

What Made the Old Covenant Obsolete?

[Hebrews 8:6-13](#)

Hebrews, Day 26

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.

- Hebrews 8:6-13, ESV

I was driving down the road in my 1999 Chrysler LHS when the right outer tie rod end failed and came apart. It was a catastrophic failure. I could no longer steer my right front wheel. When I had my car towed to the repair shop, they told me the front drive train assembly would require around \$2,000 in repairs. That was the end of my car. It was now obsolete and was towed away to the junk yard.

The author of Hebrews says something really radical in chapter 8. Hebrews was almost certainly written before 70 AD, which means the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing. It was the pride and joy of all Jewish people. The sacrificial system of worship carried out by the Levitical priests in the Temple had been the center of the Jewish people's worship and identity for hundreds of years. The Second Temple, while greatly expanded by King Herod, had been built by Ezra and the Levites after the Babylonian exile over 500 years before. The first Temple had been built by King Solomon over a thousand years prior, and the worship of the Mosaic covenant dated back 1,500 years.

The author of Hebrews said this worship was obsolete and growing old and ready to vanish away. Think about that. A system of worship given in detail by God Himself and established for 1,500 years was now declared obsolete and was ready to disappear forever. How? Why?

First of all, it's amazing how accurate the Letter to the Hebrews is. The Temple was destroyed, probably less than 10 years after the writing of this letter. Once destroyed, it was never rebuilt. Was it because the Romans destroyed it? Ultimately, no. The Romans were ultimately just the instrument of God's judgment. God judged His people for rejecting their Messiah, but He removed the Temple because it was obsolete.

What made it obsolete? Was it because it didn't work? No, not really. It never "worked," at least not in the way some people thought it did and should work. The Temple sacrifices never cleansed the people of sin. That will be made even more clear in chapter 10. It's important to know that the Temple did not become obsolete because the sacrifices stopped working. They were never designed to save anyone. They were always designed to point to a deep need and to a redemption beyond themselves.

So, why did the Temple become obsolete? Because what the Temple pictured had become a reality. What the Temple promised had been fulfilled. The greater redemption had been won, and the people of God had been set free from sin and guilt forever by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross made the Temple obsolete, which is why the veil in the Temple was torn in two when Jesus died.

It was not only pointless but disobedient for God's people to hold onto the old forms of worship when they had been fulfilled. Jesus brought full redemption to God's people at the cost of His life. Forgiven and freed, God's people no longer need the shed blood of animals and the regulations that accompanied the old covenant system. That's what made the whole ceremonial law of the Moses obsolete - the full and perfect redemption purchased Jesus.