

May 10, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Hebrews
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2015 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 8:8-13

1. What was the old covenant?
2. What was the problem with the old covenant?
3. With whom does God make the new covenant?
4. What is the new covenant?
5. How do you enjoy the new covenant?

THE NEW COVENANT **Hebrews 8:8-13**

You probably are somewhat satisfied with your vehicle. No doubt you gave some thought to what you wanted in a car or truck before you purchased it. Maybe you were in a position to be picky and you looked for a vehicle that had a lot of the modern gadgets and options that make driving not only comfortable but convenient. Now I don't want to disappoint you, but your cruise control and blue tooth options are actually dated.

That probably sounds hard to believe. Imagine my Grandfather with his brand new 1932 Ford Victoria. He probably thought he was enjoying something that would never be improved. After all, unlike the old horse he replaced with this car, he didn't have to feed the vehicle unless he drove it. He never had to attach the harnesses or trim hooves. He just turned the crank, jumped in the driver's seat, put

the thing in gear, and away he went. Yes, but you have blue tooth, GPS, cruise control, and automatic braking. We know that it will be hard to improve on that, right?

Don't be surprised if your modern gadgets are replaced in the near future. I have been reading a couple of articles lately about driver-less cars and trucks. Really. Some of these things are already in the testing stage. It sounds too farfetched to believe, but it is true. Maybe some of you think that driver-less semis would be an improvement. Surely driver-less cars on Wade Hampton Boulevard, also known as the Wade Hampton 500, will result in less crashes. Yep, your brand new car is about to become obsolete.

I wonder if the old saint who trudged up to the temple with his annual sacrifice ever thought of a day when this would be obsolete. Real saints, the ones who had faith in God's promises, must have looked forward to that final sacrifice that Abraham told Isaac about when he said that God would provide Himself a sacrifice. What would it be like? Who would it be? How would it happen?

You and I can tell the old saint in perfect detail all about the new covenant. We are all in! We are enjoying the benefits of the new covenant. One day all the nation of Israel will be in. But not now. Jeremiah promised through God's Word that the day will come when God will write His covenant on the hearts of the people of His nation. The author to the Hebrew Christians explains in our text that what Jeremiah described as future for the nation of Israel is the covenant that we are part of through salvation. We know the new covenant because we are in it. Do you rejoice in that?

God, the Author of the Covenant, Finds Fault (Vv.8-9).

Contrary to the natural interpretation of this text, the old covenant was not faulty (v.8). So what does it mean when we read, *For he finds fault with them when he says: (v.8a)?* We must remember that it was God Himself who established the old covenant. It wasn't Moses' law but God's covenant that shaped the nation of God's people. The old covenant flowed out of God's covenant with Abraham. Because God set aside a particular people for His own glory and purposes, He was right to initiate a covenant that would govern the relationship. Through these people, God would lay the

ground work for the promised Redeemer. The Law of God, which He gave through Moses, painted many pictures and established many principles regarding God's final sacrifice for sin.

To that end then, the law had to be good. That was Paul's conclusion when he wrote, *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (Romans 7:12)*. The law is good also in that it helps describe for us the character of God. God's expectations for His creation flow from His character. His character is a reflection of His glory. Through the law, we learn that God's glory is the standard for all that He created. Therefore, God's perfect law demonstrates His perfect character. That is why no one is able to keep the law of God.

That no one is able to keep the law gives us a hint about the "fault" connected with the old covenant. Again, there is nothing wrong with God's law, His old covenant. God gathered the people of Israel into a nation for His own glory. He gave them His law. The covenant stated that if the people would keep His law, they would receive His blessing. The other side of the covenant stipulated that if the people didn't keep God's law, they would receive judgment and cursing. That in and of itself is fine. The problem is with the recipients of the covenant.

Then why did the author of this letter make the previous statement: *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. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second" (Hebrews 8:6-7)*.

The covenant itself was faultless. But God found fault with the sinners who received it. All people, including the lineage of Abraham, who God brought into covenant with Him through the law, are infected with the sin principle. Because of natural sin, no one is particularly interested in keeping the law of God. As Paul wrote, *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8)*.

The law of God works really well to help people who are infected by sin to see that we are infected by sin. The law is great to

bring sinners to the understanding that we have offended God by our sin. But no one is able to be redeemed from sin by keeping the law. We all break all the law all the time. James pointed out that *whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it (James 2:10)*. Therefore, no one can be justified through the old covenant. *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11)*.

Legend holds that Thomas Edison was a successful inventor through the process of trial and error instead of applying mathematic or scientific formulas. Rumor holds that the inventor tried and failed to create the electric light bulb 1,000 times. Edison allegedly said, "I have not failed 1,000 times. I have successfully discovered 1,000 ways to NOT make a light bulb."

God never does anything through trial and error. For Him to fail would be to succumb to the sin principle. Rather, God introduces covenants and systems for the express purpose of revealing His perfect character and revealing His amazing plan of redemption that is in keeping with His character. All the time the old covenant of the law was in effect, and all the time people were acknowledging their sins and offering sacrifices to cover their offenses, God was planning to unfold the new covenant in the fullness of His time line. Hundreds of years before God introduced the new covenant, He promised that it would be coming.

Through God inspiring him to speak, Jeremiah had promised God's New Covenant (vv.8b-9). The next five verses of our text comprise almost an exact quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34. In that text, we learn that the new covenant is God's covenant. *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord" (v.8b)*. The new covenant is not a human concept that wise men concocted because God's plan wasn't working so well. There have been many such inventions throughout history. All cults are attempts to improve on God's law that reveals the need of one eternal sacrifice, one eternal Savior. The amazing thing is that all cults incorporate the same fatal flaw by proposing that a sinful human is able to gain redemption through keeping of man-made rules.

Through Jeremiah God declared that in His perfect timing He would introduce a new covenant. This is the authoritative promise of the very God who established the old covenant. How refreshing these

words would have been to devout and sincere people who truly understood their need of a final sacrifice. Sadly that idea does not describe most of the people who heard God's promise through Jeremiah. They were content to flounder around in dead religious practices. They were the people who attempted to serve God with their right hands and serve the gods of their pagan neighbors with their left hands at the same time. And all the while, they would try to assure themselves that all was okay because they had the temple of God in their midst (Jeremiah 7).

Such abysmal failure is precisely why the new covenant had to be God's plan. And just as God established the old covenant with the nation of Israel (which nation He created), God established the new covenant with His nation. God declared that the days are coming "*when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*" (v.8c).

Again we must acknowledge that God will establish the new covenant with the reunited nation. The nation of God's people divided at the time of Rehoboam, becoming the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The division was the result of Solomon's faithlessness in following after many false gods. Israel as a whole abandoned the old covenant early on, which led to the nation of Assyria over-running them and scattering the people among the nations. Judah followed the rejection of the old covenant within a few generations which brought God's wrath through the Babylonians in 586 B.C. who took the people captive. Some 50,000 people were repatriated to Judah about 70 years later.

But today we are witnessing a re-gathering of the house of Israel and the house of Judah in the modern nation of Israel. In 1881 there were roughly 25,000 Jews living in Palestine. At the beginning of WWI (1914) there were 80,000 Jews in Palestine. In 1939 the League of Nations mandated a territory for Israelis and 400,000 had gathered in the promised land. Today there are about 6 million Jews in the promised land, and they are flocking to the homeland by the thousands this year.

This re-gathering is according to multiple promises in the Old and New Testament alike. Promises such as, *In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from*

Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:11-12).

The prophet Zechariah promised that when God ends the reign of the Gentiles and is establishing the kingdom of Christ, the entire nation of Israel will be converted and brought into the new covenant. *For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day (Zechariah 3:9).* He also declared, *On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1).* Paul reiterated the same thing in the New Testament. *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26).* It is God's covenant and He will establish it with a re-gathered house of Israel and house of Judah.

Furthermore, the new covenant is unlike the old covenant. It is "*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*" (v.9a). This statement reminds us that God literally drew the stubborn people out of Egypt. The people told Moses and Aaron to mind their own business and leave them alone. Even after God had pulled them out of slavery, they wanted to go back. God took them to Mt. Sinai where He established the covenant under the law He gave through Moses.

Not surprising then, God's people refused to keep the old covenant. "*For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord*" (v.9b). God's people seldom humbled themselves and submitted to that covenant. Early on God said to Moses, "*I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people*" (Exodus 32:9). About 1,500 years later Stephen preached to their posterity. "*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you*" (Acts 7:51). That seems to be the same spirit we see manifested in most Jews still today.

Therefore, because of the peoples' stubborn disobedience, God kept His promise and turned Israel and Judah over to their enemies. They have been scattered to the four corners of the earth until this day. And now God is drawing them back for a reason. The people of God will respond quite differently to the new covenant.

The New Covenant Is Different (vv.10-13).

Notice how Jeremiah in the past, and the author to the Hebrews in this letter, detailed the characteristics of the new covenant (vv.10-12). Here we learn that the new covenant is an inward covenant. *"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"* (v.10a). The phrase, "After those days" refers to end times events. That will be events like the Great Tribulation period with the destruction of three-fourths of the earth's population and much of the current land mass. It includes the intense persecution and attempt to annihilate the nation of Israel by Antichrist. There will be the gathering of the nations' armies to Armageddon, the return of Christ to judge the nations, and the setting up of Christ's kingdom.

This is a covenant God makes with the *house of Israel*. From the time of Abraham, all of God's covenants were made with Israel. This new covenant really is not established with the Church first. Salvation is through the Jews as Jesus told the Samaritan woman (John 4:22). Rather the Church is enjoying being part of the covenant God makes with His nation Israel. We are grafted into the tree of God's people. Paul explained it like this: *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe* (Romans 11:17-20).

Because God draws us into this same covenant, we become adopted children of Abraham. Again it was Paul who wrote to

Christians in Galatia, *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed"* (Galatians 3:7-8). *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise* (Galatians 3:29).

Because God made us a part of this amazing covenant, He has written His covenant on our hearts. Our "religion" is not external, not a matter of doing this or that tradition. Our relationship is with our Creator because of His covenant. What He has written forever on our very being determines how we live and relate to Him.

Because the covenant determines how we relate to God, we must also conclude that it is also a relational covenant. God promised, *"And I will be their God, and they shall be my people* (v.10b)." This was God's intent of Israel all along. Finally, in that last day, the second part of the covenant (*they shall be my people*) will also be true.

This is the same principle of the covenant that we the Church enjoy now. We live in a world that is full of people who are not God's people. They belong to the world. They are characterized as "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). But contrasted to them is us who are God's people because of the covenant He wrote on our hearts.

The third detail we find is that this covenant is built on knowledge. *"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"* (v.11). In that day, each member of God's people will know Him intimately. They will know God like we know Him. It is not that we have been well-schooled and memorized all the right information. We know God the Father and God the Son intimately because we have God the Holy Spirit indwelling. He is the Living Word penned on our hearts. Jesus promised, *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"* (John 14:26).

Finally the text indicates that this new covenant flows from mercy. *"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more"* (v.12). A relationship with God is

possible only because sin has been removed. Today the nation of Israel is in sin and separated from fellowship with God. In that day, they will confess sin and God will remove it. So, too, we who are part of the Church enjoy fellowship with God through the covenant of Christ's blood which is the only means for having sins removed. God's law, the old covenant, reveals our sin to us. We acknowledge it and say the same thing about our offenses that God says about them. By faith we are brought into the new covenant through the blood of Christ. That is the great, eternal demonstration of God's mercy.

What action has God taken toward the old covenant, since He has established the new covenant (v.13)? God makes the first covenant obsolete. *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete (v.13a)*. Having briefly considered the characteristics of the new covenant, why would anyone want to be part of the old covenant? This new covenant is made in Christ's blood. It was the picture the old saints should have had in their minds as they were burdened with the old covenant. Each time they offered a sacrifice they should have looked forward to the final sacrifice of the Perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ. In that wonderful setting of the upper room, hours before Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He handed the cup to His followers and said, *"For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28)*.

If you are born again, you are part of the many who have forgiveness of sins. That is why we commemorate the sealing of this covenant regularly with Paul's instruction: *In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1Corinthians 11:25)*. Therefore, since it has come, the old has to be obsolete. All sinners need to stop trying to gain God's declaration of justification through law-keeping. We must humbly rejoice in God's finished work in the blood of Christ.

Because God made the old covenant obsolete, the new covenant has replaced the old one. *And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (v.13b)*. Israel as a nation has yet to be brought into this covenant. The author to the Hebrews argues that this is the covenant that every person in a relationship with God is enjoying now.

The old saying concludes that timing is everything. Imagine having been born as a Jew under the old covenant. You would never be able to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. But we are born in this age of God's wonderful grace where we rest securely in the new covenant that is validated in the blood of Jesus Christ. It is finished and I am the recipient of the payment!