

Text: Heb 8.13

We've talked about the content of the New Covenant and the difference between the people of the Old Covenant and the people of the New.

Today we will talk about how:

The New Makes the Old Obsolete

When we say this, we do not mean to say there were no privileges or spiritual advantages to the Old Covenant.

In Romans 3, Paul asks these questions:

Rm 3.1 ¶ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

He begins to answer in the next verse:

Rm 3.2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

He doesn't continue his list, stopping here with "first of all" — but he will pick up this idea again in Romans 9. We will look at that passage in a few minutes.

But first of all, ... the people of the Old Covenant had the Bible (Old Testament). That is what "oracles of God" means.

What a great advantage it is to any people to have the Bible!

1. In the Bible you find out how men are sinners and need God.
2. In the Bible you find out how God singled out one family to be the source of blessing to the world (the family of Abraham)
3. In the Bible you find out that God provided a means where you could gain access to God through offering a substitute combined with a contrite, repentant heart
4. In the Bible you learned that God still had a plan that would yet come to pass and take care of man's sins forever.

The oracles of God were a great blessing.

There were more blessings as well, and we will get to that shortly.

We could compare the blessings of the Old Covenant with the blessing of living in a free state like Canada with orderly transfers of power by democratic elections.

1. We have no fear of the losing side taking up arms against the winners
2. We have great freedom of movement within a vast country with no one stopping you at any borders
3. We have economic opportunities unparalleled in the developing world
4. We can gather, without fear, for public worship with no restrictions on our speech

And there are more... (Note: some of these blessings are threatened, but I am focusing on what *is*, not what *might* be.)

Now, can you imagine a better country to live in than Canada? I can, and it is coming soon. It is called the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The advantages of his kingdom will far surpass the advantages of the best of human civilization (whatever that might be).

The advantages of the New Covenant over the Old are the subject of our message today.

Read Heb 8.8-13, text 13

Proposition: The advantages of the New Covenant transcend the privileges of the Old Covenant and make the Old obsolete.

I. The many privileges of the Old Covenant (Rm 9.4-5)

- A. We already spoke of the privilege of the Oracles of God
 1. That is, the Old Testament – what a heritage Israel *still* has
 2. But the privilege is of no use if you won't listen to it!
- B. List of the privileges in Rm 9.4-5
 1. The adoption as sons
 - a. God's declaration of the relationship (Ex 4.22-23)
 - b. National, not individual
 - c. Israel's adoption is the setting aside of the nation as in a special relationship with God that belongs to no other nation
 2. The glory
 - a. See Ex 24.16-17, 40.34-38; 1 Ki 8.10-11
 - b. That is, the presence of God with his people

“The presence of God became a reality with this people never granted to any other.”¹

3. The covenants

Note: *plural*, not singular

a. Abrahamic covenant

- 1) Repeated many times
- 2) Repeated to Isaac and Jacob

b. Mosaic covenant: Mount Sinai

- c. Davidic covenant: the promise of God to give David an eternal son to rule his people Israel

4. The giving of the Law [the essence of the Mosaic Covenant]

a. The Mount Sinai revelation

b. The constitution and ordering of the Israelite nation

- 1) Ex 20, the ten commandments and commentary
- 2) Ex 24-40, the building of the tabernacle
- 3) Lev 1-27, the sacrificial system and implications
- 4) Dt 1-34, the repetition and expansion of the whole

Allowed Israel, and only Israel, access to God through the ceremonies of the Law: outsiders [Gentiles] had to come through Israel to draw near to God

5. The temple service [the visible expression of the Old Covenant]

6. The promises: especially to Abraham and David

- a. Land
- b. Seed
- c. Blessing
- d. King

¹ Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology: Studies in Romans* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977), 101.

7. The fathers
 - a. Esp. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - b. Possibly also Moses and David

Rm 11.28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

- C. The privileges of Israel mostly remain
 1. The oracles: if they will hear them
 2. The adoption: when they turn to him whom they have pierced
 3. The glory: when they worship in the New Jerusalem
 4. The covenants: completely fulfilled [with one caveat]
 5. The Law in the Heart – this is the caveat, more in a moment
 6. The memorial temple service [as revealed in Ezekiel]
 7. The promises: still valid today, completely fulfilled to faithful Israel in the kingdom
 8. The fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will rise again

Mt 8.11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

II. The new advantages of the New Covenant (Heb 8.8-12)

We covered this in detail before, so a bare outline now

- A. The New Covenant replaces the Old (8b, Jer 31.31)

1. This advantage is first of all for *Israel*
2. But Gentiles are added in

Supported by numerous passages, including: Isa. 19:24–25; 42:6; 49:6; Rom. 15:9–12

- B. The New Covenant is not like the Old (9)

1. Specifically, we see the "Old" identified as the Mosaic Covenant

"On the day when I took them by the hand
To lead them out of the land of Egypt"

2. The Old Covenant ultimately failed in its object: the people did not continue in it

C. The New Covenant effects a spiritual change in the hearts of everyone who is in it (10-11)

1. New mind
2. New hearts
3. New relationship with God

If you don't see any change in your thinking, your values, your loves [do you love to be with the people of God?], there is something wrong with your relationship with God in the New Covenant.

D. The New Covenant forgives sins (12)

1. All of them
2. Forever

These are tremendous advantages, they are far superior to the Old Covenant — and they are for Israel, especially, and all who are in Christ.

The Bible tells us that All Israel will be Saved (Rm 11.26) — that is, the Israel alive at the Second Coming when the whole nation will see Him and will repent of their unbelief.

III. The eclipse of the Old Covenant by the New (Heb 8.13)

Finally, to our text!

A. The very word “new” makes the “old” obsolete

“The very words ‘a new covenant’ antiquate the previous one.”²

“The use of the perfect tense of *palaioō*, ‘make obsolete,’ highlights the permanent antiquated status of the old covenant.”³

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 195.

³ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 449.

B. The Old is ready to disappear: because the New eclipses it

1. This is a hint that the temple worship was active when the author wrote

This is one of the reasons there was a Judaism that persecuted Jewish Christians were tempted to fall back to.

2. Consider how the New Covenant eclipses the Old

a. Full forgiveness of sin

- 1) In the Old Covenant, you could by faith making an offering for a specific sin or episode of uncleanness
 - a) You had to rely on the daily sacrifices for the nation for general sin and uncleanness
 - b) You had to rely even more on the annual Day of Atonement for the right to approach God at all
- 2) In the New Covenant, you rely on one sacrifice offered once for all time

b. The spiritual change

- 1) In the Old Covenant you relied on careful observance of the commandments in your rituals and your daily life
- 2) In the New Covenant, you have the witness of the Spirit in the heart

c. The relational change

- 1) In the Old Covenant the sacrificial system and the officiating priests stood between you and God: you gained access through their mediation
- 2) In the New Covenant, by the Spirit, you cry "Abba, Father," and he hears your prayer right now

This is a very inadequate comparison: but consider the difference between medical treatment today and medical treatment just a little over 100 yrs ago.

Now we have access to diagnostic tests, machines, blood analysis, etc., that can help diagnose our problems in minutes. For many diseases we have sure, safe cures, often very easy to tolerate.

“In the early 1900s in the United States, many major health threats were infectious diseases associated with poor hygiene and poor sanitation (e.g., typhoid), diseases associated with poor nutrition (e.g., pellagra and goiter), poor maternal and infant health, and diseases or injuries associated with unsafe workplaces or hazardous occupations (4,5,7,8).”⁴

“Traditional medical practices during most of the 19th century relied on symptomatic treatment, consisting primarily of bloodletting, blistering, and high doses of mineral poisons. These medical regimens resulted in high rates of death in patients unfortunate enough to undergo treatment. In the latter part of the century, practices began to shift toward something more recognizable as actual care.”⁵

I read on another site about the kind of treatments sometimes offered around 1900, including:

1. **Drinking radium water** (radioactive) to treat all kinds of things. Treatment dropped when many patients died.
2. Or **taking a “hydroelectric bath”** (small current running through your bath water) for migraines.
3. Or **dousing your head in gasoline** to cure headlice (stay way from candles).⁶

Conclusion:

Proposition: The advantages of the New Covenant transcend the privileges of the Old Covenant and make the Old obsolete.

For the Hebrew Christians, there was really nothing to go back to.

For modern hearers: there is nothing at all, anywhere else, that can deal with your sins and put you in a relationship with God.

⁴ “Achievements in Public Health, 1900-1999: Changes in the Public Health System,” accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4850a1.htm>.

⁵ “Medicine and Health from the Mid-19th to Early 20th Century,” *Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site* (blog), accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.rancholoscerritos.org/medicine-and-health-from-the-mid-19th-to-early-20th-century/>.

⁶ “9 Terrifying Medical Treatments from 1900 and Their Safer Modern Versions,” Mental Floss, August 7, 2014, <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/57983/9-terrifying-medical-treatments-1900-and-their-safer-modern-versions>.