
The Newness of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13

Promises. All kinds of people are making all kinds of promises.

Politicians – It seems any more that there are two things that make politicians click: raising money to spend in all sorts of foolish ways and making promises they have no intention to keep.

Companies – How many contracts and agreements do companies break. They say this is what they will do and then try to get them to do it.

Individuals – Too often we find people’s word to be unreliable. They make promises that they never carry out. In fact, that this is so at the personal level is why it is true at the business and government levels as well.

Marriage – Most, if not every one of us entered marriage through a marriage vow, a covenant. The terms were read to us by the minister and we said, “I do.” And we usually covenant with our spouse “till death do us part.” Yet, one out of two *Christians* will break their marriage vows either by adultery or by divorce.

God makes promises. God relates to people through the promises He has made. Most of these promises come in packages called Covenants. Now if our regular experience is that people break their promises, what happens to the Covenants between God and people? This is the heart of what our author is dealing with here.

God made a Covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be a nation. When that nation left Egypt going to the Promised Land, God covenanted with them and gave them the Law. The Law is part of the Mosaic Covenant. In it, God promises blessing and prosperity for Israel if she will keep the Covenant.

But even in the Old Testament, we find references to a New Covenant – to something that was coming later and would be better.

Hebrews 8:6–7

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. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

Verse 6 tells us that Jesus is just as superior as the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. If we are going to appreciate all that this means, we need to understand how the New Covenant is superior to the Old. All the while, we must remember that we have a sovereign, sympathetic, superior and sufficient High Priest. We are digging into the treasures of the New Covenant in order that we might value Jesus.

The Limitations of the Old Covenant

(v.6-9)

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⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

If there is something better and something superior, then there must be limitations and possibly even problems with the current. Verse 7 even tells us that there must have been something wrong with the Old Covenant in order for there to be a reason for God to make a new one.

What is it that makes the promises of governments and companies and advertisers and even marriages undependable? Is it that government is bad? Or the company is bad? Or that being married is bad? Is it that what is being promised is a bad thing?

Usually not. What is being promised is usually perceived as what we want to hear, what we want to receive. There usually is nothing bad about the company. The promises they make are often designed to get us to buy the product or support the candidate.

So it is with the Old Covenant. It is not that God is bad for making promises. It is certainly not that the promises and commands that God made were bad. No, the limitations of the Old Covenant – the relationship that God had with people through the Mosaic Law – was limited by three important things.

The Movement of God’s Plan

(v.6)

The Old Covenant was a part of the flow of God’s saving plan that unfolded in redemptive history. It was moving toward the excellence and superiority of Christ all along. Now that He has come, we can both see what was being unfolded more clearly and appreciate the “more excellent character” of what God has done.

There is also a genuine sense of moving from an “Old” to a “New”. This is both in the kind of covenant and in the time of the covenants. Part of what the New Testament does is to connect the New Covenant with the Covenant with Abraham. So the line of the New Covenant goes back to the Abrahamic promises, not back to the Mosaic Law. The Covenant with Abraham and the New Covenant are fulfilled in Jesus as our Salvation and Redeemer. The Covenant with David and Solomon are fulfilled in Jesus as our Sovereign and Ruler.

The Design of God’s Purposes

(v.7)

The Old Covenant was designed to bring God’s people out of paganism. It was designed to show how a people were to understand holiness: its commands and its consequences and its cure. It was designed to reveal sin and require sacrifice. All of its features were signposts and roadmaps pointing and leading to Jesus.

This covenant was conditional. That is, God promised blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience. It promised life to all who kept it and death to all who did not. It came down to “do or die.”

The Failure of God's People

(v.8-9)

There then is the rub. Just like in government, or business or marriage, it is the badness and sinfulness of people that make promises fail. It was not with God or with the covenant itself, it was with the people that God finds fault. They failed. They did not obey. They were unfaithful. They mistook shadows for realities, outward pretense of obedience for inward inclination. Instead of being satisfied with what God had promised and what God had provided, they were constantly hankering for something more, something different, something else.

So it was not that God had made bad promises or commands-

It was that people had bad hearts. What was wrong with the Old Covenant (v.7) was the fault He found in the people (v.8-9).

There is an awful lot of preaching on the Law nowadays. We in the church tend to turn more and more to Law as we see greater and greater corruption around us. I want to say this. The Law clearly shows us what sin is. It codified THE WHAT God had built into creation and into man's consciences. *But it lacks the power to make men perfect.* Every single human being who has ever lived, except one, has failed to keep the Law in both attitude and action. And so have you. And so have I. We know this. We have failed in every moment in every way to show how great and supreme God is. We have failed to love God and love neighbor.

But not Jesus. Jesus completely kept the Law. The Old Covenant reached what it was designed to produce *only* in Jesus Christ. There was no fault in Him. So He fulfilled the Law.

But what about us? What about each one of us who are promise breakers and covenant failures?

The Perfections of the New Covenant

(v.10-12)

This is why we have the New Covenant. We are not left without hope or help.

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more."

Here is the original text in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The New Covenant is better and superior *because what it does for the sinful, bad heart of men and women and children.* The superiority and finality of the New Package of Promises, the New Guarantee, the New Covenant is in two areas:

In its Specifics

God promised that He would do some very specific things which He did not do in the Old Covenant in the same way. Not just that God brought about *realities* in place of the shadows, but that He *made them real* to us.

Internal transformation – God would internalize His Word by giving the Holy Spirit. He would write His Word on the very hearts and minds of His people. He would give them new hearts.

Unconditional relation – God simply affirmed that they would be His people. It was no longer conditional. The conditions were all met in Jesus’ obedience and that obedience is put to our account. Under the Old Covenant it was do or die – now it is done and live.

Eternal salvation – No longer or ever again would God remember their sins. They would be forgiven. Their sin would not be held against them. Their spiritual debt would be put on Jesus’ account and He would pay it on the cross. There would be a full and final release from their guilt.

In its Scope**(v.11)**

All through these verses runs the “everyone” theme. Here is the heart of what makes the New Covenant better. Everyone that God has chosen to make a part of this covenant will receive its benefit. This is what verse 11 is talking about. It is not saying that we will not need to evangelize. That is what they had to do in the Old Covenant. Not every person who was under the Old Covenant really knew God, was forgiven by God or had a relation with God. Numerous Jews who lived under the Law died under the judgment of God. They failed and were unfaithful. Not so with the new. If you draw a circle which is the New Covenant, you will in there *all* true believers and *only* true believers. All and only – that is the preciousness of the New Covenant.

The Relationship between the Two**(v.13)**

What this verse indicates has for us already taken place.

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

On Friday, August 9, 70 AD, the Roman general Titus overthrew the defenders of the Temple in Jerusalem. His soldiers carried off every piece of furniture in it. Then, they burned it to the ground. In the remaining days, the stones in the walls were dismantled to retrieve the gold that had melted into them. Jesus’ prophecy and the words of this text came to pass. What was obsolete and aging had finally disappeared.

The Judaism practiced today is not the Judaism of the Bible. There is no Temple. There are no sacrifices. There are no more the annual Sabbaths where every Jewish male attends. This is the judgment of God on the fault and failure of the Old Covenant. And it is the grace of God in the fullness of the New Covenant.

Reflect and Respond

This means that God's promises are sure and reliable. We live in the age of the New Covenant. Here we have better promises. Now we have this superior High Priest, the Lord Jesus, who is sovereign, sufficient and sympathetic.

We are also a covenant people. We are a community, the people of God. We need to think about this more. We need to act like this more. And we need to invite people to enter this New Covenant community under our Savior and Sovereign. I invite you now.

We need to be promise keeping people. Yes, we have a whole men's movement today with its 7 promises. Listen to me beloved, keep your word. Keep your word with God. Keep your word with your church. Keep your word with your spouse.

Let us seek after Jesus who has brought this New Covenant to us by His sacrificial death on the cross. Bow to Him and trust Him. He will forgive and you will be free from your guilt.