

# Jesus, High Priest of a Better Covenant

Hebrews 8:6–13

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If you have ever been in a labor dispute you will understand this question...when are you all going back to the table? Sometimes when two sides of labor cannot agree, a third party is called in to arbitrate the differences. Some of us call that person an arbitrator or a mediator, but if someone is going to mediate between two parties, they must be equal to both sides. In other words, when the mediator sits down at the table with the two differing parties, they must represent both sides equally. The writer of Hebrews is going to teach us that Jesus has a more excellent ministry because He mediates a better covenant that has been enacted on better promises. After reading of our text, we're going to look at the new covenant that Jesus mediates for God and for us.

## Scripture

***"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. For He finds fault with them when He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 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, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 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. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.' In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."***

Jesus has a more excellent ministry as He sits at the right hand throne of God interceding on your behalf and my behalf, knowing that no matter what situation we find ourselves in, there's not a time when we cannot come to the throne of grace and obtain mercy and grace from God. Mercy is the ability to get over it; you don't have to live in the failure of your past, you can get over it. Grace is the ability to get on with it; it is God doing for you what you cannot do for yourself so that you can now do what He did. I don't know how many times I'm going to have to say this until we get it, but grace is not forgiveness. Forgiveness *comes* from God's grace but grace in your life is God's enabling power. Jesus has a more excellent ministry because He mediates a better covenant that has better promises. A mediator must be equal to both sides...he must represent both sides equally. Now Jesus never asked us and God to come to a table, but do you know what He did do? He took us to a cross. Jesus Christ being fully God, took the hand of the Father, and being fully man He took the hand of man, and He put us back together at the cross. He represented both sides equally. As God, Jesus fully understood holiness and justice. As God, He knew, sin had to be dealt with in a just way. Yet as man, He fully understood the sinfulness of man. On that cross, as a man who had never committed an act of sin, He took the sin of the human race upon Himself and He became a sin offering, and what He mediates is a new covenant.

What we need to remember here in Hebrews is the preacher is preaching to a small Jewish house church somewhere in or near Rome. Now because of the persecution that's beginning to break out among the Christian believers, there was a tendency for some of these Jewish believers to want to go back to Judaism. See, there were several who have been visiting the church, they have been under the preaching of the gospel and have been thinking about putting their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. But they're seeing the persecution, they're seeing the price that will have to be paid if they turn to the Messiah, so many of them are thinking about turning back to the law of Moses. They can't fully comprehend that salvation does not lie in the old covenant that God made with Israel and they're having trouble hearing and understanding that God has initiated a new covenant with His people. So what the preacher is going to do first is open up the Book. This is where Baptists and the Jewish people have something in common; we are both known as people of the Book. The Jewish people are known as the people of the Old Testament, while we Baptists are known as the people of the Old Testament and the New Testament. I have been taught all my life that if it's Baptist, it's got to be Bible...and if it's Bible, it's supposed to be Baptist, amen? When my Granddaddy Bogard talked about the Book, he wasn't talking about Sears and Roebuck he was talking about the Bible. If you're going to prove something to a Baptist congregation, you have to prove it by the Book. You don't want to know what I think, you want to know what the Word of God says.

### **Is The Law Faulty?**

The Jewish people were the same way, so the writer does goes back to the Old Testament book of Jeremiah to show them that God actually prophesied and promised the day of a new covenant. Now the first thing he's going to deal with in verse 7 is that if God is establishing a new covenant, then doesn't that mean something must have been wrong with the first covenant? What the preacher is trying to do here, subtly, is to show the people that if you go back to the law, if you go back to the Sinai

Covenant, then you're going back to a faulty foundation, a faulty premise. He says God found fault with *them* and it's the reason He initiated a new covenant. Now, let's stop here and make sure we're clear on this...there was really nothing wrong with the law. As a matter of fact, in Romans 7 the Apostle Paul takes up this argument and actually defends the law by saying that the law is holy, just, and good. Do we agree with that? The law of God that He gave the children of Israel on Mount Sinai was holy, just, and good. Now if something is holy and just and good, then there's no problem with the law. Amen? The problem was the law could reveal sin but it could not remove sin. The law could tell a man what he ought to do but the law could not give a man the power to do what God said he ought to do. You see, the law was based on man's ability to keep it. I think one of the dumbest things the children of Israel ever did was standing there at the foot of Mount Sinai when God stepped into their life and revealed the law to them, and He said I will enter into a covenant with you if you will keep all the things I've told you to do—and without thinking, Israel said all that you say we will do. I believe there should have been somebody in the congregation who would have stood up and said...*Now hold it God, there's not a way in the world we can keep all of these commands!* But Israel never acknowledged their sinfulness, did they? With pride, they step forward and enter into a covenant with a holy God saying all you require that we will do.

You know, today we have people trying to enter into a covenant with God believing with all of their heart they have the ability to keep everything God demands. Paul said it this way in Romans 8, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh..." What could the law not do? It could not set a man free from sin. The guy in Romans 7 was trying to be set free from sin by keeping the law but he couldn't, and he finally came to the understanding that the law did not give him the ability to be free from sin. See, the problem with the first covenant was it was based on the obedience of God's people. Israel could not keep the conditions. Do you understand why the writer of Hebrews is pleading with these people not to

turn away from the hope of the gospel? If there are some of you who ever turn away from the hope of the gospel, what you're doing is you're trying to establish a system of righteousness where you believe you can be obedient to God and you can keep all of the holy, just, and good commands of God. You can't do it. Why? Because man in sin does not have the power to keep God's law, so God said I will establish a new covenant.

## **A New Covenant**

Now, what you need to realize is in the Greek New Testament there were two words for new—one means new in point of time, and the other means new in point of kind. Let me illustrate it to you. My wife Celisa loves animals, and for several years we had what was called a min pin, which is a miniature cow. Do you know what a min pin looks like? They all look alike. So we got the first min pin, and he got kicked by a cow and he didn't survive because they're only about three to four feet tall. So after we buried him, we got another min pin, and she got run over by the mailman. Then we got a third men pin named Mary Kate and Celisa was so tickled to have this little men pin. She went to school one day to pick up her niece and she had the little men pin with her. She was so excited to show her niece the min pin, and tell her all about her new min pin. So her niece was holding Mary Kate and she said this to Celisa, "You always get the same dog." 😊 See, the "dog" Celisa got was new but it was the *same kind* of "dog." The writer of Hebrews wants you to understand that God is establishing a new covenant but it's not a new covenant that is just in point of time, it's a new covenant of a *different kind*. Does that make sense?

Now remember, a covenant means a 'cutting.' Generally, covenants were cut in stone. Generally, a covenant was ratified by taking animals and cutting those animals in two, placing one animal on one side, the other animal on the other side, and the people of the covenant would walk between the pieces that were cut, signifying that if we do not keep our part of the covenant, you can do to me as we've done to these animals. But the very root word of the word, covenant, in the Hebrew language

means to be binding, to bind. So what God is saying to the children of Israel and to these Hebrew people is I'm going to establish a new cutting with you. I'm going to establish a new agreement with you. It's going to be binding between us, but it's not going to be like the one I established with your forefathers when I took them by the hand and led them out of Israel.

### **The Recipients of the New Covenant**

Now we will get to the nature and the covenant in just a moment, but let's look at the recipients here. It's really important that you hear and listen to this. See, Jeremiah 31 says that God's going to establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. If you will remember, in 921 B.C. there was a civil war in Israel. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom split between Rehoboam and Jeroboam—Rehoboam was in the north, Jeroboam was in the south. Israel, in Old Testament history from 921 on, came to be known for the ten tribes in the north. The two tribes that Rehoboam reigned over in the south came to be known as Judah. Now when Jeremiah is writing, the northern kingdom has already fallen to the Assyrians and they are no more. Have any of you ever heard the phrase, "the 10 lost tribes of the north?" That's referring to the Assyrian captivity. What you need to remember is when the Assyrians lay siege to a people, they brought them back into their empire and they assimilated them among their people. They broke up homes, they broke up moms and dads, they broke up children, so that they could literally be incorporated into their empire; in other words, the tribes in the north lost their roots. Jeremiah is prophesying to the southern kingdom, which is about ready to fall to the Babylonians, and he is prophesying a new day when God will establish a covenant again with the house of Israel, the ten tribes of the north, and the two tribes in the south, Judah.

Now I want you to watch this...when you get to verse 10 and God again talks about this covenant, He does not mention the house of Israel and the house of Judah, but He refers to the house of Israel. You would be surprised the people who believe that this covenant that God was making with Israel is only for Israel, a physical people who descend from Abraham.

As a matter of fact, I read three commentaries this week that believe what I'm preaching to you will not be fulfilled by God until the millennial reign of Christ. Now I want you to hear me...that's not true. That is not true. For see, when the Lord spoke to Jeremiah about establishing a covenant with the house of Israel, he was talking about the true Israel of God. As a matter of fact, if you look at Paul in the book of Romans, he said not all who are of Israel are of Israel. What you need to realize is all of the promises of God have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. At the cross, Jesus Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles. So in the New Testament when the writers speak of the church, the saints of God, God is speaking of the *true* Israel of God. Paul makes it crystal clear that the true Israel of God are not people who can trace their *physical* descendancy back to Abraham. but those people who can trace their *spiritual* descendancy back to Abraham. In Galatians chapter 3, Paul says we who are of faith are a descendant of believing Abraham. The Bible says that the true child of Abraham is the person who has put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Here is the truth...the recipient of the New Covenant is not anyone who can trace their physical descendant back to someone, but it's anyone who places their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They are the people of God. Even though this letter has been written to the Hebrew people, don't listen to those people who tell you this only applies to Israel and it will only be fulfilled during the millennium; it is being fulfilled right now. Jesus Christ Himself in the upper room said when He took the cup, "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sin." What I want you to understand is even though we're not this Jewish house church that the writer was preaching to, you and I who have put our faith in Jesus Christ do not enter into God through an Old Testament covenant, but we've entered into a relationship with God based on the new covenant promises of Jesus Christ.

## **The Nature of the New Covenant**

Let's look at the nature of this covenant just for a moment; it's absolutely amazing. See, the Hebrew preacher said it's not like the first one God made. If you will remember, the first covenant that God made with Israel was a conditional covenant. In Exodus 19:5–6, God said if you do this...(and He told them what they had to do), then I will do this. Then He basically told them if you don't keep your part of the bargain I am not going to keep my part of the bargain. I can't tell you how aggravated I get to hear people talk about what God still has to do for Israel because He promised. God does not owe Israel anything. Are you listening to me? God's covenant with Israel in them being His people was based on a conditional covenant, and in Jeremiah chapter 31 He said the very reason I am entered into a *new* covenant with a *new* people is because I regard them no more. Did you hear that? The covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai was a conditional covenant and they failed in every way. So when God established a new covenant with His new people (those who put their faith in His Son Jesus Christ), this covenant is not based on conditions by the recipients. This covenant is called an unconditional covenant.

Now that is so important for you who struggle with your salvation. I really feel for those of you who have been raised to believe that you start out by faith, but then after faith, you have to work to keep it, or you can do something to lose it once you get it. I know some of you struggle with that. If our salvational covenant with God was based on Sinai, you would be absolutely right absolutely...but listen to me. The covenant we have with God in Christ is not based on a conditional covenant, it's based on an unconditional covenant. It is not based on what we do, it's based on what God does Himself. I just challenge you to read Jeremiah chapter 31:31–34. Read what the Hebrew writer quotes in our text here from the Old Testament and you will decide in this new covenant there is no 'if' 'then' language. As a matter of fact, five times God says, 'I will,' and three times He says, 'they shall.' Now the reason 'they shall' is because He is willing. The condition of your salvation isn't based on what you do, it's based

totally on what God is going to do. Do you believe God would fail to keep His covenant? For Him to fail to keep His covenant He would have to quit being God. Do you think that's possible? Do you understand why I preach security of a believer? It is not based on the nature of the believer, it's based on the nature of God.

Now, I know for some of you who have been introduced to security of a believer, you doubted because you've worked with a guy who said he got saved at Bible school and he's a drunk, he's an adulterer, he's a thief, and he's a liar. Every time you have tried to talk to him about Jesus he tells you he already knows Jesus, and he hadn't been to church in the last twenty-five years. I want to say right up front, on the authority of God's Word, that guy is not saved. Are you listening to me? You don't even have to ask a guy like that if he knows the Lord because a guy who is living like that does not know the Lord. Here's why...because in this new covenant that we have entered into with God, God actually writes His law in your heart and He puts them in your mind. See, under the old covenant, if you wanted to know what God wanted you to do, you had to get out your tablets of stone. Can you imagine thumbing through a tablet of stone? I mean, we've got the ten big laws down, but there were 613 laws in all. Can I be totally honest with you? Just about every situation you get into as a believer, you don't ever have to stop one time and check it out by the Book, do you? Most of the time when you get in a situation you know what's right and you know what's wrong. Why? Because it's written in your heart; it's written in your mind. You *know* what to do.

So how does God do this? See, in the ancient world the mind was the seat of the intellect, the seat of understanding. The heart was not the seat of the emotion, the heart was the seat of the will, it was the decision maker. What the Bible's saying here is this new covenant hasn't been written externally but it's been written internally. It's why you will never see me get caught up in one of these debates about having the Ten Commandments on the walls of our schools or courthouses. What you and I need to know is they may take the Ten Commandments out of our

schools, they may take it out of our courthouses, but they can never take it out of our hearts! A believer in Jesus Christ doesn't have to look on a wall somewhere to know what to do, he has a new nature and that nature has the holiness and the law of God written all over it.

See, if you are a believer, at the core of your heart and your mind is you want to do what's right, and you know what's right because at the moment of faith the Holy Spirit of God came into your heart and into your life. Jesus described it as we, who are on this side of the cross, have an advantage that no generation of people has ever had. In the Old Testament, there was a select group of people who were anointed with the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, but it was just for a short term for a specific task. But on this side of the cross, when Jesus went away He said that God was going to send another helper and He would be our teacher. He would be our guide, He would convict us, and He would be our witness, and that comes from within the Holy Spirit of God, so that God can say 'I will be their God.' Do you know what that means? It means God's given Himself to us. 'And they shall be my people,' which means He who has given Himself to us then takes us unto Himself and He establishes a relationship! See, there was no intimacy under the old covenant of God there was just that curtain that said stay out...but under the new covenant of God there is intimacy.

See, here in verse 11 it says you will have no need of anyone to teach you. You won't have to say to your brother or your sister or your neighbor, "Know the Lord." Now, the nation of Israel was not a regenerate nation in its entirety. I mean, is there anyone here who believes everyone in that group of people who came out of Egypt knew the Lord personally? Of course not. God established a covenant with them as a group of people, but there were a lot of those people who didn't know the Lord. There were a bunch of them that just heard what was happening...*Hey we're leaving Egypt, the bondage is over! We're going to a land flowing with milk and honey!* Who wouldn't get in on that train, amen, and they just got in because of what everyone else is doing. All through the covenant age there

were people who were part of covenant Israel who didn't know the Lord, so there was always a teaching ministry of the Lord; teaching that you had to have a personal intimate relationship with the Lord.

Now watch this, this is real important because some of you are confused...the new covenant is a personal covenant. You don't get in on the new covenant promises of God because your mama is a Christian or your daddy is a Christian, or your granddad was a preacher...that doesn't get you in. What gets you in is personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So the only people who are recipients of the new covenant in Jesus Christ are people who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Therefore, the people of God now, this side of the cross, are a regenerate people. Does that make sense? This is why in this church we only baptize believers, because we believe in a regenerated church. You have to realize that we have a lot of brothers and sisters who are going to church today who believes that the church can be unregenerate. In other words, you can have people who are part of the church, they're part of God's covenant blessing; therefore, they baptize their babies as Israel circumcised their children. That's not true today. The people of God are not unregenerate, they are regenerated by the power of God, and those people who are regenerated by the power of God, when they put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ they go down into the water and they follow the Lord in believer's baptism. There is no reason to be baptized other than your faith is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Therefore today, those of us who are recipients of the new covenant, I don't have to turn to you and tell you to get saved, you are saved! If you are not saved you are not part of the new covenant people of God. So in the new covenant community, we don't have to teach people to know God we just have to teach people to walk with God, and that's where most of us struggle...not in knowing God but in walking with God.

Now here is the last part about the new nature of this new unconditional covenant. See, under the old covenant there's a sacrifice every year that just rolled people's sins forward for another year. All that the blood of the

animals could do on the day of atonement was *cover* people's sin...and next year, all of your sin of the previous year was brought up. Can you imagine how terrible that would be? To be trying to live for God, and then once a year have to go back and remember everything you did? Some of you are still living there. But see, the blessing of the new covenant we have with God is that God says, 'I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sin no more.' Do you get that? If you are a new covenant person, God says I do not remember your sin. Now from what I know of God, God by nature is not forgetful. I am forgetful; it's a weakness of the flesh. I forget the things that I shouldn't and I remember the things I shouldn't. Does that happen to any of you? God, by an act of His being, chose to forget your sin. On what grounds can He do that? On the sufficiency of the sacrifice of His Son. If God the Father, who is holy and just, can look at the sacrifice of His Son and forgive you of your sin and forget your sin, what should be the mark of the new covenant community? Do you know what I hear people say all the time, and this is almost blasphemous, "Well Bro. Ricky, I can forgive them but I'll never forget it." Some of you say you've forgiven somebody and all you want to do is remember their past! You say you are forgiven of God and all you want to do is remember your past. You are denying the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, God help us! Let's send that saying right back from where it came, the pit of hell! Based on the people we are of God and the nature of our new covenant, we can forgive someone, and we don't have to let their past cancel out their future with us if it doesn't with our God. Amen? What a covenant...what a covenant!