

Text: Heb 8.7-8a

Last week we talked about Jesus as the mediator of the better covenant based on better promises.

Our text shifts now from talking about Jesus directly to a discussion of that better covenant.

The rest of chapter 8 is mostly a quotation of the better covenant, given to us first in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. All of this sets up a comparison of the covenants that is the subject of chapter 9.

A new idea enters the discussion as the author of Hebrews prepares to quote the New Covenant passage from Jeremiah. That idea is the idea of a faulty covenant, as if there was something wrong with the Old Covenant.

Read Heb 8.7-8

We are just going to talk about verses 7-8a today, discussing the idea that the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law, essentially) is flawed.

We must remember this point: God gave the Old Covenant.

If the Old Covenant is flawed (and so our text implies) then God gave a flawed covenant to his people.

How could that be? Is it really that the Old Covenant is really flawed? Or is it the people, the nation of Israel, that were flawed and could not keep the covenant?

I've given our message this title:

The Faultiness of the Old Covenant

By that you can see that I am suggesting that something is wrong with the Old Covenant, even though God gave it to his people.

Proposition: The singular failure of the Old Covenant demands the provision of a New and Better Covenant to overcome the flaws of the Old.

I. The idea of a faulty covenant introduced

A. By a “contrary to fact condition”

if that first *covenant* had been faultless

Lit. “if that first was being without fault”

1. This type of condition assumes that something is untrue to make its argument
 - a. "If John was faultless, then no one would ever seek a replacement"
 - b. In other words, "if that first [covenant] was faultless" means that it had a fault
2. The idea that God gave a faulty covenant bothers many people

"The use of this word does not imply that the old covenant had positive faults [Blm, EBC, HNTC, Hu, TH, TNTC, Wst], but only that it could not fully accomplish what was needed [Blm, EBC, EGT, HNTC, Hu, Hwt, Mil, NIGTC, TH, Wst]; the fault was with mankind's experience in it [TNTC, Wst]."¹

- a. The abbreviations in the quote refer to various commentators
- b. They are:

- 1) Blm = Bloomfield
- 2) EBC = Leon Morris
- 3) HNTC = Montefiore
- 4) Hu = Philip Hughes
- 5) TH = Ellingworth & Nida
- 6) TNTC = Guthrie
- 7) Wst = Westcott
- 8) Hwt = Hewitt
- 9) NIGTC = Ellingworth

Most of these are conservative commentators

3. The problem, though is the consequence: "if the first continued faultless, then no reason to seek a second" (my paraphrase)

¹ Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 277.

B. Some considerations to soften the concern

1. Biblical doctrine of God reveals God as perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, impeccable (no sin)
 - a. A faulty covenant made by God could weaken this view of God
 - b. At worst, it could make God deceptive

This is why the commentaries are nervous about the suggestion of fault in the Old Covenant

2. However...

- a. God never intended the Old Covenant (the law) to be permanent
- b. God intended Old Covenant to be preparatory or typical of the New Covenant
 - 1) Preparatory: lays the theological groundwork for a substitutionary atonement by an impeccable victim [\[explain these terms\]](#)
 - 2) Typical: an imperfect representation of an ideal to come later
 - a) Just as OT tabernacle/temple imperfect representation of heaven
 - b) Just as OT priesthood an imperfect representation of a perfect priest (Jesus) who was to come

II. The location of the fault in the Old Covenant

A. Unique textual problem in v. 8a

For finding fault with them, He says

1. Variant for the word “them”
 - a. One letter difference in the variation
 - b. Has to do with the case ending of the word
 - 1) Our text takes the word as the object of “finding fault” — *finding fault with them*
 - 2) Alternate reading takes the word as the indirect object of God’s words

NET Heb 8:8 But showing its fault, God says **to them ...**

YLT Heb 8:8 For finding fault, He saith **to them ...**

2. The scholars are divided on these readings, but the versions are not
 - a. Almost all take option 1, including, interestingly, the KJV
 - b. The majority manuscripts take option 2, so this is a case where the KJV goes against the Majority

B. The place where the fault lies

1. Option 1: the fault lies with the people who couldn't keep the covenant
 - a. Many commentators prefer this point of view
 - b. It eliminates the suggestion of imperfection in God's words (the Old Covenant)
 - c. And *it is true* that no one in the human race can keep God's word perfectly
 - 1) We know this from history
 - 2) We know this from experience

As an illustration, many people will speak highly of Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount, without looking closely at it

- In the Sermon, he says, if you hate your brother, it is all the same as if you murdered him
- He also says, if you look on a woman with lust, it is all the same as if you committed adultery with her

Jesus doubles down on the Law (the Old Covenant) — he shows how impossible it is for man to keep God's will perfectly

I once preached a message on the Ten Commandments called "Ten Good Reasons Why You Can't Work Your Way to Heaven"

2. Option 2: There is a fundamental flaw with the Old Covenant itself
 - a. The Old Covenant granted access to God through the OT priesthood and sacrificial system
 - b. The Old Covenant could not become a *permanent* solution for sin
 - 1) The sacrifices had to be offered again and again
 - 2) The priests who served could not last, but must be replaced (as we have seen)
 - 3) And, most importantly, as David said:

Ps 51.16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.

- 4) The author of Hebrews adds

Heb 10.4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

III. The lengthy search for a second covenant

- A. Our text (7b) suggests that if the Old Covenant had no fault, there would be no search for a second covenant

Heb 8.7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion **sought** for a second.

1. Verb is in a linear tense, suggesting a constant search
2. Insight from OT testimony shows the length of the search

- B. A few examples

1. David, already cited:

Ps 51.16-17 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

2. David echoes Samuel, earlier rebuking Saul

1 Sa 15.22-23 Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams.²³ “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king.”

3. The prophets chime in

Isa 1.11 “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

Hos 6.6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Jer 7.22-23 “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.²³ “But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’

C. Finally, the Lord leads Jeremiah to offer the New Covenant as a future promise (Jer 31.31-34) [[compare with Hebrews as I read Jeremiah](#)]

Jer 31.31-34 ¶ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.³⁴ “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for

they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

D. This brings us back to the opening statement of Hebrews

Heb 1.1-2 ¶ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² **in these last days has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The singular failure of the Old Covenant demands the provision of a New and Better Covenant to overcome the flaws of the Old.

The Son of God spoke to the world from the cross. You can be right with God if you depend on His cross to save you from your sins.