



“The New & Better Covenant”

Part I

Kevin Presley

It's great to be with you for another study of God's word. That word is divided into two major divisions: The Old and the New Testament. A majority of the Old Testament scriptures cover a long period of time where God had a covenant with the ancient nation of Israel, the children of the patriarch, Abraham. A *covenant*, being an *agreement*, much like the various agreements we make with another person or entity today. The thirty-nine Old Testament books show how that God made a covenant or agreement with the people He chose to serve Him in that age by unfolding His purposes and, ultimately, bringing the Christ into the world. The Old Testament is a sad story, however, of how the Israelites broke the conditions of that covenant were divorced or cast aside by God as a result. He then established a new covenant and the New Testament book of **Hebrews**, in particular, is an explanation of not only why God established a new covenant with man, but also why it is much better. Let's read together from **Hebrews**.

Hebrews 8:1-6 “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on 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 pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”

Here, he says that the Lord has established *a better covenant* with man today, *built on better promises*. In other words, it is much better to live under the New Covenant, the New Testament of Jesus Christ, than to be subject to the Old Testament which came by Moses. But, why?

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the New Testament law is compared to the Old Testament law and is shown to be superior in every respect. Where the law of Moses fell short in accomplishing God's ultimate purpose, the covenant that He established with us through Jesus Christ did those things to the uttermost and more. We want to be very careful to point out that the law that was given to the Jews by Moses (that is, the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial law recorded in the Old Testament scriptures) WAS inspired of God and WAS in keeping with God's design and purposes. It was not a mistake or an afterthought on God's part, rather it was all a part of His great plan. The Old Testament law is just as much a part of the word of God as any other portion, but it was never intended by God to be a permanent thing. It was only to last until Jesus Christ came and fulfilled it, then its authority was taken away and a NEW law was established through Christ.

Galatians 3:19 "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."

The word *seed* refers to Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:23-25 "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."

The new law replaced the old when Jesus fulfilled the old law by His death upon the cross. In **Hebrews**, Paul is comparing the fleshly covenant made with a physical nation marked by physical circumcisions, soaked in the blood of animal sacrifices, filled with ordinances and ceremonies that pertain to the tabernacle and the sacrificial system—he compares all of that to the spiritual blessings that all people of all nations (not just the Jews) can now find in Christ Jesus. We now have a new covenant through Christ. We don't live under two covenants, and there are not two covenants in place or in existence today. There is not a covenant today between God and the Jews and another covenant between God and the Gentiles; rather, Christ brought a new covenant.

Hebrews 8:13 "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

He is referring there to the impending destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 which would leave the Jew's temple and religion in a heap of dust and ashes, to be no more. That former covenant was done away by Christ, and one word can be used to summarize the **Hebrew** writer's conclusion about the new covenant that took its place, and that is the word *better*. The New Testament is a *better covenant built on better promises* (**Hebrews 8:6**). But what makes it better? Why should you and I be thankful to live under that covenant today?

First, because it is a *spiritual* covenant as opposed to a *fleshly* covenant. What do we mean by that? Well, the old covenant was between God and an earthly, physical nation. God chose the Jews to be the people through whom He would bring the Christ, the Messiah, into the world to redeem Adam's fallen race. But the result of God choosing this nation meant that all other nations were excluded. Paul pictured the sad state of the Gentiles under the Old Testament era:

Ephesians 2:11-12 “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”

You see, that old covenant was a fleshly covenant. Jewish males bore the mark of that covenant in their bodies: circumcision. That set them apart in the eyes of God, from the uncircumcised Gentiles. All of God’s promises and blessings under that covenant fell to the Jews.

Now, God did not choose them for eternal salvation. Don’t mistake that fact. Rather, He chose them for service to Him, that through Him, He might bring eternal salvation to people of ALL races. In other words, God chose them (the Jews) as the conduit through which He would ultimately bless ALL of the world (the Gentiles). God intended for the Jews to be a light unto the Gentiles, and God, according to the promise that He made to faithful Abraham, made them the *seedline* through which the Messiah would one day be born into the world and bless all nations, Jew and Gentile alike. Paul goes on:

Ephesians 2:13-16 “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:”

God took the old law out of the way. That law that was given to the Jew, that delineated him from the Gentile, so that there is now no difference between the two. The whole thing was God’s plan all along, you see, to redeem the lost world through Christ, who would come through this special people God chose for this purpose.

Spiritual blessings, including the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls belong to the church of Christ today because of God’s plan that was accomplished through His people of old. Jeremiah prophesied that a new covenant between God and His people would one day come.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

What does that mean that “*they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD:*”? It’s the contrast between the fleshly and spiritual covenants. Jews were part of the Old Covenant because they were Jews. It was a fleshly covenant. A Jewish baby was born into that covenant. A Jewish baby was circumcised at just eight days old and was part of this covenant by essence of his physical birth. He later had to be taught to *know the Lord*. Jeremiah said that

all of that would change with the establishment of a new covenant. Under that new covenant, the law of God would be written on the heart because one bears the circumcision of Christ in his heart, instead of the mark of circumcision that the Jews had on their bodies essentially from birth.

Today, one is spiritually born into God's kingdom and enters into the New Covenant. Not by essence of his physical birth or physical circumcision, but by essence of his spiritual birth and spiritual circumcision. You may recall Nicodemus, who was a Jew and part of the Old Covenant because of his birth and circumcision. But what did Jesus tell him?

John 3:1-5 "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Then notice what Jesus says in the next verse:

John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Flesh meaning a Jew under the Old Covenant, *spirit* meaning a child of God by faith in Christ. He is contrasting the two ideas. Of course, that confused Nicodemus because all he had known and could imagine was that fleshly covenant he had lived under all his life as a Jew. He didn't understand how a man could be "*born again*" other than as it relates to physical birth. Jesus let him know that wasn't the kind of birth He was speaking of, because the covenant He brought was new and it was different. Today, men and women alike are parties to this covenant, and by essence of obedient faith in Christ, we are forgiven of our sins, and thus circumcised in the heart. That's why each man/woman under the New Covenant doesn't have to be taught to *know the Lord* like the Jew of old; he/she already knows the Lord because it was his/her faith in Christ that brought him/her to know the Lord. We are born of a spiritual re-birth, and circumcised in heart through faith, repentance and obedience to the gospel. That is how we enter into this new covenant; not by physical birth. It is a spiritual covenant that potentially extends to people of all nations, not just the fleshly Jew. The only way a fleshly Jew can enter into this new covenant is the same way that a Gentile can, and that is by this spiritual re-birth, being born again, baptized into Christ. It is a better covenant because all who will come to Christ in obedient faith can be a party in this covenant and enjoy its unsearchable riches and immeasurable spiritual privileges, especially the forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God.

My friend, no matter who you are, what your race, your background, your socioeconomic status...it matters not. God wants to have a covenant with you. He wants you to enter into this agreement with Him wherein you can enjoy the forgiveness of your sins, and that is possible through what Jesus Christ did upon Calvary.

But, then there is the mediator of the New Covenant that makes it better. That is, the Lord Jesus Christ. *A mediator is one who goes between two groups of people to help them work out their differences and come to agreement.* A mediator is usually a neutral party, a go-between, or an arbitrator who brings about reconciliation when divided persons are not able to work out their own differences. Moses served

in that role when God established His covenant with Israel, which we know as the Old Testament or Mosaic law. It was through Moses that the law was given to the children of Israel from the top of smoking, trembling Mt. Sinai. Moses stood between the people and God and brought the will of God to them.

The idea of a mediator in the Old Testament really applied to three roles:

1. The role of the *priest* in offering sacrifice on behalf of the people
2. The role of the *prophet* in administering God's law or His will unto the people
3. The role of the *king* who ruled over the people by God's authority

In a sense, Moses occupied all three of those positions. He offered sacrifice and consecrated the house of Aaron as *priest* over the people. That sacrificial system came through Moses. He also spoke the word of God to them as a *prophet*. He delivered the law for them to keep. And he served as God's *government* on earth. You see, Moses was a symbol, type or picture of what Christ would be to us in this age of time. Only Christ is much better.

Jesus is called the mediator of the New Covenant (**Hebrews 8:6**) and He is the ultimate and perfect mediator for man in every sense. Why?

1. He alone, being fully God, can represent man TO God.
2. He alone can bring complete reconciliation because He alone can bring about complete payment for man's sin and therefore satisfaction of God's wrath.
3. He alone can bring true and lasting peace between God and man, and that He did when He established the New Covenant.

As the old law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. You see, the law that Moses gave was not able to give eternal life. Not because it was bad itself, but because man was insufficient. That law was based upon works that men failed to perfectly perform, thus the law exposed the weakness of man and his inability to save himself from sin. It showed that man was hopelessly doomed by sin without the intervention of a savior.

Galatians 3:19 "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."

So, why did that old law come to be? *because of transgressions until the seed should come.*

Galatians 3:21-22 "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

What did the old law do? For one thing, Paul says that it made mankind conscious of sin.

Romans 7:7 "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

This passage goes to show, by the way, that the Ten Commandments were part of the Old Testament law that Paul is talking about in this context, which he shows was unable to save and was taken out of the way that we might be married to Christ. But he says this Old Testament law brought an awareness and a consciousness of sin, thus showing the need for Christ, our Savior.

I might illustrate it this way: Suppose that you're in the market for a new car and someone says that you should try driving one of those Ford so and so's or one of those Chevy so and so's. You say that you haven't seen one of those so and so cars, and they tell you to go down to the dealership and check one out. That if you drive it, you might be surprised, you might like it. Well, you go down there and ask them to show you one, and it's beautiful. You look at the wonderful design and the various features of the car. You get behind the wheel, take it for a spin, and decide it's just what you've been looking for. You decide to buy it.

Chances are, when you drive off the lot, you're going to notice something you didn't notice before. You'll probably go a little way and see another car just like yours. And in a few more miles, you'll probably see another one and in a couple of days, you'll see another one parked down the street. Until it seems like everywhere you've gone, you've seen a car just like yours. Is that because when you decided to go buy that car, everyone else decided to go buy one, too? No, chances are, those cars were there all along; you just didn't notice them. Something brought those things to your awareness and consciousness.

That's what the law did for man in regard to sin. It made man aware of sin. It showed him the need for Christ. But the law that Jesus brought to man—the New Covenant—James calls *'the perfect law of liberty'* (**James 1:25**). That New Covenant provides salvation by grace through obedient faith, and it is dependent on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to take away our sin and do what the old law could not do. That doesn't mean that obedience to Christ is unnecessary, by the way. God forbid! Anytime God has a law, we are required to obey that law. But it means that the New Covenant provides the remission of sins by grace through obedient faith in Christ. It's a much better covenant.

Why would people desire to try to go back and be justified under the Old Covenant when the New is far superior? Why return to a covenant that is unable to save? Come to find out, that's a problem that goes back a long, long way. There were people in Paul's day who were trying to do that very thing and he did not mince words when he told them the consequences of leaving the covenant of Jesus Christ and going back to the old law. Would you believe that despite the warnings and pleadings of the apostle Paul, there remain those today (much like the Judaizers of Paul's day) who claim to believe in Christ, yet want to go back and seek justification and vindication by the Old Testament law? By the law of Moses? It is absolute folly to do so. It is a misunderstanding of scripture to do so. In our next study, Lord willing, we will show how the New Covenant provided forgiveness in a way that was not possible under the Old, and why and how many are so strangely trying to return to that old inferior law today.

©2018 BibleWay Media. All rights reserved.

BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.