

A New Heart and a New Hope

Hebrews 8:6-13, Jeremiah 31:31-34

8:6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

A better covenant

(Recap) The Old or First covenant refers to the Mosaic covenant, which was made obsolete by the new, and was fading away. The book of Hebrews also references the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, both of which endure and find their fulfillment in the New Covenant.

Biblical covenants are often referred to as *God's promises*. Whilst helpful, the word *promise* alone doesn't reveal the nature, intent, and effects of God's covenants throughout history.

Another working definition of Biblical Covenant is "a bond in blood sovereignly administered"
O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* 1980.

Abrahamic Covenant: Hebrews 6:13 *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ...*

Binding promises were made between God and Abraham, promises bonded with blood: Animals were cut in two and set apart, then a *smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces*. Passing between halved animals were rituals performed when enacting binding agreements at that time in history. Both parties were to walk between the animals effectively saying: "Let my body be cursed like these animals if I were to fail to meet my side of the agreement." In this particular bond with Abraham, only God was represented as passing between the animals, indicating that He alone would take responsibility for keeping covenant promises.

The Abrahamic covenant included promises of a son, leading to descendants as the stars of heaven – a great nation. These would be God's chosen people, His household, through which all nations would be blessed, and were promised a homeland (c.f. Heb 11:14-16).

Are the covenants conditional or unconditional? We reason falsely if we assume that a conditional covenant cannot be certain of fulfillment. God worked in Abraham, once an idolator, bringing him to faithful obedience. Gen 22:16-18 *"By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*

God's covenant promises are sure, *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure* (Phil 2:13). Hope is not just wishful thinking – God keeps His covenant promises.

Common to all God's covenants are promises regarding "a household" (e.g. Heb 3:2) and bringing them to Him – names written in *the book* (e.g. Ex 32:32-33). Surely this the intent of the covenants, yet there are some who by God's grace and mercy hear and obey and others who hardened their hearts and did not value their inheritance.

The Mosaic Covenant was established through God's redeeming actions of Abraham's descendants released from captivity in Egypt. They, His chosen people, were given the law to live in relationship with Him. When they sinned, they could still live by His mercy and grace through sacrifice. This was another bond-in-blood covenant enacted and administered by God, but this time foreshadowing better foundations on which to fulfil His promises to Abraham.

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Christ's once-for-all atoning sacrifice has freed us from the curse of the law and in His resurrection, ascension and reign *all the promises of God find their Yes in him* (2 Cor 1:20).

The covenants have always been about Him!

Luke 24:25-27 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

And (recap) this better covenant has **a better homeland** resting in God's presence, **a better High Priest** – one who can save to the uttermost and is eternal, ever living to intercede and lead our worship, **a better Sacrifice** that can purify our conscience from dead works, propitiating wrath and removing our sins.

A foundational promise

8:12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Verse 12 begins with *for*, indicating that dealing with sin and iniquity is the primary basis on which the new covenant promises of verses 10 & 11 can be graced on God's people. The limitations of the old needed to be removed, and the power of the new is built on the cleansed conscience of His people.

7:19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

A better hope is introduced, better than the first covenant. A foundational hope of the New Covenant, in which we can approach the eternal heavenly Throne of Grace in worship and prayer without remembrance of our sin.

Q1 How can our omniscient God *remember their sins no more*?

Answer 1: They have gone. Christ's better once-for-all atoning sacrifice, has taken sins "outside the camp".

Answer 2: He never calls our sins to mind – He chooses not to remember.

Why? Because of His steadfast love, Psalm 86:5 *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.* He chooses not to remember, for our good.

Q2 What do we remember? Eph 2:12 ***remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*** 2 Peter 1:9 *For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that **he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.***

We remember that we have been saved, we remember the steady love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. We forget the guilt and terror of coming before Him and run to him instead of away in fear of judgment.

A New Heart

Heb 8:10a *I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, ...*

Eze 36:26 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.

The writer doesn't expand here on the quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Neither is there an explanation on how this prophecy relates to the need for a new priesthood. None-the-less the action of the true priesthood fulfils these new covenant promises.

Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary effects a heart change, an inner obedience change, in those who make entrance through and in Him. The Son loves to do the will of the Father, and so do those in Christ.

The old covenant, with its **external** and repeated rituals for cleansing (formalism, ritualism, traditionalism), has been replaced with the new covenant's **inner** cleansing – a living cleansed conscience (personally and corporate).

In the old tabernacle the law was kept in the Ark of the Covenant on stone tablets. In the new tabernacle, where God dwells with Man, the law is inside his people. This imagery shows that the heart of God's covenant people is secured within a heavenly Ark under the cover of a heavenly Mercy seat.

Christians know the law and desire to obey our Lord God from the heart! We have been loved and cleansed to serve the living God, with the Spirit dwelling within us, loving to be about our Father's business – serving the Living God.

Qu: Is faithful obedience our desire? Do we hate our sin?

Romans 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

A heart of stone loves to sinfully go our own way, regardless of a troubled or seared conscience. In contrast, our hatred for and wrestling with sin is testimony to the new covenant promise of the law written on our minds, of a new heart and new spirit, the true us when we live by faith in Christ.

Qu. How should we measure our maturity? What should our sin do?

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

Instead of requiring a mediator, such as a priest, Levite, Pharisee or a "great teacher", we all have the True Teacher, dwelling within. All living in this New Covenant will know and love their Lord and there will be no need to exhort each other in this knowledge anymore. Our relationship with God is wonderfully close and personal – we are known by God and know Him.

A New Hope

Heb 8:10b ...I will be their God, and they will be my people.

A Mosaic promise fulfilled: Lev 26:11-12 *I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. 12 And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*

Although not detailed in Hebrews, the readers would have understood the new covenant in the terms of Jesus' words, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you*", or what we term "Holy Communion" remembering Christ's blood poured out that we would be His people dwelling in Christ.

His new covenant people Love: We know and love God and His commands, and we love one another. *13:1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.*

Those in Christ, His redeemed nation/household, have come to a heavenly sanctuary/tabernacle/temple, a homeland/city/heavenly Jerusalem:

Heb 12:18-24 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them ... 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Everything under the old covenant shook, and everything that has been made will once more be shaken *in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.* The events of AD 70, AD 2024 shake the shakeable, and finally the reappearance of the Son of Man will shake away the old.

12:28-29 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

13:20-21 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The new and eternal covenant in Christ's blood:

- Established true and enduring peace for God's people. Peace that allows us to enter His eternal unshakable rest. Peace that is established through the propitiatory atoning sacrifice of our risen Lord Jesus Christ.
- Established the Reign and Rule of Christ over His people. David's greater son and King is *that great Shepherd of the sheep*. Kings were titled shepherds in Israel, (and more widely in the Middle East). He is our Great Shepherd King who came that we, His sheep, may have life and have it abundantly. *John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. C.f. Psalm 23.*
- Equips God's people. The NT greek for *equip* means "to rearticulate what has been dislocated, to restore to functional perfection" (Hughes). The dislocation of sin has been dealt with. The blood of Christ has *9:14 purified our conscience from dead works to serve the living God – to do what is pleasing to him.*

Glory be to Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen.