

What Is New about the New Covenant?

Hebrews 8:8-13; Galatians 3:17

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When you open your Bible, there are two major divisions in it: The Old Testament and the New Testament. Are these two different books or are these two chapters of the same book? How is the Old Testament old and how is the New Testament new?

Today we will be considering these and other questions that arise in understanding God's redemptive plan to rescue guilty sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. I also pray that you (adults and children alike) might better understand how God intended you to use the Bible so that you might grow in faith and in love for the Lord Jesus Christ to whom the Scripture points (both Old and New Testaments).

I would like to answer three questions briefly and then make one application: (1) What Is the New Covenant? (2) How Is the New Covenant the Same as the Old Covenant? (3) How Is the New Covenant Different from the Old Covenant?

I. What Is the New Covenant?

A. The New Covenant is the end, the goal, the full realization of God's eternal plan to save and rescue undeserving sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 13:20).

B. This divine plan did not begin with coming of Jesus Christ (that was the full realization of the plan). It began in eternity before the creation of the world. There the Father covenanted with His Son and chose in Christ elect sinners for whom the Son secure their salvation through His perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice in bearing the wrath of God due to their sin (Luke 22:29; Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8).

C. The divine outworking of that eternal covenant between the Father and the Son to save elect sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was initiated in history after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin when God gave them a promise of salvation (Genesis 3:15). That promise of salvation through Jesus Christ in the Covenant of Grace was revealed in the covenants made with Noah (saved from destruction), Abraham (a chosen seed that would bless all the families and nation of the world), Moses (sacrifices, priesthood, mercy-seat), David (a royal seed that would reign forever), and finally the New Covenant (the fulfillment and realization of God's promise of salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ).

D. So the New Covenant in Christ Jesus is the full realization of the covenant made in eternity between the Father and the Son and was revealed by way of types, shadows, and ceremonies in all of the covenants made with His people in the Old Testament. That is the New Covenant that is in view here in Hebrews 8:8-13.

II. How Is the New Covenant the Same as the Old Covenant?

A. The New Covenant in Jesus Christ is essentially the same Covenant of Grace as the Old Covenant that revealed Jesus Christ in types, shadows, sacrifices, and ceremonies. The Old Covenant promised the Redeemer. The New Covenant gave the Redeemer. A war veteran that returns with an amputated limb is essentially the same man as the one that went to war. He may outwardly look different in certain respects, but as to substance, he is the same man. So likewise, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant may outwardly look different, but as to substance, they are essentially the same Covenant of Grace.

1. **The same God** instituted both the Old and the New Covenants (Acts 3:13). It's the ancient heresy of Gnosticism that taught the God of the Old Testament was a different God from the God of the New Testament, not biblical Christianity.

2. **The same Moral Law** is revealed in the Old Covenant as in the New Covenant—The Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17-19).

3. **The same Gospel** is revealed in the Old Covenant as in the New Covenant—salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. In the Old Covenant faith was placed in Jesus who was yet to come. In the New Covenant faith is placed in Jesus who has come (Revelation 13:8; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:17; Hebrews 4:2). Where are the words, “the just shall live by faith” first found? They are first found in Habakkuk 2:4. The gospel was proclaimed in both words and ceremonies (sin can only be forgiven through God’s sacrificial Lamb and His shed blood). Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:4). The offices of prophet, priest, and king all pointed to Jesus Christ (our Prophet, Priest, and King). Prophecies of the coming Messiah and Savior were given in the Old Testament and were believed by God’s elect (Isaiah 53—the death, suffering, payment for sin, and resurrection of Jesus Christ). Salvation under the Old Covenant was on credit in looking to Christ’s payment to come—that payment was made in His death upon the cross for His elect in the New Covenant.

4. **The same Church** was moving from a time of shadows under the Old Covenant to a time of brightness and glory under the New Covenant (Acts 7:38; Hebrews 10:1). The Church of the Old Covenant had its outward signs and seals of the gospel (Circumcision and the Passover), and the Church of the New Covenant has its outward signs and seals of the gospel (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper).

B. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are not enemies looking to destroy one another. They are friends in leading the Church from the shadows of Christ under the Old Covenant to the glory of Christ under the New Covenant, from less knowledge of Christ under the Old Covenant to greater knowledge of Christ under the New Covenant, from immaturity under the Old Covenant to maturity under the New Covenant. These two covenants only become enemies because man pits them against one another—not because God has done so.

1. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are not like two different people that are strangers to one another, but are like the same person at two different stages of development (Galatians 4:1-5). The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are not like two different roads leading in different directions, but rather are the same road at different points of progress—the end of the road being Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are not two different trees, but one and the same tree at different stages of growth—the seed, the stem, the bud, the fruit (Romans 11).

2. The apostles are continually preaching to the Jews in Acts that the religion of the Old Covenant was essentially the same as that of the New Covenant—Abraham is the father of all who believe, Romans 4:11; Hebrews 11—by faith Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David etc.). As *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (7:6) correctly teaches: “There are not two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.”

III. How Is the New Covenant Different from the Old Covenant?

A. What is “new” about the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8,13)?

1. What does the word “new” in the New Covenant mean?

a. Absolutely new, having nothing in common with the Old Covenant? Is the New Covenant new in contrast to the Old Covenant as if they were two different persons, two different roads, or two different trees? No, the New Covenant is not new in that sense.

b. New in the sense of being the realization of the old, while being essentially the same person at different stages of maturity, the same road at different points of progress, and the same olive tree at different degrees of growth? Yes, the New Covenant is new in this sense.

2. Consider John 13:34. Was that commandment absolutely new and never revealed before Jesus commanded it? No, it was likewise commanded in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). What then made this commandment new? This commandment was new by way of full realization in the love of Jesus Christ for His people (“as I have loved you”). So likewise, the New Covenant is “new” by way of full realization in Jesus Christ of all that the Old Covenant promised in the prophecies, types, shadows, and ceremonies. The New Covenant is “new” in that the credit card is now fully paid off—“it is finished”—paid in full.

B. What are the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?

1. The Old Covenant is before Christ and looks to Christ to come. The New Covenant is at and after Christ and looks back to Christ who has come.

2. The Old Covenant delivered the gospel in many shadows. The New Covenant delivers the gospel in brightness and glory.

3. The Old Covenant was primarily comprised of Jews as the Old Covenant Church (a few Gentiles). The New Covenant is comprised of Jews and Gentiles (mostly Gentiles) as the New Covenant Church. Thus, the blessings of the New Covenant are more far reaching and extensive.

4. The Old Covenant was ratified with the blood of animals. The New Covenant was ratified with the blood of the Lamb of God.

5. God instituted more ceremonies in the Old Covenant and fewer ceremonies in the New Covenant. However, it was the same Regulative Principle of Worship that governed worship in both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

6. The Old Covenant and its shadows and ceremonies were temporary. The New Covenant and its ordinances and sacraments are permanent until the Second Coming of Christ.

C. It is not true that the Old Covenant was merely physical and external whereas the New Covenant is spiritual and internal. There was that which was external in the Old Covenant (sacrifices, circumcision, and Passover), and there is that which is external in the New Covenant (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). But there was also that which was spiritual and internal in the Old Covenant. Consider the spiritual blessings mentioned in Hebrews 8:10-12 to encourage these Jewish believers.

1. **God’s laws written on minds and in hearts** (Hebrews 8:10). That is to say that God will cause His people to walk in loving obedience to His laws—not mere outward observation, but inward joy in doing so. But was this not also the case for those in the Old Covenant (Psalm 37:31; Psalm 119:77; Psalm 119:97)?

2. **God will be their God and they will be His people** (Hebrews 8:10). Union and communion with the Lord by faith is here promised. And yet this was a spiritual blessing enjoyed by believers under the Old Covenant as well (Leviticus 26:12).

3. **Illumination and understanding of the Lord and His salvation** (Hebrews 8:11). This spiritual blessing was surely enjoyed by Old Covenant believers, for without spiritual illumination and understanding there can be no salvation (Psalm 119:125; Jeremiah 9:23-24). All of God’s elect from the least to the greatest knew the Lord in the Old Covenant Church just as in the New Covenant Church. Just as there was need of teachers under the Old Covenant, so there is under the New Covenant. Does this mean that the New Covenant Church is filled with only regenerated believers? No! In the Church of the Old Covenant there were true believers (Abraham, Moses, David, Hebrews 11), and there were mere professing believers or hypocrites (Hebrews 4:2). So likewise in the Church of the New Covenant there are true believers (Peter, Stephen, Paul, etc.), and there are mere professing believers or hypocrites (Simon the magician in Acts 8; I John 2:19; Hebrews 10).

4. **Forgiveness of sin** (Hebrews 8:12). This spiritual blessing was granted to believers in the

Old Covenant as in the New Covenant (Psalm 32:5; Psalm 130:4).

D. Clearly all of these spiritual blessings were essentially enjoyed by believers in the Old Covenant and by believers in the New Covenant. So then what makes these blessings of the New Covenant “new”? The coming of Jesus Christ to fulfill all the promises, prophecies and to bring to realization all of the types, shadows, and ceremonies of the Old Covenant make these blessings of the New Covenant “new”. What is new about these blessings of the New Covenant is that they are not ours on credit (as in the Old Covenant), but are ours by full payment in Christ.

E. One application.

1. Is there any other way of salvation after the death of Jesus Christ than by means of the New Covenant? Can anyone be saved apart from the New Covenant in Christ’s blood? Then how are elect infants saved who die in infancy (before or after their birth)? They must be saved as sinners (just like youth and adults) through the New Covenant in Christ’s blood. There is no age of accountability (Psalm 51:5). Why do infants die? It is the wage of sin (Romans 6:23). If then elect infants are saved through the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, upon what biblical basis should they be denied the sign of the New Covenant—baptism? Granted, not all infants that are baptized are regenerate, but neither are all adults that are baptized. The New Covenant is no less gracious or less merciful than the Old Covenant which included infants in the Old Covenant Church by way of the outward sign and seal of circumcision. If anything, the New Covenant is more gracious and merciful in extending the sign of the New Covenant to include females.

2. Dear ones, God made Jesus central to all of history. Is He central to you and your life? Is He your life (Philippians 1:21)? Who or what do you trust more and love more than Jesus Christ? Are you building your life on sand that will perish or on the Rock that will endure for all eternity? Come to Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life.

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