

Enjoy living under the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13)

The “new covenant” is a familiar term to most professing Christians but probably not fully understood or its promises incorporated into their lives. That is shown by their attitude toward obedience, lifestyles, forgiveness, and more. For the author of Hebrews the “better promises” of the new covenant argue for the superiority of Jesus’ ministry, and lead to a greater appreciation of Jesus. It is important to understand the new covenant to enjoy living under it and thereby honor God.

I. *Why was a new covenant needed? (8:7–9)*

1. The “first/old covenant” was God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai in which God promised blessing to Israel, if they obeyed His commands; to which Israel agreed (Exodus 19:4–5, 8; 24:3, 7).
2. A new covenant with better promises was needed because the people were unable to fulfill the requirements of the old covenant and that covenant had no provision for helping them. Cf. Romans 3:10–12; Deuteronomy 30:6.

II. *What did the new covenant promise? (8:10–12)*

1. ***New heart:*** *God will write the law on the inward person (8:10b).*

The law was changed from an external requirement to an internal desire. Cf. Romans 7; Ezekiel 36:26.

2. ***New identity:*** *God will establish them as His people (8:10c).*

The status which Israel enjoyed in the world as God’s people was dependent upon their obedience in which they failed, so God also hid His face from them (Exodus 19:5; Hebrews 8:9b; Deuteronomy 31:17–18). In the new covenant, because God gives an undivided heart, believers will obey; they will be God’s people and He will be their God (cf. Ezekiel 11:19–20); and God will never leave nor forsake them.

3. ***New knowledge:*** *God will make known Himself individually without exception (8:11).*

More than intellectual knowledge, you can know God in a relationship and have eternal life (Galatians 4:8–9; John 17:3).

4. ***New freedom:*** *God will forgive completely (8:12).*

The old covenant had penalties for sin which even sacrifice could not remove. When O.T. saints experienced forgiveness, it was not on the basis of the old covenant but on God’s unfailing love and compassion (Psalm 51:1–2). This is now promised in the new covenant. Believers are not punished, because our sin was punished in Christ on the cross.

III. *What is the consequence to the “first” covenant by making a new with better promises? (8:13)*

Promising a “new” covenant six centuries before Christ made the first “old”, even though it was still functioning. It was “soon” replaced when the work of Christ was completed. The forms and rituals which the Jewish Christians were tempted to rely upon were part of an obsolete system. The requirement today for blessing is to believe in Christ, and believers now seek from the heart in God’s word to understand His desires and do what pleases and honors Him.

IV. *How do Christians participate in the new covenant made to the houses of Israel and of Judah?*

1. The contexts of the Old Testament passages relating the new covenant indicate that it was made to the nation of Israel which will be reunited back in the land at a future time. In the New Testament, while affirming that the covenants belong to Israel (Romans 9:4), the new covenant is applied to Christians (cf 2 Cor 3:6), a fact particularly critical for the argument in Hebrews.
2. The participation of Christians today in the new covenant appears best explained not by spiritualizing the promises of the Old Testament, nor by postulating a confusing second “new” covenant. Instead recognize that Israel has temporarily been set aside but will be restored in the future (Romans 9–11). Understand that what was not known in the O.T. is now revealed, Jew and Gentile form one new man in Christ (Ephesians 2–3). All believers today are united with Christ who is the Seed of Abraham, by which they benefit from the promises made to and through the Seed (Galatians 3).

The promises of the new covenant are better than the old because God does what neither we nor the law can do. Only by trusting Jesus Christ and what He has done do we receive them as a gift. They free us from the bondage of the law, but do not give a license to sin. When we enjoy living under the new covenant, we please God and honor Him.

Questions for further reflection and discussion:

- What is difficult about obeying God? What shouldn’t be difficult? Why?
- What is the difference between trying to be different from the world and becoming different by following Christ? Why is the distinction important to know?
- What are your greatest struggles in appreciating God’s forgiveness? What would help?