made with a single nation, the New Covenant will eventually embrace the whole world.*

<sup>12</sup>FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO  
THEIR INIQUITIES,  
AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR  
SINS NO MORE.”

**[Read v.12]**

**Q: What was the most the Old Covenant could accomplish when it came to sin?**

A: In much greater detail, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 10 establishes that under the Old Covenant the blood of bulls and goats could cover sins, but only the blood of the Lamb of God could “take away the sins of the world”. (Jn. 1:29) Just as the Old Covenant was temporary until it could be ultimately fulfilled in Christ, so dealing with sin was temporary until the perfect work of the cross.

**Application:** *The New Covenant is based on the better promise of sins forgiven and forgotten forever!*

<sup>13</sup>When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

**[Read v.13]**

**Q: In the historical context of the original writing of Hebrews, what might be particularly ironic about the observation that the Old Covenant “is becoming obsolete and growing old” and “is ready to disappear”?**

A: At the time of the writing of Hebrews the Romans were most likely preparing for the invasion to come in 70 A.D. when the Temple, the priesthood, and all the vestiges of Mosaic Judaism as literally practiced through the Old Covenant were to be forever destroyed.

**Q: Nevertheless, what is the defining term clearly provided by which Believers are to apply to the Old Covenant?**

A: “*Obsolete*”. The Greek word is used throughout in the Septuagint to describe clothing that is worn out and no longer wearable (Dt. 29:5; Is. 50:9), old wineskins which have disintegrated (Josh. 9:13), and the wasting away of the physical body (Lam. 3:4). The common meaning describes something that at one time had a purpose but has grown old and unusable and needing to be replaced by something newer.

**Application:** *The New Covenant is based on the better promise of eternal blessing.*

**Hebrews 8 • A Better Covenant, Page 3 of 4**

## **Overall Application**

*It is not unusual that human wisdom holds to the notion that the “original” is best or that everything was better when it first started. After all, this mirrors the physical law known as “entropy”, which asserts that everything decays from its original state or goes from a state of higher energy to lower energy and eventually dissipates away. However, where God’s Law is concerned, this does not apply. The “original” was given as a shadow or teaching of the greater fulfillment to come. There is no advantage to “going back” to the Old Covenant, something affirmed by the council of Apostles in Acts 15 when they recognized the almost non-existent attachment to the Law for Gentiles. Trying to keep the Old Covenant is not a spiritual return to “the good ol’ days”, but is actually a deception which prevents Believers from enjoying the greater promises and benefits of the New Covenant already in their possession. Notice that those who “go back” to the Old Covenant always deteriorate into a gospel of works, whereas the New Covenant is best characterized as a Gospel of Grace.*