

## The Superiority of Christ

### Jesus - A Better Covenant

#### Hebrews 8:6

### Introduction

For centuries, devout Jews operated under the Mosaic Covenant. But when Jesus came, they were told, first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus, that things were about to change. Even the disciples and then apostles began to perpetuate this doctrine of change. In their case, the apostles couldn't claim they didn't know this dramatic change was coming.

The Old Testament writers had prophesied that a time would come when a Newer Covenant would be vastly superior to the Older Covenant. One such prophet was Jeremiah. The Hebrew writer cites his prophecy in our text. Jeremiah 31: 31-34 is the longest Old Testament citation found in the New Testament. The Hebrew writer uses this Old Testament text to prove that the New Covenant Jesus instituted is better than the Old Testament Abrahamic Covenant.

"Let's read Hebrews Chapter 8 verses 1-13. Now, *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. **For He said, "SEE THAT YOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."** But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: **"BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH— NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS IN THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; BECAUSE THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DISREGARDED THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 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 IN THEIR MIND AND WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. NONE OF THEM SHALL TEACH HIS NEIGHBOR, AND NONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST OF THEM TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."** In that He says, "A NEW COVENANT," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish

away." (Hebrews 8:1-13 NKJV)

First of all, what is a covenant? Since we are talking about the New Covenant, we should probably try to understand what the Bible means by the term "covenant." Webster says that: A covenant is an agreement, usually between two parties. The word "covenant" derives from the same root word meaning "to cut." In the ancient Near East, a covenant was validated by cutting or sealing an agreement in blood.

Abraham and Abimelech entered into a covenant in Genesis 21. Marriage is described as a mutual covenant in Malachi 2:14, where the bride and the groom would make covenant promises to each other before God. Then there was the Mosaic Covenant. The covenant Moses brought down from the mount was written on stone tablets.

In Exodus 19:5, God said to Israel, " Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. (Exodus 19:5 NKJV) God promised them blessings when the people kept His covenant and a curse when they disregarded it.

But the Bible also reveals that God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. God made a covenant in which He binds Himself to uphold specific promises not based upon conditions or the actions of others. In the case of the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to make a great nation of Abram and bless his seed abundantly so that Abraham and his descendants would become a blessing to others. The Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant that God confirmed with an oath; it was an unchangeable covenant.

Both the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ consist of promises. That is what the author tells us in Verse 6, "But now He (Jesus) has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6 NKJV)

The New Covenant relies on a series of promises that God made to Israel and the Church. These promises apply to both Jews and Gentiles and are unchangeable and irreversible, and God seals them with an oath. The promises of the New Covenant are much better than those of the Older Covenant made to Abraham. The New Covenant absorbs and replaces the old one, essentially becoming obsolete.

However, the New Covenant is really not all that new because much of it is really the subject of many Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah 59:21 says, "As for Me," says the LORD, "this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore." (Isaiah 59:21 NKJV)

Isaiah 61:4-8 says, "And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner *shall be* your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame *you shall have* double honor, And *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs. "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; **I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant.**"

(Isaiah 61:4-8 NKJV)

Ezekiel writes in Chapter 11 verse 19, "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

(Ezekiel 11:19-20 NKJV)

In Chapter 16, verse 60, God says, "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you." (Ezekiel 16:60 NKJV)

There are also several texts in the New Testament that talk about the everlasting New Covenant. In Luke 22:20, when Jesus institutes the New Covenant at the Last Supper, it says, "Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.**" (Luke 22:20 NKJV)

The Apostle Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 11:25 when he writes, "In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.**" (1 Corinthians 11:25 NKJV)

In Galatians 3:15, Paul tells the believers, "Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "AND TO YOUR SEED," who is Christ. And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise." (Galatians 3:15-18 NKJV)

So what we have is a New Covenant in Christ that expands and adds to the Old Covenant promises even greater promises and blessings that are also unconditional.

## I. A Better Promise

The Hebrew writer says the New Covenant is based upon a better promise than the Old Covenant. Jeremiah lived during some of the nation's darkest days during Old Testament times. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been defeated and taken captive by the Assyrians. And the southern kingdom of Judah didn't learn from her sister Israel's experiences, so Judah also went into captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah told of the seventy years of captivity, during which the land would receive its rest.

But he prophesied that there was hope for restoration after their captivity if they would return to the Lord, and both Israel and Judah would be restored and forgiven. This promise of restoration was not based on the Old Mosaic Covenant but on the Abrahamic Covenant and, ultimately, the New Covenant.

The Book of Hebrews tells us that the New Covenant is better than the older Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants because it contains better promises. What are these promises, and how are they better?

First of all, remember what we read in verse 6, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." ([Hebrews 8:6 NKJV](#))

Verse 7 says, "For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." ([Hebrews 8:7 NKJV](#))

In other words, the New Covenant has better promises. Unconditional promises are always better than conditional ones!

Hebrews claims the New Covenant's superior promises are given only because the Old Covenant was flawed in some way. If the Old Covenant is flawed, then it needs to be replaced. It is the flaws of the Old Covenant that causes God to declare a New Covenant with better promises. What is the nature of these flaws? Well, I'm glad you asked that question.

In verse 8, God says, "Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH." ([Hebrews 8:8 NKJV](#))

So why was the Old Covenant a "bad covenant"? "Did God mess up by giving Israel a flawed covenant?" We know from Romans 7:12 that the problem is not entirely with the law, for it is "holy and righteous and good."

So as the argument develops in Romans 7, we find that while the law is good and its requirements are righteous, the problem is with sin and the weakness of our flesh.

The law is right in what it requires, but we are the ones who fail to obey its commands. Sadly, even though we agree with what the Law forbids, we go ahead and do those things anyway. The fault lies, first of all, with us and then with a covenant that cannot overcome or permanently remove sin and its consequences. The fault of the Old Covenant is its inability to remove sin.

The New Covenant will not be like the Old Covenant that was flawed. Thankfully, the New Covenant is not merely a set of external commands and standards. The New Covenant produces a change of heart and is the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is an internal work, changing our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. The Holy Spirit creates in us a love for God and a desire to obey His commands. As a result, we find ourselves drawing near to God and entering into a relationship with Him that is free from fear and dread.

Verse 11 says, "NONE OF THEM SHALL TEACH HIS NEIGHBOR, AND NONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST OF THEM TO THE GREATEST OF THEM." ([Hebrews 8:11 NKJV](#))

"Knowing the Lord" is synonymous with salvation and a faith relationship with Christ. Those who are saved "know the Lord." The New Covenant achieves what the Old could not, namely, salvation from sins, so that we can truly "know the Lord." Under the New Covenant, we are commissioned to the "priesthood of all believers."

But the fullest fulfillment of this New Covenant promise is still yet to come. Isaiah 54:13 says, "All your children *shall be* taught by the LORD, And great *shall be* the peace of your children." ([Isaiah 54:13 NKJV](#))

God's promises always involve a better future!

## **II. A Better Relationship**

That better future involves a better relationship.

The New Covenant is better because it provides a better relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Relationship is key to the New Covenant.

Genesis 12:1-3 records the Abrahamic Covenant. It says, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ([Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV](#))

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional and unchangeable covenant, and God sealed it with His oath.

The Mosaic Covenant would come years later. It was a conditional covenant and not confirmed by an oath.

Exodus 19:3-6 describes it, "And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now, therefore, **if** you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, **then** you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19:3-6 NKJV)

From the very beginning, it was apparent that the Mosaic Covenant could not be the means of man's salvation from sin. Joshua challenges the Israelites to follow God and keep His covenant. The people assure Joshua that they will, but Joshua says they won't keep the law.

The Old Covenant could not save the Israelites, no matter how great their determination. The Law would only condemn them. The New Testament tells us what was wrong with the Old Covenant. The problem with the Old Testament law was not with the law itself, for it set forth a standard of righteousness that was holy, righteous, and good. But in our flesh, we are powerless to resist sin and achieve the kind of righteousness God requires.

Paul's conclusion in Romans 7:24 is, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

(Romans 7:24 NKJV)

Since the Law can't save us, God sent His Son, Jesus, with the gift of salvation. Jesus fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant as the result of His work at Calvary. Through the New Covenant, the full measure of God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled, bringing together a better people.

### **III. A Better People**

Verse 8 says, "Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH." (Hebrews 8:8 NKJV)

If Jesus made the New Covenant with Israel and Judah, then the question is, "How, then, did we Gentiles come to enjoy these blessings?" How can Gentiles and the church enter into promises made to the people of Israel? Romans 9:6-9 gives us the answer, "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED." That is, those who *are*

the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this *is* the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." ([Romans 9:6-9 NKJV](#))

In Verse 16 of Romans Chapter 4, he writes, " Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." ([Romans 4:16 NKJV](#))

It was always God's goal to include not only Jews but Gentiles in his great plan of redemption. We live now in what is often called the "times of the Gentiles." More Gentiles than Jews have expressed faith in Jesus Christ as God's Messiah. But when the "times of the Gentiles" comes to an end, God will return His focus to the Jews, and then many will come to faith in Jesus as the Promised Messiah.

We are very close to this transition now.

## **Conclusion**

The New Covenant agrees that we are sinners and that the Law cannot save us.

A New Covenant must replace the Old Covenant because the old one just doesn't work. The Law does a wonderful job of revealing sin, but it cannot remove the penalty or the presence of sin. Romans 3:19 says, " Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." ([Romans 3:19 NKJV](#))

Verse 20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

([Romans 3:20 NKJV](#))

All of the world's religions tell you what you must DO to get to Heaven. Theirs is a religion of works. But Christianity is the one religious faith that proclaims the work of salvation has already been done for you by Jesus Christ. It is not what we "do" that save us, but what Jesus Christ has "done." For us.

God begins from the inside, giving us a new heart, one that loves God and loves to keep His Word. And it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to do what we cannot do in our own strength. Have you entered into the promised blessings of the New Covenant? Have you experienced the forgiveness of your sins, the blessing of a new heart, and an eternal life? If you haven't, why not experience the joy of drawing near to God in Christ today?"

Reach out to Jesus and accept the blessings and promises of His New Covenant. Your whole life will begin to change – and all for the better!