

Text: Hebrews 8:7-13

Title: The Vanishing Covenant

Truth: The New Covenant Obsoletes the Mosaic Covenant

Date/Location: April 3, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

We are going to step away a little bit from considering our great high priest (8:1) and look in more detail at the arrangement or “terms” of His priesthood. These terms are specified under the “New Covenant.” The word for covenant is the same as the word for testament. So, when we read our “New Testament” we are actually reading a lot about this New Covenant (NC).

I. Introduction to the New Covenant

- A. The phrase “new covenant” occurs 10 times in the Bible: once when it was announced (Jer. 31:31); four times in records of the last supper in which Jesus announced that His blood was the basis of the forgiveness of sins in the new covenant (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; see also Heb. 10:29); once in 2 Cor. 3:6; and four times in Hebrews (8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24). I believe it is also referenced in Romans 11:27 and Heb. 7:22, 10:16, and 13:20 under slightly different names. The idea of the New Covenant is in other passages as well, such as Ezekiel 36.
- B. Since there is a new covenant, there must be an old one too. It is the Mosaic covenant which was given in the “Old Testament” book of Exodus. It contained the laws we call the “Ten Commandments,” the regulations for priestly service and sacrifices, tithes, and penalties for various crimes, as well as promises of blessings and curses depending on the people’s obedience.
- C. I sometimes may use the term Mosaic covenant and law synonymously, but technically I should be careful about doing that. The covenant is an overarching term that includes the conditions put on the people (the regulations) and God’s part of the promises.
- D. The covenant could also be called the “Sinaitic covenant” because it was given at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness east of Egypt, on the land that is located at the north end of the main body of the Red Sea.

II. The Main Idea of 8:7-13: The New Covenant Obsoletes the Old One

- A. The thought is this: If the covenant given through Moses had been faultless, there would have been no need for another covenant (v. 7). But, there *was* a fault with the Mosaic covenant, so God promised the

New Covenant (v. 8-12, quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34). This new one has made the first obsolete and old so that it is about to vanish (v. 13).

- B. This is just like the promise of another priest in 5:6 and 7:11—it shows that the old priesthood was to be changed, and with it the Law of Moses that supported it. If perfection was achievable by the Levitical priesthood, there would have been no need for a second priesthood. But, alas, perfection was impossible through the Levitical system, so a change was needed.
- C. Now in chapter 8 we see that the change of the priesthood and law was not just a minor adjustment, but it was a total change-out: it, along with the entire Mosaic covenant, had to go away entirely and be replaced with a new covenant. The author of Hebrews has stepped carefully into this part of his argument by first talking about the priesthood being changed. Now he drops the big one—the whole covenant given through Moses is gone!

III. The Fault(s) of the Old Covenant

- A. The fact that there was a problem with the old covenant can be deduced from the fact that God saw fit to give a replacement. But what exactly is the fault of the old covenant?
- B. I believe we can ascertain from this passage and other Scripture that the fault has to do with the sin of those under its terms and with the limitations of the terms themselves. It was designed for a certain time period and purpose. It could not be stretched to accomplish things beyond its design. I do not believe any of this was “God’s fault.”

Problem #1: The Israelites did not keep the covenant.

Jeremiah says “they broke it” (Jer. 31:32). They did this in spite of the fact that God was their “husband”—that is, that this covenant was like a marriage arrangement. They divorced their God-husband and left Him. Some old translations have something like “I disregarded them” instead of the part about the husband. This is true as well, given that God turned against the nation and punished them with the punishments He had promised would come if they disobeyed.

Problem #2: The old covenant was mainly external, not internal. It was concerned with washings and sacrifices and buildings. It did have an internal aspect as well, with the hope that each person’s heart would be circumcised (Deut. 10:16, 30:6; see also Rom. 2:29 and Col. 2:11), but there was nothing in the covenant that provided this *per se*.

Problem #3: The Law only can point out sin. It cannot make anyone righteous. Romans 3:20.

Problem #4: The Law was given for a certain time and was a tutor to bring a people to Christ, Gal. 3:24.

Problem #5: The old covenant did not provide for a universal knowledge of God. Such is promised by the New Covenant.

Problem #6: It did not provide complete and permanent forgiveness of sins. The repetitive nature of the sacrifices showed that sins were never finally removed. The NC provides for full forgiveness.

IV. The Content of the New Covenant, 8:8-12

A. Future – days are coming, v. 8a

It was promised but not inaugurated until years later. In fact, the death of Christ is the grounds of the new covenant, so it could not be in force until then.

B. People – house of Israel and house of Judah, v. 8b

This is *clearly* a Jewish covenant. It was promised to the people of Israel.

How is this related to the NT church? We are grafted in (Rom 11:16-25).

The church today receives a portion of the same blessings that Israel will receive when the New Covenant is fulfilled in the future. All of the blessings of the NC are based on the person and work of Christ. He is the priest of it; He was the sacrifice of it for the remission of sins; He sent down the Spirit when He ascended to heaven.

C. Novel – not according to the covenant I made with their fathers, v. 9

I use “novel” here to mean something new and unseen before. It is not like the covenant from before. It fixes all the faults of the earlier one that led to it becoming broken.

D. Internal – in their mind and on their hearts, v. 10a

Religion focuses on the externals. You see this in many “churches” today with the rituals and forms. But in the NC God changes people from the inside out.

E. Relational – I will be their God, and they shall be My People, v. 10b

We believe that Christianity is a relationship, not a religion.

F. Universal – all shall know me, v. 11

This was definitely not the case under the Law, nor is it the case today. In fact, our mission as a church is largely tied up on the Great Commission to make God known to people through the gospel.

G Spiritual – **their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more**, v. 12

This is foundational. Without this, the other parts would not work. No relationship would be possible with God. The internal aspect would be unable to operate in the midst of a sinful person's insides.

H. Unconditional – **I will...**

We should also note that the covenant is unconditional. Note the phrases throughout the statement of the covenant that make this very clear. There are no "if you do this" kind of statements; rather, everything is, **I will make** (twice), **I will put**, **I will write**, **I will be their God**, **I will be merciful**, **I will remember** [their sins] **no more**.

A major problem with the first covenant was that it was conditional—on sinful human beings to keep their end of the bargain. It never works. God has to step in unilaterally to fix things up.

I. Eternal – from Jeremiah 31:35-37

God promises that the covenant will last forever and will not be done away. This accords well with the eternal priesthood of Christ (5:6, 6:20, 7:17, 7:21, 7:24, 7:28) and the explicit statement that the covenant is everlasting in 13:20.

Conclusion

Because of all this, the old covenant was "ready to vanish away." It was shortly before 70 AD when that statement was made. Today it *has* vanished away, despite any Jewish attempts to resurrect it or make use of some part of it. There is no one in the world today who is under the Mosaic Covenant—certainly not Gentiles who never were under the Law, and not Jews now, because they cannot possibly keep the basic parts of the law in the sacrifices and so on.

But more importantly than any accidents of history that have made it impossible to fulfill the old covenant, God has given us special information that ensures us that there is a new covenant now, and that it is the system we are to follow, not the old one. It is indeed a better covenant based on better promises (8:6). Let us be so thankful that God has blessed us with the knowledge of this system and the ability to participate in parts of it already today.

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