

# Good, Better, and Finally Best— the New Covenant Hebrews 8:1-6

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## Title explained

I'm using this familiar figure of speech to emphasize that each covenant is good because it was established by God. But it is also true that each covenant is better than the one it precedes because it includes all the essentials and promises of the previous covenant while adding new material and expanding on all that had come before. The New Covenant is best because it is the consummation and fulfilment of everything that had been promised in previous covenants. All the promises of God are fulfilled in the New Covenant. It alone is a covenant with nothing left out.

## Apart from the covenants of Scripture . . .

1. You cannot fully understand your own salvation—how the promises of God are guaranteed, or how the Holy Spirit works in you.
2. You cannot usefully understand the love, and the promises of God.
3. You cannot appreciate the justice of God.
4. You cannot adequately reference any portion of Scripture (a book, a chapter, a verse, a word).
5. You cannot understand world history (past, present, or future).

## Today's text

Hebrews 8:1 Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if He were on earth, He wouldn't be a priest, since there are those offering the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain. 6 But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree He is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been *legally enacted on better promises*.

## The last of the covenants

1. The Covenant of Creation (Adam)—Where all was lost by Adam's sin
2. The Covenant of Noah—the earth is preserved in preparation for the coming Saviour
3. The Covenant with Abraham—the gospel is declared for the first time (Gen. 15:6)
4. The Covenant of Law (Moses)—Gospel worship is instituted and gospel holiness is revealed
5. The Covenant of the Kingdom (David)—Christ's kingship and lordship foreshadowed in David
6. **The New Covenant, or the Covenant of Consummation (Christ)**—Everything lost in Adam is finally restored in Christ! Everyone who comes to Christ, and by the Spirit is baptized into Christ (I Cor. 12:13-14), finds that he or she is included in all the covenants. All the promises of all the covenants find their fulfilment in Christ and are extended to all who are

in Christ.

Gal. 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment.  
28 There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29  
And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

### **Persistent covenantal themes**

1. **Sovereignty** of God is emphasized throughout (The Creator God establishes the covenants and calls human beings to embrace their terms)
2. **Expectation** of a Messiah, a Saviour, is central to the covenants
  - a. first promised to Adam and Eve as the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15)
  - b. A son of Shem (Gen. 9:26)
  - c. Abraham's Seed (Compare Gal. 3:16 with Gen. 13:15)
  - d. David's greater Son (II Sam. 7:12-16)
  - e. Jesus Christ, the son of David, Son of God, Saviour, the mediator of a better (best) covenant (Compare Heb. 8:1,6 with 7:16)
3. **Sacrificial Blood:** Every covenant is established and maintained on the basis of a blood sacrifice (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; 9:12; I Cor. 11:25)
4. **Grace, forgiveness, restored relationship:** "He will be forgiven" is spoken as the outcome of all the O.T. sacrifices (10 times in Lev. alone). In every covenant God is at work to bring people to Himself by offering them a hope that is always focussed on the total victory over sin promised in the New Covenant.
5. **Purpose:** "I will be their God and they will be my people." (Heb. 8:10; Ex. 19:5-6; but also throughout Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah, Rev. 21:3, etc.)

These themes find their highest and fullest expression in the New Covenant instituted in the blood of Christ.

### **The New Covenant is based upon Christ's superiority** (from today's text)

1. He is a better priest than Aaron. (v.1)
2. He reigns from a superior throne. (v.1)
3. He works in a better sanctuary. (v. 2,5)
4. He offers a better sacrifice. (v.3; 9:23ff)
5. He is the mediator of a better covenant. (v.6)
6. His work rests on better promises (v.6) because He has obtained a better ministry as a whole. (v.6)

**New Covenant** (First described in Jeremiah 31, then repeated word for word in Hebrews, thus emphasizing its fullness and perfection.)

1. v. 8 – It is a New Covenant, therefore replacing the Old Covenant (see v. 13) by retaining the essence of the Old while adding new features that are distinctive and necessary to fulfil all God's OT promises.

2. v. 8 – The New Covenant is established with God’s eternal people, the house of Israel and the house of Judah. But us Gentiles need not fear that we are left out. Through Jesus Christ we are brought into Israel. Along with believing Jews we are the one people of God in Christ. As we’ve already heard this morning, in Christ we are Abraham’s seed, heirs to all the promises God made to Abraham.

Eph. 2:17 When the Messiah came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. 21 The whole building, being put together by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. 22 You also are being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

Eph. 3:4 By reading this you are able to understand my insight about the mystery of the Messiah. 5 This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 *The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

3. v.9 – The New Covenant is different from the previous covenants in that it is made with Christ, not man. Compare two passages.
  - a. Today’s text: “I disregarded them . . . because they did not continue in My covenant.”

Why did Israel repeatedly fail to continue in the covenant God made with them at Sinai? The answer is found in Romans 8.

- b. Romans 8:3 What the law could not do since it was limited by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending His own Son in flesh like ours under sin’s domain (yet He remained sinless), and as a sin offering (our substitutionary, atoning sacrifice), 4 in order that the law’s requirement would be accomplished in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (By the Spirit we are baptized into Christ. I Cor. 12:13-14).

If we are in Christ, we need not worry about covenant faithfulness. He is our faithfulness. He is our atonement. He is the one who keeps the covenant for us—in every way. He is the one who sends His Holy Spirit to enliven us through the New Birth so that His covenant faithfulness begins to evidence itself in daily life. In other words, “what the law could not do since it was limited by the flesh,” Christ does for us as our covenant representative and as the source of our Spiritual life.

4. v.10 The New Covenant is a Spiritual covenant; that is, built upon the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer’s life. No longer is the law merely an external thing, engraved upon stone tablets. Now it is engraved upon the renewed hearts and illuminated minds of those who are born again by the Spirit. (*This is the first of the “better promises.”*)

Moses prophesied in Deut. 30:6, “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love Him with all your heart and all your soul so that you

will live.”

The prophet Ezekiel also prophesied a day would come when God’s people would be transformed from the inside out. Eze. 11:19, “And I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, so they may follow My statutes, keep My ordinances, and practice them. Then they will be My people, and I will be their God.”

This is exactly what Jesus had in mind when he taught that we “must be born again, born of the Spirit” (John 3:1-10), and he was astonished that although Nicodemus was Israel’s teacher he had never understood these things.

II Cor. 3:7 Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stones, came with glory, so that the Israelites were not able to look directly at Moses’ face because of the glory from his face—a fading glory— 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

5. v.11 The New Covenant lifts every believer into a universal priesthood (I Peter 2:9); it gives every believer a holy calling (II Tim. 1:9), it makes every believer a builder of God’s Spiritual house (I Pet. 2:5). (*This is the second of the “better promises.”*) This verse does not mean there is no continuing role for teachers. Rather it means that no one is without spiritual aptitude. No born-again child of God is unable to “get it” when it comes to spiritual things. We vary one from another in spiritual gifts and even in spiritual attainments. But compared to the people of the world, every person in Christ is a spiritual Einstein.

This is exactly what God was speaking to in

Isaiah 2:3 In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house will be established at the top of the mountains and will be raised above the hills. All nations will stream to it, 3 and many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us about His ways so that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction will go out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

6. v.12 The New Covenant provides actual forgiveness of sin. (*This is the third of the “better promises.”*) The animal sacrifices offered at the temple taught the forgiveness of sins by means of a substitute sacrifice, but after fifteen-hundred years of repeated sacrifices it was clear that “the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). But when God declared through Jeremiah that with the coming of the New Covenant He would “never again remember their sins,” He was declaring the end of the sacrificial system. Sure enough, the end came in Christ.

“But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:13).

Do you believe it? In a way that changes your life?