

# **The Two Covenants**

**A Biblical exposition of the old and new covenants**

**By Terry Hill**

**Hebrews 8:8-10**

**“For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:”**

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### Overview

**The old covenant** was instituted at Mount Sinai. This is when the Hebrew people, shortly after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, promised God that everything He asked of them they would do (Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 24:7). The success of this covenant was totally dependant upon the people keeping their promise. This covenant was ratified (confirmed/sealed) with the blood of animals (Exodus 24:8). No one is saved (or can be saved) under the terms of this covenant.

**The new covenant** was instituted immediately after Adam and Eve had sinned. It was given by God in the form of a promise (Genesis 3:15). The success of this covenant depended upon God keeping His promise. This covenant was ratified (confirmed/sealed) with the blood of Christ at Calvary (Matthew 26:26-28, John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 11:25, Hebrews 9:18-20, 13:20). This is the only covenant under which anyone can be saved. This is whether they lived during the time period before Jesus died (Old Testament times) or after Jesus died (New Testament times).

The reason why the new covenant is called 'new' (or 'the second covenant') is because it was ratified after the ratification of the old covenant.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Many years ago I came to the realisation that a misunderstanding of the two covenants (the old and the new) is one of the main reasons why so many Christians do not believe that today, 2000 years on from the death and resurrection of Christ, God requires His people to observe the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. This is the commandment in which He says we are to remember His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) to keep it holy (see Exodus 20:8-11). This is the day of rest He instituted at creation (Genesis 2:1-3). Often this is said to be part of an agreement called the 'old covenant' that God made with the Jews – and that because a new covenant began when Jesus died at Calvary, the keeping of (the remembering of) this day is not required of Christians.

Those who reason this way also tend to believe that as long as the Ten Commandments are kept in principle (in spirit), this is acceptable to God. They say that because we are under the new covenant, it is not necessary to keep precisely to the letter of the law. Often it is said that this 'preciseness' of law keeping is the "ministration of death" that the apostle Paul spoke of to the believers in Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:7). This is why it is reasoned that the Christian Church, with the approval of God, was able to replace Saturday (the seventh day of the week) with Sunday (the first day of the week) as God's special day of worship. It is generally said that this was done in remembrance of Christ's resurrection (Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week). The end result of this is that God's seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) is regarded as 'Jewish' whilst Sunday (the first day of the week) is regarded as 'Christian'.

As Seventh-day Adventists we know this reasoning is not true (not Biblical) therefore we need to be very careful that in expressing our beliefs, whether this is concerning the covenants or anything else, we do not strengthen people in this misunderstanding. If our views on this and other subjects become too varied, we shall be no different than the confused voices of Christianity. We would in fact be guilty of adding to the confusion.

It cannot be denied that down through the ages, God's original Sabbath (the seventh day of the week - Saturday) has largely been forgotten. Today though, through His appointed agencies, God is calling His people back to remembering His appointed day of rest. The fourth commandment is equally as important as the other nine commandments.

As a denomination (Seventh-day Adventists), we believe that the world is fast heading towards a time when there will be a universal controversy over the law of God and that at the centre of this controversy will be the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Our message to the world therefore must be very clear. This message is that God is calling His people to keep holy His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday). Nothing must be said to lessen the import of this part of our message - or to give it a wrong interpretation. This is why it is so important to be able to explain to others that even under the covenant of grace, God's moral law (the 10 Commandments) is still binding on people today. It is the purpose of this study to explore these things. God bless you as you do so.

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## Chapter 2

### Agreements and conditions

As stated in the Overview of this study (see above), the old covenant is an agreement that God entered into with the Hebrew people at Mount Sinai. This was shortly after He had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. This was around 2500 years after creation (Genesis 1:1) and about 900 years after the flood (Genesis 6:17, 7:17). Prior to this time, this covenant did not exist – at least not as a formal agreement between two parties. We find an account of this agreement in Exodus chapter 24.

Before we look at this agreement and see how it came into existence, it is important to note that within a few months of the Hebrews departing from Egypt (Exodus 19:1-3), God instructed Moses to communicate the following words to them (this was prior to the establishing of the old covenant therefore the covenant referred to here cannot be the old covenant)

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”  
Exodus 19:4-6

Take note of whom God says did the actual delivering. He says it was Himself (“I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself”). Notice too that God is making reference to *His* covenant.

From this can be seen that even though God had delivered the people from their slavery in Egypt, there was a condition to them becoming His treasure “above all people”. It was if they heeded His voice. Their 'deliverance' therefore did not guarantee them this particular status. God has never promised great blessings to those who ignore what He says. This is still the same today. God has not changed.

The word 'obey' (as in the above text) is the Hebrew 'shama'. It means to 'listen to diligently' or 'pay attention to' whilst the word 'keep' (as in this same verse) is translated from the Hebrew word 'shamar'. This has the basic meaning of 'to keep', 'to guard', 'protect', 'hedge about', 'watch over' and 'preserve' etc. It is used in Genesis 2:15 where it says that God put Adam “into the garden of Eden to dress it and to *keep* it”. It is also used in Genesis 4:9 where it is recorded that Cain, in answer to God asking him “Where is Abel thy brother?”, replied, “I know not: Am I my brother's *keeper*?”. It is also found in Genesis 30:31 where Jacob said to Laban, “I will again feed and *keep* thy flock”.

It can be said therefore that God was saying to the Hebrews, 'If you pay attention to my voice and keep (protect/guard/preserve) my covenant' you will be my treasure above all people', or, to put it another way, 'If you treasure (cherish) my covenant, then you will be my treasure'.

Immediately after the fall of man, God had promised (covenanted) that He would provide the answer to the sin problem (Genesis 3:15). This was God's covenant. This was His promise. This was His 'arrangement' to save mankind from the results of sin. Fallen humanity made no contribution to it. It was God who initiated this covenant and it was God who would see it through to its completion. This is referred to in Scripture as the new covenant.

This covenant (the new covenant), just like the covenant God had made with Noah never to flood the earth again (Genesis 9:8-13), was unconditional. The fulfilling of it (its success) was not dependent upon someone other than God, neither could anyone do anything to thwart it. God had promised it therefore it would happen.

This same covenant promise was renewed with Abraham. God had promised not only to make his seed a great nation but also that through this nation He would bless the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-9, 19, 18:18). God had later sworn this with an oath (Genesis 22:16-18, 26:3-4, Deuteronomy 7:8, Hebrews 6:16-19).

Zacharias (the Father of John the Baptist), when speaking of the messianic predictions of the Old Testament prophets, made reference to this covenant. He referred to it as 'the mercy promised to our fathers', God's "holy covenant" and "The oath which he [God] sware to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:67-79). This can only be the new covenant. This is the same covenant referred to in Exodus 19:5 (see above)

Repeatedly throughout Scripture we find God referring to *His* covenant. Numerous times we encounter it with God's dealing with Abraham. In Genesis chapter 17 alone (with respect to Abraham) it is mentioned 9 times. Three times in this same chapter it is called the 'everlasting covenant'. This was God's covenant. Its success depended upon God fulfilling His promises. This was centuries previous to the inauguration of the old covenant at Mount Sinai. God did not break His covenant (Psalm 89:34-35). He ratified it with the blood of His Son at Calvary (Hebrews 13:20).

The covenant revealed to Abraham was an unfolding of the original covenant promise (Genesis 3:15). It was a revealing of God's purposes for humanity through humanity. By sending His Son into the world to die as a sacrifice for sin (this was through the seed of Abraham), God would justify fallen humanity (see Galatians 3:8, 16). This provides irrefutable proof of His love for the human race (John 3:16, Romans 8:3, 31-32). He could not have offered greater proof. In giving His Son He gave everything.

Abraham was not asked by God to make any promises but he was invited to believe God's promises. Whether or not Abraham would participate in the final fulfilment of these promises would totally depend upon his continuing relationship with God. It is exactly the same with us today. God invites each one of us to partake of His covenant but this is not unconditional (see Matthew 19:17, 22:1-14, Hebrews 5:9, Revelation 22:14).

In His omniscience, God knew that Abraham would prove to be faithful to Him but this did not mean that Abraham was without a choice. It was just that God foresaw his choice. It is the same with us today. God knows what we will choose before we actually choose to do it but we are the ones who do the choosing. Our eternal life depends upon the choices we make. In this sense we are masters of our own destiny.

Abraham did believe God's promises (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, Hebrews 11:17-19). He also kept God's commandments. This was God's own testimony (Genesis 26:5). Four centuries later at Mount Sinai, God was asking the Hebrew people (many of whom were Abraham's direct descendants) to do exactly the same. He was inviting them to walk in Abraham's footsteps. He was inviting them to cherish the very same covenant that Abraham had cherished. This was God's covenant – the new or everlasting covenant (Genesis 3:15). These are two different names for the same covenant.

In Abraham's time, the old covenant, as an agreement between two parties, did not exist although the underlying principle of it (the attempt by humanity to justify themselves with God by their own works) did exist. It still exists today.

In making the Hebrew people a nation, God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham. In this sense the people were already 'God's elect' but in order to make them everything He wanted them to be (a peculiar treasure unto Him above all people), they would need to exercise faith in Him (believe as He says).

Although the Hebrews had been recipients of the advantages that God had provided for their release from Egypt, they had not contributed anything to their deliverance. The entire deliverance was by God's own hand. As a nation they had been saved by grace (unmerited favour). If it had not been for what God had done, the deliverance would not have been possible. For a detailed account of this deliverance see Exodus chapters 1-14.

God voluntarily chose the people but He did not choose them because of what they were or for what they had done. He loved them and had chosen them for His own special purposes (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). Even when they had been slaves in Egypt He had referred to them as His "son" and His "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22-3, see also Hosea 11:1). God's purpose in delivering them from their slavery was so that they could keep His laws and His statutes (Exodus 3:18, 5:3, Psalm 105:42-45).

God had seen their predicament in Egypt. He had also heard their cries for deliverance (Exodus 2:23). The Scriptures tell us that He 'remembered' His covenant with Abraham (Exodus 2:24, 6:5, Psalm 105:42-45).

The calling of Moses was the beginning of the process of delivering them from their bondage (Exodus 3:1-8, 6:1). The Hebrew people owed their freedom to God. They should have been very appreciative of what He had done for them. Never should they have yearned to 'go back'.

The spiritual lesson should be very clear. We today should be very appreciative of what God, through the death of His Son, has done for us. His sacrifice has provided for our release from the bondage (slavery) of sin. If it were not for God keeping His promise (Genesis 3:15), this release would not have been possible. Christ's death has made it possible for us to choose between eternal life and eternal death (John 3:16). It makes it possible for us to obey God. It has given us freedom to choose. Without Christ's death we would not have a choice.

It was God's desire that the Hebrew people should be the greatest nation on earth (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Through them He wanted to reveal Himself. He also required them to tell the world of the salvation He would provide through a promised saviour. He also wanted to save for eternity all those whom He had called. To be able to do this He required of them trust and obedience (Deuteronomy 4:5-6, 26:16-19, 28:1-10). He had called them out of Egypt to establish His covenant with them (Exodus 6:1-5). This is the same covenant revealed to Abraham. We often refer to this as the Abrahamic covenant.

This same covenant, as in Exodus 19:7 (see above), is as valid today with Christians as it was with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai. God invites everyone to be partakers of it. He desires to make them the most blessed (favoured) people on earth (1 Peter 2:9). To accomplish this He requires them to listen diligently to His voice. He is a God of compassion but He cannot abundantly bless those who knowingly disobey Him.

Under this covenant (the new covenant), God has redeemed (bought back) His own. Under it He also delivers His people from Satan's dominion. Fallen humanity did not contribute to this covenant although we, as God's people, do partake of its advantages (Romans 5:8-10). We must be careful though not to abuse this privilege (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 6:1). This is a covenant that involved - and was totally dependant upon for its completion - the death of God's Son (Genesis 3:15, John 3:16). This is the price that God has paid to buy back (redeem) His own. This was our redemption price. It was the price that He and His Son paid to purchase our freedom. This is freedom for all the inhabitants of the world. This shows the value they both place upon our freedom. It also shows how much they love us.

Through the death of His Son, God has established (ratified, sealed, made secure) His original promise (Genesis 3:15). Through His Son, He has provided for our deliverance from sin. This has made salvation available to all of earth's inhabitants (1 John 2:2).

The one thing we can be sure of is that God does not ask us to do anything not possible for us to do therefore along with His commands must be the power to do them. In partaking of God's covenant (the new covenant) we are able to do what He commands (Ezekiel 36:24-27). This is a covenant that our Creator undertakes and in which His people participate.

This is why God expects His people to keep His law (Matthew 5:17-21). Those who love God will, as did Jesus, obey His commandments (John 15:10, 1 John 5:2-3). This is their identity. They will have the faith of Jesus and keep God's commandments (see Revelation 14:12). This is the new covenant experience (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:24-27, Hebrews 8:6-13).

As we shall see more of later, it was immediately after Adam and Eve sinned that God instituted the new covenant. It is the covenant under which all who will be in His kingdom will be saved. No one will find salvation outside of this covenant. It is a covenant of grace. All who in the finality find themselves in God's kingdom will have been saved by God's grace. No one will be there because of his or her own personal merits.

God is love (1 John 4:8) – and love awakens love. We love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:10, 19). It is love for God that draws us into this new covenant relationship with Him. Love is the motivating factor. It is the all-compelling factor (2 Corinthians 5:14). This comes from an appreciation of God's character. If we love God we will want His character to be developed in our own life. In every way we will want to be like Him. Our desire will be to do as He says. When we appreciate what God has done for us through His Son, we will be drawn to Him in love.

Jesus said

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” John 12:32

Six centuries previously, the prophet Jeremiah wrote of this same love. He penned these memorable words

“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Jeremiah 31:3

God's love and His lovingkindness (towards fallen humanity) is the golden thread that runs through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is the central theme of both the Old and the New Testaments. These two dispensations are not in opposition to each other. The religion and message of both is exactly the same. The New does not supersede the Old but is a continuation of the old. The New Testament sheds light upon the Old Testament – just like the old sheds light upon the new. The New is an unfolding of the Old – also a fulfilling of it.

As Jesus said to Nicodemus

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

This is a fulfilment of the promise that God made immediately after the fall (Genesis 3:15). It was also a fulfilling of the promises made through Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, see also Luke 1:68-73, Galatians 3:8). Jesus died for everyone (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 1 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 2:9, 1 John 2:2). Everyone therefore is invited to be amongst those whom God calls His “treasure” above all peoples. In so doing He requires them to trust Him (have faith in Him). This trust (believing what God says) will manifest itself in obedience to His revealed will (Deuteronomy 30:15-16), John 14:15, 21, 15:10, 1 John 5:2-3, 2 John 1:6). God's people will delight in doing as He says.

Returning our thoughts to the situation at Mount Sinai: God had, through miracle after miracle, revealed His power to deliver (to save). Through these miracles He had delivered the Hebrews from their slavery. All these things had shown the people how much He loved them – also how much He desired to take care of them. Now He was calling for their trust. He was inviting them to be His special treasure above all the nations of the earth. Their response should have been in appreciation of these things. God only wanted the best for them. He did not wish them any harm.

Moses informed the elders of what God had said (Exodus 19:7). They in turn, although it does not say so, must have relayed these words to the waiting congregation. This is because the Scriptures tell us

“**And all the people** answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do...” Exodus 19:8

On the part of the people, this response, although in one sense highly commendable, was somewhat presumptuous. This is because at this point, God had not made known, at least not in its entirety, the details of His requirements. In other words, the people's promise to obey was probably born more of enthusiasm rather than an intelligent understanding of what was required of them. As we soon shall see, prior to God allowing the people (as a nation) to ‘officially confirm’ this agreement, He did reveal to them His requirements. This would mean He did give them time and opportunity to consider them. He did not rush them into a response. The people did though, at this initial point, pledge their allegiance to God. By their promise they had put themselves under His authority. This they did as a nation.

There is one thing that at this point they did understand. They understood the importance that God places upon His seventh day Sabbath. They realised He regarded this day as sacred (see Exodus chapter 16).

Inspiration records that when some of the people (by looking for manna on that day) profaned this sacredness, God said “How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?” (Exodus 16:4, 25-30). This was previous to God speaking the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). This shows that prior to the 10 Commandments being spoken, the people did have a certain understanding of His requirements.

It is very important to note here that God had not asked the Hebrews to promise to obey Him. The promise to obey was their idea. God had simply said, "if ye will obey [pay attention to] my voice indeed, and keep [guard/observe] my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." (see above). This was an invitation – albeit with conditions. God had no more asked the Hebrews to make a promise (to obey Him) than He had asked Abraham to make a promise (to obey Him).

This though was the way the people responded. They responded by making a promise. This they did without asking God for help to accomplish what He would require of them. This shows they believed that whatever it was that God would ask of them, they were, of themselves, quite capable of doing it.

Moses then informed God of the people's response to His invitation (Exodus 19:8). As a people (as a nation), this was the first promise they had made to God. They had readily accepted the invitation and had promised to meet the conditions.

There then follows in chapter 20, the speaking by God of the 10 Commandments. This is the moral law. Even before God spoke His law He reminded the people that He had been the One who had delivered them from Egypt (see Exodus 20:2).

This was the first time this law had been given in such a form (Exodus 20:3-17). It can only be assumed therefore that prior to this time, God's requirements had been verbally passed on from person to person. Now though, after the people had spent centuries amongst the idolatrous practices of the Egyptians, God deemed it necessary to proclaim His requirements in such a fashion that no mistake could be made in understanding them. As we shall see later, to make absolutely sure there was no mistake, He wrote these laws on two tables of stone. This He did with His own finger (Exodus, 24:12, 31:18, 34:1, 4). This reveals the importance that God places upon His moral law.

God then gave Moses other instructions that would serve to protect (keep sacred) the Ten Commandments. These can be found in chapters 21-23.

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## Chapter 3

### The old covenant

Following the giving of the 10 Commandments (this was prior to God telling the Hebrews to make a sanctuary), we are told in Exodus chapter 24 how the old covenant came into being. It is explained this way

“And he [God] said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. **And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.** And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: **and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.** And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.” Exodus 24:1-8

This is the formal agreement or contract (covenant) that God entered into with the Hebrews. Three times the people had promised to do everything He would ask of them (see Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 24:7). Now in ceremonial fashion the covenant was sealed with the blood of animals (see also Hebrews 9:18-20). The people were now a theocracy – a nation under the auspices of God. God had chosen them as His people and they, by their promise, had chosen Him as their king.

It is estimated that over 1 million people left Egypt therefore those who had actually ‘signed’ the agreement were simply a representative body (the elders) of the people. It was as a corporate body of people (as a nation) that they had entered into this covenant relationship with God.

The people had heard God speak the Ten Commandments. They knew also of the additional instructions given through Moses (Exodus 24:3). They knew therefore, before they officially entered into this covenant, exactly what was required of them. This agreement we know as ‘the old covenant’ (see Hebrews 8:8-9). We have previously noted that this was over 2500 years after creation. This was the beginning of this formal agreement between God and the Hebrew people. As we shall see though, because of the people not keeping their promise, it was not long before this covenant was annulled.

This was the first time that God had entered into a covenant relationship with a nation. Previously, His covenant relationship had been with individuals. These individuals were such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph etc.

The old covenant made with the Hebrew people (as a nation) at Sinai is not the same covenant that God had revealed to these faithful (individual) patriarchs. These are two different covenants. Moses spoke of this when reminding the people of their encounter with God at Mount Sinai – also how they had heard God speak the Ten Commandments. He said to them

“The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.” Deuteronomy 5:2-3

It is important to note that the old covenant is not the Ten Commandments. These are two different things. The 10 Commandments constitute God's moral law whilst the old covenant is an agreement between God and the Hebrew people. The moral law was an integral part of the agreement (see Deuteronomy 4:13) but it was not the agreement itself. The agreement was, just as we have seen it above – a compact between two parties (Exodus 24:1-8). The moral law had existed prior to this agreement. It is that which God commanded the Hebrews to perform (Deuteronomy 4:13). They responded by promising “All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.” In this old covenant compact, obedience to God's law was their (promised) part.

Some present the view that the sanctuary and its services was the old covenant. This cannot be true. It was not until after the old covenant had been made and ratified (see Exodus 24:1-8) that God introduced these services (Exodus 25:8). In other words, the old covenant was instituted prior to the introduction of the sanctuary services, or to look at it another way again, when the Hebrew people entered into this compact with God (the old covenant agreement) they were not aware He would introduce these regulated services.

Some believe that the 10 Commandments, along with the sanctuary services (and its laws etc.), constitute the old covenant. In other words, they believe that the old covenant is the law. This has led to a great deal of confusion. It has led to the reasoning that when the old testament came to an end, so too did the entirety of the laws that God had given to the Jews. This includes the 10 Commandment law.

Whilst it is true that the sanctuary services were designed to come to an end with the closing of the old testament dispensation (brought about by the death of Jesus), God's moral law (the 10 Commandments) did not come to an end. It is as much of an integral part of the new covenant as it was of the old covenant. At conversion, God writes this law in the heart (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10, 10:16, see also Romans 2:15).

Much of the confusion stems from believing that the old and new covenants are consecutive – which they are not. As said in the Overview to this study (see above), the new covenant was valid immediately Adam and Eve sinned but the old covenant did not even exist until 2500 years later (at Mt. Sinai). The new covenant (a covenant of grace) will only come to an end when Jesus returns for His people. God's people will then partake of His kingdom of glory.

Before we move on, take special notice of upon what it was that the keeping of the old covenant depended. It depended upon the people keeping *their* promise. It was not dependant upon God keeping *His* promise. If this point is missed then everything is missed. It was the new covenant that was dependant upon God keeping His promise (Genesis 3:15, Hebrews 8:6). As noted above, these are two different covenants.

The people did not say they were unable to do what God had asked of them, neither did they ask for His help in doing it. They did not even ask for forgiveness if they failed to do it. They simply promised God that everything He asked of them they would do. There was nothing more to this covenant. It was just a case of 'obey and live' or 'disobey and be cursed' (Deuteronomy 27:26, see also Joshua 8:34). They knew of God's requirements and they knew the judgements for not doing them (Exodus 23:3). In this covenant (the old covenant), God's grace was absent. There was no promise of divine power to obey. There was no forgiveness of past transgressions. There was no saviour. This is where it differed radically from the new covenant. The new covenant had all of these things – and more. The objective of both covenants was exactly the same. It was the means for achieving this objective that was different.

As we shall see later, the Hebrews failed to keep their promise. They did not do as God had asked. This was not because there was something wrong with what He had required of them, neither was there anything wrong in Him asking them to do it. The problem was with the people. This is because without God's help, it was impossible for them to do what they had promised. Remember though, God had not asked them to promise to do anything. The promise (covenant) was their idea.

Following the ratification of the old covenant agreement, God gave instructions to make a sanctuary. This was so that He could dwell amongst His people (see Exodus 25:8). This was representative (typical) of Him dwelling in us as individuals (as living temples) by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19). This is part of His new covenant promise (Ezekiel 36:26-28).

The sanctuary service was designed to impress on the Hebrews the entire plan of salvation. It was not intended to be an end in itself but a teaching aid. It was to reveal God's answer to the sin problem. It was to reveal in type the provisions (God's provisions) of the new covenant. In itself therefore, the sanctuary and its services were a type and not the reality. The 'real thing' was that which God was doing – also that which He would do in the future – through His Son. It was indeed a "shadow of heavenly things", not the reality itself (Hebrews 8:5, 9:22-24, 10:1). The death of Christ brought an end to this earthly sanctuary system (see Daniel 9:27, Colossians 2:14-17). Through Christ's death, it's purpose had reached its fulfilment. Type had met anti-type.

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## Chapter 4

### The moral law

In ten brief commandments (see Exodus 20:3-17), God's moral calls for a perfect love for God and a perfect love for each other. Jesus said that all the laws of God - also all the messages that came from God through His prophets - are based upon these same two principles (see Matthew 22:34-40). The first four commandments comprise our obligation to God whilst the six that follow comprise our obligation to each other. As Jesus said (in response to the lawyer asking "which is the great commandment in the law?")

"...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

This sums up the moral law. It is God's ideal for His people. It is a law of love. As the apostle Paul wrote, "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

God's law is representative of His character (1 John 4:8). His desire is for our characters to represent (reveal) His character. He wants us to live out His law (His character) in our life. This we cannot do of ourselves (John 15:5). To be able to do this we need God's help. We need His Holy Spirit.

The moral law is the same law that Jesus referred to in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-28). This is the law that says, 'do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery' etc. Many nations have adopted these precepts as the social norm.

Jesus said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (see Matthew 5:17-20). He was saying that this law, the Ten Commandments, in every particular, will last as long as time will last. Nothing of it will ever change.

The Ten Commandments (the moral law) is a beautiful law. It is as sacred and holy as God Himself. It is a perfect law of love. It is no wonder that under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul exclaimed in words that need no explanation

"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Romans 7:12

This is the law that reveals sin (1 John 3:4). This has always been its purpose. It will always show where we fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). This is because it shows us where we fall short of God's character (of love). In this sense it serves to condemn but it cannot save. It is God's standard of righteousness.

More importantly than revealing 'acts' of sinfulness, God's moral law reveals the disposition of our heart. It reveals the sinfulness of our very nature (as opposed to how God wants us to be). This was explained by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Immediately after saying that God's moral law will never change (Matthew 5:17-20) He said

"Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:" Matthew 5:21-22

As another example of the far reaching claims of the moral law He explained

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Matthew 5:27-28

The law therefore reveals the very thoughts cherished in the heart. This shows the spirituality of the law. This is why James was led to write

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” James 1:13-15

It was this same realisation that led the apostle Paul to pen these words

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet...For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Romans 7:7, 14

Coveting is something we do from within. We sin from within. This is when we pander to (indulge) our fallen nature (James 1:13-14). This results in outward sinful acts. We need therefore a new spirit within us. We need a change of heart (a change of mind). This cannot be accomplished by correcting the way we live (by changing our habits etc.). Rather it is something that with our cooperation, God achieves within us. This is one of the purposes of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:24-27). Paul was saying here, 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ (meaning in the full light of the gospel), that the moral law was still pointing out sin.

Almost 40 years later (this was as the first century of the Christian era was drawing to a close), John the gospel writer said exactly the same. In the first of his epistles (letters) he explained

“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4

In this “transgression of the law”, John would have included the failure to acknowledge the sacredness of God’s seventh day Sabbath (Saturday). He would have said that this failure (assuming the truth concerning this day is known) is a sin. If we know God wants us to do something and we do not do it, this is sin. As James explained

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” James 4:17

The moral law is God’s unerring and unchanging detector of sin. This is why Christians will always seek to establish it. They will never attempt tear it down or belittle it (Romans 3:31). As this same inspired writer and faithful disciple of Jesus also made clear

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” 1 John 5:2-3

When the rich young ruler came to Jesus asking Him what he needed to do to obtain eternal life (Matthew 19:16) Jesus said “... if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

On the part of humanity, the keeping of God’s commandments is a response to the love that God has shown us through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. We keep God’s law because we love Him and want to represent Him (2 John 1:6). The 10 Commandment law (the moral law) is not grievous. It is God’s law of liberty (freedom). This is why Jesus said

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

To the Christian, God’s law, because it is a law of love, is not a heavy burden. It is an easy yoke to bear. As Christians we should delight ourselves in it. Jesus delighted in it (Psalms 40:7-8 John 15:10). Those who speak of God’s moral law as a burden are still carnally minded (Romans 8:7-8). We are to live out God’s requirements as the “apple” of our eye (Proverbs 7:1-2). We are to keep His words in our heart (Proverbs 4:21). They are “life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh” (verse 22). Those who love God will testify as did the Psalmist

“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Psalms 119:165

From the above, we can see that God's moral law (the 10 Commandments) is still as applicable today as it always has been. It still reveals God's standard for the human race. It still therefore points out sin (in all its aspects).

Concerning the construction of the sanctuary - also the running of it - there is, in Exodus chapter 25 through to chapter 31, the detailed instruction that God gave to Moses. Interesting is that nearing the end of this instruction, God said to Moses

“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.” Exodus 31:13-17

This reveals the importance that God places upon His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday). It is His special blessing to the world (Genesis 2:1-3).

Notice here that God says His Sabbath is “a sign”. Some say that this only has application to the Jews but Jesus did not say the Sabbath was made for one particular race of people. He said it was made for mankind (Mark 2:27). It needs to be remembered that the Jewish nation did not come into existence until well over 2000 years after the Sabbath was instituted (at creation).

Jesus also said He was the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Those who argue this 'Sabbath point' would do well to remember that it was Christ who originally instituted this day (John 1:1-3, Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:14-17, Hebrews 1:2). If there was any one person who understood its importance it was Him.

Whilst it is not the prime purpose of this study to explain the whole spectrum of God's reasons for blessing us with this day (or to point out how this day should be kept) it may be beneficial here to say just a few words on the subject. It must not be thought that we are simply referring to rules and regulations. There is so much more to the Sabbath.

God set aside (sanctified - made holy) this day at creation (Genesis 2:1-3). This reveals that even in a sinless world He deemed it necessary for humanity to have a Sabbath. Even if Adam and Eve had not sinned we would still be blessed from week to week with the Sabbath. As it was, Adam and Eve did sin. This has led to all sorts of false reasoning. This concerns not only God Himself but also our origins.

There are those who believe we came into existence by accident (by a chance happening) and not by design (a special creation). These are the evolutionists. According to their reasoning, we (homo sapiens) are the end result of millions of years of evolutionary change. Supposedly, in becoming what we are today, we began as single celled creatures that continued developing (evolving) through a more complex pond life. This is said to be the original ancestral line from which such as the chimpanzee eventually developed. From this same original ancestral line, according to the evolutionists, came the human race.

This reasoning is degrading to humanity. This is one of the reasons why God gave us His Sabbath. It was to be a continual reminder that we exist not because of a chance happening but a special creation. This was when God made man and woman in His own image (Genesis 1:26). This is why it is so important that we, His created people, should acknowledge His appointed day of rest. It is to remind us of our origins. God's seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) is a witness to the world of our origins. God has not appointed another day. This is why Jesus said

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law,



till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus is saying here that not even the smallest requirement in God's law will ever change so how can it be said that God has changed His day of rest? God still desires His people today to remember His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday). He certainly would not have 'done away with' the very thing that He had instituted at creation to remind us we are a product of intelligent design and not a chance happening. God's Sabbath (Saturday) is the only day upon which He placed a special blessing. He did not make holy (sanctify) any other day of the week (Genesis 2:1-3) – neither does it even intimate in Scripture that a change regarding this day would take place.

When Christ had finished His work of creation He rested from His work. He did the same when He finished His work on earth as our Saviour. He died the day before the Sabbath (Luke 23:54-56, John 19:30-31, 42). This is the day we refer to as Friday. He rested in the grave on Sabbath. This is the day we refer to as Saturday. He was raised to life on the third day – the day we call Sunday.

When we keep God's Sabbath day holy, we ourselves become living witnesses to God's special creation – also to His sovereignty as our Creator. This, as Seventh-day Adventists, is an important part of our message. We are God's ambassador's to the world. By our witness we are to be living reminders of God's creative and redemptive power (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). When we live out God's law in our lives, we become living epistles (letters) from Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

As a reason for not keeping this day holy (since Christ has died), some have pointed to where the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.” Romans 14:5-6

To use this verse to invalidate the keeping holy of God's Sabbath day is to take it completely out of context. Paul is referring here to 'doubtful disputations' (see verse 1). We have already seen (see above) how he described God's moral law. He believed it to be sacred. He would never have referred to the 10 Commandments as 'doubtful disputations'.

Another Scripture used by some to supposedly show that we are no longer to keep God's original Sabbath is where this same apostle wrote (again to the believers in Rome)

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Romans 10:4

Unfortunately, the word “end” tends to give the wrong impression. It can erroneously be taken to mean that Christ brought to an end the moral law of God which Paul most definitely would not have been saying. As we have seen, he said that as Christians we establish the law (Romans 3:31). This can only be the moral law.

The Greek word translated “end” is 'telos'. It can convey a number of meanings. These include such as 'the goal' or 'the aim of a thing' or 'the objective' etc. This is how it should be thought of here.

Nowhere in Scripture can it be found where Christ even intimated that the Sabbath would be changed. This is whether it is to Sunday or any other day of the week. In fact as we have seen, He only said exactly the opposite (see Matthew 5:17-19). Jesus kept God's law perfectly. He showed us how to keep God's day of rest sacred. He therefore is our example as to how God wants us to treat this day. In this, as He is in everything else, He is our objective. He is our goal (the point to aim at).

The Sabbath reminds us of creation. It also points to God as the Creator and sovereign ruler of this world (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11). If the Sabbath had been kept, as God ordained it should have been kept, it would have been the answer to all kinds of false worship. It would certainly have been a bulwark against the 'evolutionary theories' that in our learning institutions today are expounded as 'science'. It appears therefore that God's seventh day Sabbath is more needful today than it has ever been.

The Scriptures then tell us that when God had finished communing with Moses, He gave him "... two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (see Exodus 31:18). These were the 10 Commandments that God had previously spoken from the mount (see Exodus 20).

It was at this juncture a very serious problem arose.

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## Chapter 5

### Apostasy (idolatry) at Sinai

In waiting for Moses to come down from the mount, the people became impatient. They said they did not know what had happened to him. They asked Aaron (the elder brother of Moses) to make them “gods” which would go before them’ (Exodus 32:1). Aaron obliged and made a molten calf. The people said that these were the gods that had brought them out of Egypt (verse 4).

When they were in Egypt, the people often encountered such 'gods' but even if they had made an effigy to represent the true God, this would have been wrong. God had forbidden them to make representations of anything as an object of worship - and they had also agreed not to do such a thing (see Exodus 20:4-5, 24:7). They then held a feast and “offered burnt offerings” (Exodus 32:5-6).

God knew what was happening. He described the Hebrews as a “stiffnecked people” (verse 9). He then said to Moses

“... let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.” Exodus 32:10

The acceptance of God's invitation would have brought great personal honour to Moses. Many coveting glory for themselves would have seized this opportunity but this man of God, even though he knew the people were deserving of punishment, did not give up on them.

God signified that He had 'disowned' the people. His words suggested that Moses was their leader. (see Exodus 32:7). Moses appealed to God saying they were His (God's) people (verse 11). He also said to God that if He did destroy the people, those looking on (the nations around them) would have a wrong idea about why He (God) had brought the people out of Egypt in the first place. Moses said it could have been interpreted by the Egyptians that instead of calling the people into the wilderness to sacrifice (see Exodus 3:18, 5:3), God had called them to be sacrificed (verse 12).

Moses therefore pleaded with God to remember the covenant He had made with Abraham (Exodus 32:13). The Scriptures tell us that “... the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (verse 14). They were experiencing the same as Abraham had experienced. They were experiencing God's grace. This should have led them to appreciate more and more God's benevolent character.

We won't go through the rest of the story, suffice to say that the people had now broken their covenant with God. They had promised not to make graven images and worship them (see Exodus 20:4-5, 24:5) but this is exactly what they were now doing. Moses made no appeal to this covenant. His only appeal was to God's grace and to His covenant with Abraham.

The Scriptures tell us that when Moses came down from the mount he saw what had taken place. We are also told that his “anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount” (Exodus 32:19). This signified that the people had broken their covenant with God. This released God from His part of the agreement. This is why God had previously said to Moses

“... Go, get thee down; for **thy people**, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:” Exodus 32:7

What hope now did the people have under a broken covenant? The answer is that they had no hope. What then, seeing that the covenant they had recently made with God was null and void, could be done to restore their nation's standing with God?

Let's leave that there for the moment. Let's consider Adam and Eve. This is because they had found themselves in the same predicament.

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## Chapter 6

### From perfection to imperfection

Adam and Eve had been created perfect. They possessed eternal life. This life though was conditional. They would retain it only if they trusted God and heeded His voice. In a very real sense they were on probation.

God had instructed Adam that with one exception he could partake of every tree in the garden. This exception was the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). He was told that if he ate of this particular tree he would die (verse 17). Eve was also aware of this prohibition (Genesis 3:2-3). Notice that God never asked either of them to promise to obey Him.

Despite the warning they both succumbed to the wiles of the serpent. They both partook of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:6). This left them with knowledge of their nakedness, which, in an attempt to hide, they made aprons of fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). They were attempting to cover their shame by the work of their own hands. It could be said they were trying to provide their own covering of righteousness. This is a principle of the old covenant.

In their sinful condition, Adam and Eve had no more hope of restoring their relationship with God than did the Hebrews when 2500 years later at Mount Sinai they would sin. They had disobeyed God and did not possess the wherewithal to remedy the situation. Since the fall, this has been the common lot of mankind. This is the inheritance we have received from Adam (Romans 5:12, 19, Ephesians 2:1).

It is also true to say that in their fallen condition, neither Adam nor Eve would have gone looking for God. The Scriptures tell us that after they had sinned, because of fear, they actually hid from Him (Genesis 3:8, 10). This is why God came looking for them (Genesis 3:9). He was the prime mover in seeking the restoration of their relationship with Him. This again, since the fall, is how it has been with everyone – also how it always will be – at least until Jesus returns. All those who eventually find themselves in God's kingdom will be there because God came looking for them.

Through various means and avenues, it is the work of God, through His Holy Spirit, to have us realise our need for Christ (Romans 2:4). This is God's one great desire for each of us. Unless this need is awakened, there is no hope for the individual.

God always comes looking for the sinner. It is never the other way around (Romans 3:10-11). He is the good shepherd who is always seeking His lost sheep (Isaiah 40:10-11, Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 34:11-16). Christ is the good shepherd who gave His life for His sheep (John 10:11, 14). He is the lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:18). He is the lamb that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). His shed blood is the blood of the 'everlasting covenant' (Hebrews 13:20). This is the new covenant (Matthew 26:26-28).

After conversing with Adam and Eve, God provided them with animal skins (Genesis 3:21). It is reasonable to believe therefore, although it does not specifically say so, that in the Garden of Eden an animal had been slain.

This would mean that because of the sin that Adam and Eve had committed, an innocent animal had been put to death. This was the beginning of the sacrificial system. It was also the first death that Adam and Eve would have experienced. It is also reasonable to believe that God explained to them the meaning of this sacrifice – also that it was Adam who had slain the animal.

To us today the death of an animal is 'fairly common place' but to Adam and Eve it must have been horrific. They knew it was their disobedience that had caused the death of this innocent animal. Can we imagine how they felt as they looked upon its lifeless carcase?

Whilst this sacrifice was very real, it was also symbolic. It was representative of the One great sacrifice that 4000 years later would pay for every sin committed on earth. This was the sacrifice that God made through the death of His dearly beloved Son at Calvary (John 3:16, Romans 8:32).

It was Christ's blood that would ratify (confirm/seal/make sure) the covenant of grace (Genesis 3:15, Matthew 26:26-28, John 3:16). It was His life that would pay our redemption price (1 Peter 1:18-19). The animal skins represented the righteousness with which all the saved will be covered. This is the perfect righteousness of a sinless saviour. It is the righteousness of God (Jeremiah 33:16, Romans 1:17, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:9, 2 Peter 1:1). It is God that provides the covering (Isaiah 61:10, Zechariah 3:1-4). It is the wedding garment that all must wear if they are going to make it to God's kingdom (Matthew 22:11-14). It is Christ's righteousness alone (not anything we can do) that will merit a person for salvation therefore all the saved will be saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8).

Grace is free to us (it is a gift) but it was not free to God to offer it. In order to make it available to us, it cost Him the life of His Son. This is the price He paid to redeem us from sin and from eternal death. Our redemption is not a cheap affair.

Can we imagine how Adam and Eve felt as this truth was unfolded to them – that what they had done would cost the death of God's dear Son? This is something we should be able to do. This is because it is our sins, not just their sin, or anyone else's sins, that nailed Jesus to the cross.

On behalf of each one of us, Christ has paid the price of sin. We have all therefore been purchased with a price. This includes all those who will never accept God's gracious offer of salvation. In this sense therefore, by the death of His Son, God has redeemed (purchased/bought back) from eternal oblivion, the entirety of the human race (Isaiah 53:5-6, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 1 John 2:2). Salvation therefore has been made available to everyone (Titus 2:11). All have been given enough divine knowledge to be saved (compare John 1:9, Romans 1:18-19, Titus 2:11 and 2 Peter 3:9). All therefore are without excuse. Whether it is realised or not, Christ is everyone's saviour (Romans 4:5, 5:18, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 1 Timothy 4:10). Christ died for all Hebrews 2:9). There are no exceptions.

The very first prophecy concerning this sacrifice (the sacrifice of the new covenant) can be found in the words that God directed at the serpent. God had said

“...Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:14-15

This is the new covenant in embryo form. It is in fact the gospel. This is also the very first prophecy in the Bible.

To Adam and Eve, because they would have heard God's words, it was also the first intimation of hope. God said that whilst Satan's seed would cause discomfort to the seed of the woman (“bruise his heel”), He (God), through this seed, would “bruise” his head. This signified that through the seed of the woman, God would eventually destroy Satan (Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 20:10). We are not told here whether Satan fully understood the import of God's words – suffice to say he must have realised that his scheming would not go unhindered.

This seed (singular) we know to be Christ (Galatians 3:16). We know too that God had ordained He would come through the Jewish nation. This was in fulfilment of the promise God had made to Abraham (see Genesis 22:14-18, 49:10, Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:14-16, Micah 5:2, see also Matthew 1:1-17, Acts 13:23). This promise was that through his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. On a number of occasions this promise was repeated (see Genesis 12:1-3, 17:21, 18:18, 22:15-18, 26:4-5, Isaiah 11:1-5).

This covenant promise (Genesis 3:15) could not be fulfilled by anything fallen humanity could do. It was totally the work of God.

This same prophecy foretold that in the process of destroying Satan, the seed Himself would experience suffering. He is the suffering messiah of which Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 53:1-12). He is the One 'smitten' by God – the One 'bruised' for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:4-5). He is the Righteous Branch that God Himself would raise up (Jeremiah 23:5-6, Zechariah 6:1). The Book of Revelation describes Him as “the Lamb slain from the

foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8, see also John 1:29). He is 'that prophet' (see Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, John 1:21, 25, 6:14, 7:40-42, Acts 3:25, 7:37).

Paul tells us He is God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16, see also John 1:1-3, 14). He is the great I AM who in the burning bush had revealed Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:1-6, 13-15, John 8:58). He is the One who in the pillar of cloud and fire had led the Hebrews through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:19-22). He is the “desire of all nations” (Haggai 2:7) - yet when He came to His own they did not know Him (John 1:11).

Grace has existed since the first sin. If it had not then existed, humanity would not have continued to exist. Without intervention from God, the human race was doomed to eternal oblivion. On the other hand, where sin does not exist, there is no need of grace. Angels and the inhabitants of unfallen worlds have no experiential knowledge of God's grace. Grace is unmerited (undeserved) favour. Every single blessing we receive and every good thing we have, we owe to the grace of God. Of ourselves we are deserving of nothing. Our only appeal is to God's grace.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God instituted a kingdom of grace. This is God's kingdom. To fallen humanity He had given another probation (a second chance). There would be no third chance (Hebrews 9:27). Every human being has the opportunity to partake of this kingdom. If those who partake of this kingdom remain faithful, they will, when Christ returns, partake of His kingdom of glory. Sin will not rise up a second time (Nahum 1:9).

When Jesus died at Calvary, the kingdom of grace was established (made sure/made secure). The covenant (the new covenant) was then sealed with Christ's blood. Prior to this time it had existed by the promise of God (Genesis 3:15, see also Hebrews 6:16-18).

On God's part, the plan of salvation was not an afterthought. It was the mystery that was hid in Him from all eternity (Colossians 1:26, 2 Timothy 1:9) - thus the covenant of grace, which existed in the mind of God (in silence) throughout all eternity - came into effect when Adam sinned. This grace, which was within Christ before the world began, had been enquired after - and had been made known - by the prophets of old (1 Peter 1:10). This grace was clearly manifest in Christ's earthly life and ministry. After His death it was then made known throughout the world. This was to both Jew and gentile alike (Romans 16:25-26, 2 Timothy 1:9-10). This grace was typified by the sanctuary service.

It is important to remember that since all eternity, everything that has happened here on earth (or ever will happen) has been rehearsed in the mind of God. It is therefore not new to Him. Before it has happened He has foreseen it. This is why He could inspire the Bible writers to write at times as though an event had happened prior to it actually taking place (for example see Revelation 13:8). What He has foreseen will take place. Nothing can change it. We cannot hide anything from God – not even our most innermost thoughts (1 Samuel 16:7, Psalm 139:1-4, 23-24, Jeremiah 17:9-10, Hebrews 4:13). The infinite has foreseen – and has foretold – the decisions of finite men.

Adam and Eve, before they sinned, had been perfect. Their natures had been pure and innocent. Now, because of their sin, it had become corrupt and evil. Their hearts were now at enmity (at war) with God. They were in harmony with Satan. In this condition they were not fit for God's kingdom. They needed a change of heart (a new spirit). They needed salvation.

So it is with each one of us (Romans 3:23). We are all born carnal; sold unto sin (Romans 7:14, 8:6-7). This is why we all need to be born again (born from above). Hence the words of Jesus to Nicodemus

“... Verily, verily, I say unto thee [Nicodemus], Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. John 3:3,5-7

We shall return our thoughts to this conversation later.

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## Chapter 7

### Born again (conversion)

None of us are born righteous (Romans 3:23). We are all born with a sinful nature. It is our natural disposition to sin. This is why David wrote

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Psalms 51:5

If we were honest with ourselves, we would all admit the same. In this respect, none of us are any different (Proverbs 20:9).

It is also true to say that no matter what we do, none of us of ourselves can ever become righteous. We have all sinned and have fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:10-12, 23). This is why we all need a saviour. Whatever good we possess or whatever good we do, it is tainted with sin (Isaiah 64:6). This is why it is Christ's righteousness alone that can merit us for salvation (Titus 3:5). He kept His Father's commandments perfectly (John 15:10). In Him was found no sin (John 8:46, 14:30, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:21-22, Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 3:5). Our only hope is in Christ's righteousness (Philippians 3:9). His is the only name under heaven by which men and women can be saved. There is no salvation in any other (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Even with the 'best of us' we are only as an unclean thing. Our righteousnesses are only as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). When this is realised, we will be brought to say (as did David)

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.” Psalms 51:1-3

God forgives us of our sins not because of something we have done but because of His lovingkindness towards us. If it were not for this lovingkindness, we would still be in our sins. When we realise that in order to extend this forgiveness to us, God had to sacrifice His only-begotten Son, we shall then come to Him in repentance and sorrow. On our part there will be no thought of our own self-esteem. Our confession will be our own unworthiness.

Luke records that Jesus told the story of two men who went to the temple to pray (Luke 18:10-14). One was a Pharisee and the other a publican (a tax collector). Jesus explained that the Pharisee prayed

“...God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Luke 18:11-12

This man obviously thought well of himself. He also probably thought that God should do the same.

The tax collector took a completely different attitude. Jesus said that “standing afar off”, he would not even lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote upon his breast saying

“... God be merciful to me a sinner”. Luke 18:13

The ending to the story probably shocked some of those who were listening. Jesus said

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Luke 18:14

Humility is a hallmark of a Christian (Psalm 37:1, Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:5, 11:11, 29, 18:1-4, 23:11-12, Mark 9:35, James 4:6, 1 Peter 3:4, 5:5-6). None who will be saved will be filled with self-importance. All who will experience the kingdom will see themselves as not being worthy to be there. Those who see themselves as better than others will more than likely fail to make it. Only those throwing themselves on the mercy of God (as did the publican) will experience justification. They will be saved by God's grace.

Overwhelmed with guilt, the publican felt the need for forgiveness. He felt his need for God. The Pharisee felt no such need. He resisted the working of the Holy Spirit in his life. Continually indulged pride will ultimately

prohibit a person gaining an entrance to God's kingdom. Those who are genuinely repentant and who confess their guilt will be justified. Christ will plead His blood on their behalf. The Saviour will never turn away the repentant sinner. The truly penitent will always find rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28-29).

There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that God saves men and women today any differently than the way He did before Christ died. There was not one system of salvation in the Old Testament and a different one in the New Testament. Whoever it may be, if they are to experience God's kingdom (regardless of what they believe), will need to be born from above. This includes those who were born on earth prior to Jesus coming (the first time) as well as those born afterwards. All will need to be included in His covenant of grace. This is because none of us are born righteous (Psalm 51:5) and all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8). None of us therefore, without experiencing God's personal intervention in our lives, can make it to the kingdom.

This was something of which King David was well aware. This is why 1000 years before Christ came he penned these memorable words (from the same Psalm as above)

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” Psalms 51:7-12

This will always be the prayer of the truly repentant. It is a “godly sorrow” that comes direct from the heart. It is repentance “not to be repented of” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). David knew exactly what it meant to be amongst the redeemed. He spoke of the joy of God's salvation. He had thrown himself on God's mercy. He knew what it meant to be under grace.

Some may ask, what about those who were not able to make a decision for themselves? These are such as those who died at too young an age to do so (such as babies and children who die in infancy) – also those who are mentally unable to do so. The answer is that what God does in these and similar cases must be left to Him alone. Nothing is said about this in Scripture therefore we are not to conjecture. There can be no doubt He will do what is best for everyone. He will, in accordance with His character, be kind, just and merciful. Of this we can absolutely sure.

Those who are able to make a decision - yet are never born again - will fail to make it to God's kingdom whilst everyone who is saved will, in their individual lives, experience the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). This is the cause of the enmity towards Satan and sin. It is the grace that God implants within all who are born again. Without this grace (without this enmity toward sin) we would not be able to resist sin. This is the work of God.

So what happens when a person is born again? To those who look for this experience God says

“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:24-28

This is the experience of conversion. As we shall see later, this is the fulfilling within individuals of the new covenant promises (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:7-12). This is when we become ‘new creatures’ (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:10).

This experience is totally the work of God. It is in fact an act of God although it is true to say that He does not accomplish it without the cooperation of the individual. It is only as we seek restoration with Him (because of our yielding to His pleadings through His Spirit) that He does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. When we consent to place our will on His side He will work that miracle within us.



The law of God is perfect (Psalms 19:7, James 1:25 and Romans 7:12). It therefore demands perfection. It demands a perfect love towards God and a perfect love for each other (Matthew 22:35-40). This was the same in Old Testament times (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). It therefore demands from us that which we are not able to produce of ourselves. This is why it condemns us. As the apostle Paul wrote

["For I know that in me \(that is, in my flesh,\) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Romans 7:18](#)

There is nothing within our own selves (in our flesh) that would give us the power to live a righteous life (keep God's commandments) neither can we change our natures (Jeremiah 13:23, see also Job 14:4), so whilst we may come to the place where we have a desire to keep God's law - and whilst we may have a desire to live the life of Jesus (because of the promptings of the Holy Spirit) - we cannot do this of ourselves. In this respect we are impotent.

Unless the grace of God is implanted within us then we are unable to live the life of faith that God requires us to live. It is this indwelling that enables us to do what we cannot do for ourselves. Through this indwelling we are washed and regenerated (Titus 3:5-7). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit therefore, if we are to experience salvation, is absolutely essential. Without this enmity to sin we would be slaves of Satan. David pleaded with God not to take the Holy Spirit from him (Psalm 51:11). We must learn to hate sin. To do this we will need to realise what God had to do to save us from sin. He had to sacrifice His one and only Son. Only then will we see sin as God sees it. God hates sin but He loves the sinner.

We are born with a sinful nature. Our natural propensity is to sin. This is why, if we are to experience salvation, this must change. We must partake of a higher nature. This is divine nature. It is the nature made available and promised to us of God (2 Peter 1:4). It is this nature (God's nature) we are to serve with a newness of spirit. It is at conversion that the battle within us begins (Galatians 5:16). Before conversion takes place this battle does not exist. We lived then (in peace) to please the flesh (Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:22). This battle is with self.

When God sees that we desire to serve Him aright, He works a miracle in our lives. He renews the heart and puts a new spirit within us. This is the greatest miracle of all. It is a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). He forgives us our sins and assures us that He will cast them as far from Him as the East is from the West (Psalms 103:12). Without this act of God we would remain at variance with Him. It is then that the keeping of God's law becomes a delight (Psalms 1:1-3, 119:70, 77, 174, see also Romans 7:22). As Christ said through the psalmist

["I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Psalms 40:8](#)

This will always be the profession of all those saved by God's grace. It is the result of the Spirit's indwelling – Christ living within. They will love God's law. It will be their meditation and delight (Psalm 119:92-105, 174, Romans 7:22).

Let's return our thoughts again to the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus.

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## Chapter 8

### Don't you know these things?

Although not usually thought of as doing such, Nicodemus lived in what is generally termed, 'Old Testament times'. He was required to keep all the laws that God had imposed upon the Jewish nation. He was a teacher of the law. These laws concerned the Ten Commandments (the moral law), the sanctuary (the ceremonial law) and the civil requirements. The same was required of Mary the mother of Jesus – also all the disciples when Jesus called them to His service. This was the common lot of the Jew. Jesus too was subject to these laws, at least as far as they were applicable to Him. In the incarnation He was made under the law (Galatians 4:4).

John the Baptist, although not called to write anything that would become Scripture, was a prophet of 'Old Testament times'. This was the same as Jeremiah, Obadiah or any other of the prophets. He was also the herald of the New Testament dispensation (Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:1-3 and Luke 3:3-4). He was therefore the connecting link between the two dispensations. Jesus Himself lived during these 'Old Testament times'.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus, unless a man is born again "he cannot see the kingdom of God", this teacher of the law responded by asking, "How can these things be? (John 3:9). The answer Jesus gave is very interesting. He said to Nicodemus

“...Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)

This must have been quite a rebuke to Nicodemus. Jesus was saying that if anyone ought to know these things it should have been him. After all, he was the one who was doing the teaching.

The words of Jesus would have reminded Nicodemus of passages of Scripture such as found in Ezekiel 36. This Hebrew scholar would have read these words many times although from his remarks to Jesus it appears he did not appreciate the full import of them. This is where God had said

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”  
Ezekiel 36:25-27

Nicodemus would also have been reminded of where Jeremiah spoke these words (this was at the time of the Jewish captivity in Babylon)

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34

This passage of Scripture, like the one above written by Ezekiel, refers to the experience of those born again. Jesus was saying to Nicodemus, do you not understand these things?

Although a learned teacher of the law – also a respectable and honest man – Nicodemus needed a rebirth. This is a spiritual rebirth. Jesus said that without this experience he would neither gain an entrance to God's kingdom nor discern it. It is the same with everyone. If at last we are to be found in God's kingdom, this experience is indispensable (John 3:3). It is very doubtful if those who have not been born again will be able to understand it. The natural man “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto

him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). In everyone there needs to be a spiritual awakening. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

By the time Jeremiah had written these words, the southern kingdom of Judah would have been in captivity to Babylon. In the main his 40-year ministry was to those remaining in Jerusalem although through him, God sent messages to the Jews in Babylon. Ezekiel was in Babylon to deliver his messages from God (see Ezekiel 1:1-3). He was partly contemporary with both Jeremiah and Daniel.

Some nine centuries had passed since God had delivered His people from the influence of Egyptian idolatry (the exodus) but they had returned to the worship of false gods and the profaning of God’s holy Sabbath day. Jeremiah was called to take a stand against these things (Jeremiah 17:21-27, 19:3-5, 15).

The Jews were in Babylon to learn a lesson – which was that to disobey God is to go into captivity (Jeremiah 19:15, 25:8-11, 36:31, Ezekiel 39:23-24). It was for their own good that God “sent” them into captivity (Jeremiah 24:5). Eventually, when the captivity was over, God would punish those who took them captive. He would then restore the Jews to their own land and to the covenant promises (Jeremiah 25:12-16, 29:13-14, 30:3, 32:27-42, Ezekiel 39:23-28). This is a parallel as to how, at the end of time, God will deal with all the nations of the world (see Revelation chapter 18). He will then give His people rest in the land He has promised them. This will be Eden restored. Thus spiritual Israel will receive the end result of the covenant promises.

The captivity in Babylon was also a spiritual captivity. The Jews had been seduced into this situation by Satan. They had sold themselves into slavery. Only God was able to deliver them from it. Of themselves the people were once again helpless. To those who through repentance were seeking restoration with God, the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel would have been messages of immediate hope. Throughout the years of captivity, many would have learned their lesson and would have taken the advantage of renewing their personal covenant relationship with Him but it was only a comparatively small remnant that when the captivity was over returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

These two prophets of God (Jeremiah and Ezekiel) were not saying that 600 years later when Christ would come (the first time) that God would make another covenant with the Jewish nation that would resolve their present captivity problem. This would not make sense. By then, they would all have been dead. What sort of hope would this be for anyone? They were restored to their land after 70 years of captivity. It was then that God said He would give His people a new heart to know him (Jeremiah 24:6-7). This has a spiritual application. When our captivity in sin is over, God gives us a new heart to know and serve Him. This is God’s ongoing covenant with His people. It is God’s law written in the heart that keeps the righteous from falling (Psalm 37:30-31). This is a new covenant experience (Hebrews 8:10-12, see also Deuteronomy 6:6, Psalms 40:8).

Just as God had delivered His people from captivity in Egypt, so too He delivered them from captivity in Babylon. This time He did it by His servant Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-2, Isaiah 44:28, 45:1). They were again saved by God’s grace. God did for them that which they did not deserve. He was once again exercising toward them unmerited favour.

The words of Jeremiah, just like the words of Ezekiel (see above), are referring to that which God does for an individual person at conversion. It is a spiritual work that we cannot do for ourselves. These words cannot refer to a nation, church or organisation. They can only refer to the work that God does in individuals. It is the restoration within a person of the Holy Spirit. This restoration is the covenant of grace. This includes the writing of His law in human hearts. It is the restoration (rebuilding) of the human temple as the dwelling place of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19).

The difference between the two covenants is clear. The success of the old covenant was dependant upon people keeping their promises. As the Hebrews said, “...All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8, see also Exodus 24:3 and 7). The success of the new covenant was dependant upon God keeping His promises. In the old covenant the people say “we will do”. In the new covenant God says “I will do” (see Genesis 3:15, Jeremiah 31-31-34 etc).

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## Chapter 9

### The new covenant - God's answer to the sin problem

Returning our thoughts to the Hebrews and their sojourn at the foot of Mount Sinai, I did ask, seeing they had broken their covenant with God, what could be done to restore their national standing with Him. In reality there was nothing they could do – at least not of themselves. As a nation they had nothing to offer. They had broken their covenant with Him. It was therefore now disannulled. This had released God from His covenant obligations (promises).

We need to remember here that whilst the breaking of the covenant (by the Hebrews) released God from His part in this compact (the old covenant), the people were not released from their obligations. God had made clear His requirements and this had not changed. God still expected them to heed His voice. This is exactly the same in the new covenant. Whilst those partaking of this covenant are under grace, this does not give them license to ignore what God commands.

It is reasonably evident that God knew the Hebrews could not keep their promise to obey Him (see Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 24:7) so why did He allow them to enter into such a covenant?

Perhaps the best way to explain it is by using a simple illustration. When my children were young, I sometimes saw them struggling with something they were doing. I would offer to help them. Often their answer was "That's OK dad. I can do it by myself". Invariably, after a short while, my child would come back to me and say "Dad, I can't do it. Can you help me please?" I am sure that almost every parent has had this experience.

I knew my children could never do what they were attempting to do but for their own sakes they needed to try to do it. Until they did so they would never realise their inadequacies and their limitations.

This is how it was with God and the Hebrews. God allowed them to say they could do what He had asked them to do even though He knew that by themselves they could not do it. He knew they would fail. He knew they could not keep their promise. This though was His way of having them realise that without Him they were helpless. This was in keeping where He was to say to His people 1500 years later "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). It is only when we realise our dependence upon God that we are safe.

God very often brings us into 'strait places'. This is so that we may realise our dependence upon Him. He had done this with the Hebrews. When deliverance seemed impossible He had delivered them from their servitude in Egypt. When annihilation by the Egyptians seemed inevitable, He had led them safely across the Red Sea. Now, at the foot of Mount Sinai, they needed to learn that because of the sinfulness of the human heart, they could not of themselves live the life that God requires of His people. This is a life, if we are to inherit the kingdom that God has prepared for us, is essential for us to possess. It is a life of faith, trusting in God's grace for our deliverance. This is far more important than any other deliverance.

The giving of the law therefore, also the allowing of the Hebrews to enter into a covenant with Him (that God knew was impossible for them to keep), was God's way of helping them to realise their need of His grace and a need of a saviour from sin. Without these things they could never be candidates for eternal life. This was God's way therefore of having them appreciate the covenant we call 'the new covenant'. This is the covenant in which He provides for our salvation. It is a covenant of grace. At Mount Sinai, God was being gracious towards the Hebrews. He did not give them His law as a system of salvation. The law could only highlight the sin problem (Romans 5:20, Galatians 3:19). It could never provide the remedy. The remedy is the grace of God (Romans 5:20). Grace has always been God's remedy for the sin problem. This was the same in Old Testament times as it has been since Christ's death.

Promising God to do as He says is not wrong in itself but if we make this promise believing we can do this in our own stead (without divine aid) then we are sadly mistaken. The promises of men are like ropes of sand.

Moses, as his time of leadership was drawing to a close, reminded the Hebrews of this fact. He brought to their minds how it had been at Mount Sinai. This was when the people had heard God's voice and had

promised to obey everything He would ask of them. Moses reminded the people they had said to him (to Moses)

“Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.” Deuteronomy 5:27

When the people had heard God's voice they were afraid. They asked Moses (as a mediator) to listen to God, then relay to them what He had said. They then promised they would do as God says. Moses continued

“And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.” Deuteronomy 5:28

From this, some have reasoned that God was pleased with the people for making the promise to obey Him but this is missing the point of what God was saying here. This is evident because in continuing, Moses told the people that God had said to him

“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” Verse 29

God was saying that promising to obey Him was one thing but actually doing it was something else. As He said, He wished there was a heart in them that would lead them to fear and obey Him. As it was, God's word was not in their hearts therefore it was not in their hearts to be obedient. This is why they very quickly disobeyed His specific command. This was when they had made an image (the golden calf) and had worshipped it (Exodus 32:8, 19).

In Exodus 33 we find God telling Moses to continue to lead the people into the land that He had promised them (through His promise to Abraham). God said though, because there was the danger of Him consuming them, He would not be in their midst (Exodus 33:1-3). This was after Moses had pleaded with God that instead of blotting the people out of the book He had written, to blot him out of it. This request though, no matter how sincere, could not be granted (see Exodus 32:30-33). Salvation is an individual matter (Ezekiel 14:14, 20, 18:20-24, 33:7-9). It shows though the compassion of Moses for the people. This was the same compassion as Paul had towards his fellow countrymen (see Romans 9:3). This is the spirit of those who love their brethren. They are willing to give up their lives for their brethren. This is the type of love that Jesus commands (John 15:12-13)

The reaction of the people to God's decision (not to be amongst them) was that they were repentant. This was revealed by the things they did. They humbled themselves to God's request (Exodus 33:4-6).

True repentance will always bring the same response (Luke 19:8-10, see also Matthew 3:7-9). Repentance is essential for salvation (Matthew 9:13, Luke 13:5, 15:7, 24:46-47, Acts 3:19, 20-21). It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Repentance is the result of surrendering of one's self to the pleading of God's Spirit. Without God working in our lives we could not repent. If we do not resist the Holy Spirit we will be drawn to Christ in love. It is getting to know Christ that will bring us to repentance. Our salvation from beginning to end is the work of God. There is no merit in repentance. Repentance is the work of God within us.

In recognition of the great sin of the people, Moses moved the tabernacle “afar from the camp” (see Exodus 33:7). This could not have been the sanctuary because at that time it had not been built. Moses called it “the Tabernacle of the congregation”. All those who “sought the LORD” repaired to this tent. It appears to have been a temporary forerunner of the sanctuary. It was in this tent that Moses would have communed with God (see verses 8-11).

This 'separation' typified the end result of sin (Isaiah 59:2). It is separation from God

Jesus experienced this separation on the cross. When crying out “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, He experienced the full horror of being separated from His Father (Matthew 27:46). This He did so that

you and I need not experience it. His was a substitutionary death (sacrifice). The atonement He made at Calvary was vicarious. It was made on our behalf.

To be able to offer us eternal life, this is the price that He and His Father had to pay. It was the experience of separation from each other. This was the wages that sin had earned (Romans 6:23). Jesus was paying the price of sin. This is sin that you and I have committed.

Moses continued to plead with God. He was told that he had found grace in God's sight. Nothing was said though about the people (verses 12-15). Moses was not satisfied. He continued His interceding by saying to God

"For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." Exodus 33:16

Moses was pleading for God's grace to be manifested. The Scriptures tell us that God replied to Moses saying

"... I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." Exodus 33:17

In His mercy - and in response to Moses' continuing intercession - God had promised to go with the people. This He did in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Again God was extending grace (unmerited favour) to the Hebrews. They did not deserve His presence. This was something that by their sin they had forfeited.

Moses was a type of Christ. In order to save his people he offered his own eternal life (Exodus 32:33). He had pleaded (interceded) for his people - and God had listened. God listens to the prayers of the righteous. Their prayers accomplish much (James 5:16-18).

Christ pleads for His people. It is because of this that God's wrath is turned away from us. If it were not for Christ's intervention, God's glory would by now have consumed us. We owe everything to God's mercy.

Moses was still not satisfied. He said to God "... shew me thy glory" Exodus 33:18). God responded by saying

"... I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Exodus 33:19

God kept His promise. The Scriptures tell us (this was after Moses, under instruction from God, had hewn out two more tables of stone and had taken them up into the mountain)

"...the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6

This is God's glory. It is His character.

In appreciation of God's mercy, the only thing left for the people to do was to go to Him in repentance and ask Him to forgive their sin. As individuals they could also ask God to instil within them a new spirit and the power in the future to do what He asks. There and then, at the foot of Mount Sinai, a person could enter into the new covenant experience (relationship) with God. They now appreciated what it meant to be under grace. They were now ready to appreciate the new covenant.

It is only when we realise that the only thing we deserve (by our works) is to be consumed by God - also when we realise it is only because of God's mercy that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:21-23, Malachi 3:6) - that we will begin to appreciate the terms of the new covenant. We will then realise how merciful, kind, loving and compassionate is the God we serve. We will then begin to serve Him aright. Jesus is God's mercy.

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## Chapter 10

### The new covenant – active in Old Testament times

That the new covenant (God's covenant of grace) was in operation (active) before Jesus died is evident for a number of reasons.

First of all is the fact that we are told in Scripture that Abraham kept all the commandments of God (Genesis 26:5). This is something he could not have done of himself. To accomplish this he needed the indwelling (the restoration) of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:27). The restoration of the Holy Spirit is the covenant of grace. It is that which God does for us that we cannot do of ourselves. It is this that enables us to live out God's law in our lives (keep God's law). It is then we become temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16). Without God's Spirit we cannot keep God's law.

The Scriptures tell us that Enoch, who was born over 1000 years previous to the flood, had such a close walk (relationship) with His Creator that he was taken without experiencing death (Genesis 5:22-24, Hebrews 11:5). This will be the experience of God's people who remain alive immediately prior to the return of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). They will be translated without experiencing death.

It would not be reasonable to say that without God's help, those living in 'Old Testament times' could keep God's commandments whilst those who lived following Christ's death could only accomplish it with God's help (by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit). That really would be a conundrum. This requires us to believe that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that God's people in the Old Testament kept God's commandments. The law was in their heart (Deuteronomy 6:5-7, Psalm 37:31, 40:8, 119:34, Proverbs 3:1, Isaiah 51:6-7)

We are also told that in Old Testament times, forgiveness of sin was freely available to everyone. People asked God for forgiveness and mercy. They knew it was available to them (Exodus 32:32, Numbers 14:18-20, 1 Kings 8:30-39, 50, Psalms 25:18, 32:1, 78:38, 85:2, 86:5, 130:4, Jeremiah 36:3, Daniel 9:19, Amos 7:2). As David wrote

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Psalms 32:1-2

Forgiveness is a foremost attribute of God. He delights in mercy and forgiveness. The prophet Micah wrote

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.” Micah 7:18

At Sinai, when Moses asked God to reveal His glory, the Scriptures tell us

“And the LORD passed by before him [Moses], and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:6-7

Isaiah wrote these often quoted words

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:6-7

In the Old Testament, there was surety of salvation. One of the oldest patriarchs exclaimed

“If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. ... For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and

mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” Job 14:14, 19:25-27

Job looked forward to a resurrection from death. On the same theme the prophet Isaiah was also led to write

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ... Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” Isaiah 25:8-9, 26:19

As the Psalmist and the wise man wrote

“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” ... “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me” ... “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.” Psalms 17:15, Psalms 49:15, Proverbs 14:32

Through the prophet Isaiah God had counselled

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” (Isaiah 51:6-8)

Looking down to the end of time the prophet Daniel made this observation

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Daniel 12:1-2

Those living in Old Testament times knew of God’s salvation. They knew about life eternal. They may not have understood it as fully as we do today but they had the assurance of it. As God has said through the prophet Hosea

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” Hosea 13:14

Interesting are the different translations of this verse. One translation says

“I will save them from the power of Sheol; I will deliver them from death, O death, where is your victory? O Sheol, where is your sting? Consolation is hidden from my eyes.” Hosea 13:14 George Lamsa translation of the Peshitta

Paul probably had this verse in mind when he wrote

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

Perhaps it was the Psalmist whom summed it up the best. He wrote



“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.” Psalm 130:2-6

How very true are these last words:- “... with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.”. This is the very essence of the new covenant. It speaks volumes of God. It reveals the very nature of His character (what He is truly like). Obviously God's people living in Old Testament times knew what God is like. We must remember though that whilst God is always eager to forgive the penitent, He will “by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7).

From the above, it can be seen also that people in Old Testament times believed in a resurrection from the dead. In the time of Christ the sect of the Sadducees did not believe it but the Pharisees believed it. This was an ongoing dispute between the two parties (see Matthew 22:33, Acts 23:6-8).

In speaking of the faith of those who lived before Christ died, the writer of Hebrews penned these words

“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; **that they might obtain a better resurrection**: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, **received not the promise**: God having provided some better thing for us, **that they without us should not be made perfect**.” Hebrews 11:35-40

We read here that all those who died in faith had “received not the promise”. It is said that “without us” they would not be made perfect. They believed in “a better resurrection”.

The 'final perfection' comes on the resurrection day. This is when the dead and living will together be given immortality (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). None of us have yet received immortality. We shall receive it together with those who died in faith before us. Our vile bodies then will be changed to the likeness of the glorified body of Christ (Philippians 3:21). Mortality would have put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

The “promise” spoken of here refers to the promise of a saviour to come. All those mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 (often called the roll call of faith) died having faith in the promise but never actually seeing it fulfilled. We are of those who have had this privilege. In this respect we are greatly blessed above those living before Christ died.

So how was it possible for the new covenant to be effective before Jesus died? The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews provides the answer. He tells us

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. **For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself**, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, **confirmed it by an oath**: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:” Hebrews 6:11-18

The new covenant was effective before Jesus died because it existed by the promise of God. It was as valid then as it is now.

Isaac was born not because of anything Abraham and Sarah had done (or could do) but because God had promised it. When they were still childless, God had made the promise that through Abraham (and his posterity) the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 15:1-6, 17:1-8, 18:11-18, 21:1-7).

God's promise was fulfilled. He had made it with an oath. When Abraham showed that he was willing to obey God by sacrificing Isaac, God appeared to him saying

“... By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:16-18

This was God's “promise” and His “oath”. These are two immutable (changeless) things “in which it was impossible for God to lie”. Through ‘the seed’ (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 3:8-9), God had promised to redeem the human race. This He did through His own Son (John 3:16, Romans 8:3, 32). No one else contributed to what God has done. It is totally His work. The only access (way) to God's grace is through Christ (Romans 5:1-2). He is “the way, the truth, and the life”. No one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Christ is God's grace bestowed. He is God's grace personified.

It is by believing what God says and partaking of the new covenant that a person has the assurance of eternal life. This has been the same since the fall of man. Those living in Old Testament times were assured of salvation because they believed the promise of God. They trusted (had faith in) God. It is exactly the same in New Testament times (since Christ has died).

To the individual therefore, the difference between the covenants was not so much a question of time but of personal experience. Instead of depending upon one's own self and one's own promises to provide (produce) an acceptable righteousness with God (which always ends in failure), a person could have faith in God's provisions. Never has a sinner's righteousness saved a person, neither has it ever contributed to a person's salvation. All has been accomplished through faith in God. All those saved will be saved by Christ's righteousness. Salvation is ours through faith (Romans 1:16, 5:10).

Faith is as indispensable to the New Testament Christian as it was to people before the cross. This is not faith that God will provide salvation through the merits of a sacrificed Saviour but faith that He has accomplished it (fulfilled that which He promised). We are to act on (live by) that faith. Righteousness comes through faith. This is whether it was in Old Testament times or now in New Testament times. Time has made no difference as to how we obtain Christ's righteousness. Whilst faith cannot save, it is the means by which we lay hold of God's promises. It is through faith we can take hold of God's hand. It is through faith that God will lead us into His kingdom. Faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). It comes through hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). As the prophet Habakkuk wrote, “the just shall live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4).

In the Old Testament, the promise of a saviour to come was typified by the sacrifices. The entire sacrificial system was to show how God dealt with the sin problem. It was to reveal a coming Saviour from sin – also the work He would do as our High Priest. It was to show God's willingness to forgive sin.

The difference between the two covenants therefore was that the old covenant was dependant on the promises of people whilst the new covenant was dependant upon the promises of God. Hence the writer of Hebrews explained

“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.... But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” Hebrews 7:22, 8:6

This “better covenant” is the new covenant. It is through this covenant (a covenant of grace) that God delivers His people. Hence we are saved (justified) not by works that we have done but by faith in this grace (Romans 5:1-2, Titus 3:7). This was Abraham's experience (Roman 4:16).

The Scriptures tell us concerning Abraham



“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6 (see also Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6)

As Christians, this is also to be our experience. All those of the same faith as Abraham will be saved. We will all be heirs of his seed – children of the promise (Romans 4:16, 9:8, Galatians 3:7, 29). Like Abraham, we will be saved through believing God’s promises (Romans 4:13-25). We are justified freely by faith without the works of the law (Romans 3:24-5, 28, 4:13, 5:1, Galatians 2:16, 3:11). God counts faith as righteousness (see Romans 4:5). As it says in the epistle to the Hebrews

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Hebrews 11:4

Notice here that God tells us that in bringing this sacrifice, Abel “*obtained witness*” that he was righteous. It does not say that by bringing this sacrifice he *became* righteous. God had declared Abel righteous when he first believed. It was this that led Abel to bring the sacrifice in the first place. It was faith in God. This is a faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6). Cain’s offering was nothing more than a thank offering (see Genesis 4:3-7). It fell short of an offering for sin.

Abel was not declared righteous because of his works but because of his faith. It is at the point of faith when God declares each of us righteous (see Genesis 15:6, Psalm 32:2, Romans 1:16, 3:21, 3:25, 3:28, 3:30, 4:5-6).

It was the same with Abraham. It was not after circumcision - nor at the point of circumcision - that God declared him righteous but prior to it. It was when Abraham first believed what God had told him (Genesis 15:3, Romans 4:3). The act of circumcision simply testified of Abraham’s faith (see Romans 4:9-12). This is exactly the same as Abel’s sacrifice said of Abel.

The idea therefore that during Old Testament times a system of law prevailed which since the time of Jesus has been replaced by a system of faith (or grace) finds no place in Scripture. During Old Testament times (before Jesus died), as in New Testament times (since the death of Jesus), faith was the determining factor. It was through faith that people received the righteousness of Christ.

This is where some have become confused. They believe that ‘Old Testament times’ is equivalent to the Old Covenant – also a system of law keeping – whilst ‘New Testament times’ is equivalent to the new covenant and faith in God’s grace. This clearly is not the case. This confusion, as stated in the introduction to this study, has contributed to some believing that God’s command to keep His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) holy is not applicable to ‘New Testament Christians’. Those who reason this way say that this is ‘Old Testament’ requirements and has nothing to do with the Christian faith. They say that this type of commandment keeping came to an end when Jesus died. It is here they make a very serious error.

Both covenants call for obedience to the revealed will of God. It is how this obedience is produced that is different. We can either attempt to do it of ourselves (the old covenant way) - which will always end in failure - or we can allow God to do the work within us (the new covenant way). Under the terms of the new covenant, God writes His law in our hearts. He puts His Spirit within us. This is why we keep His law. We walk in the newness of spirit and of life (Romans 6:4-5, 7:6). We are renewed in the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:21-24).

Through the merits of Christ, the new covenant provides for justification with God (Roman 4:25, 5:16-18). This is something outside of our power to do. We cannot provide our own justification. It is God that justifies (Romans 3:24-30, 4:25, 5:1, 5:18, 8:31-33).

Only Christ’s righteousness commends us to God. Our works do not play a part in our justification (Philippians 3:9). We are saved through our faith in Christ’s righteousness. Our salvation is not faith plus works (Romans 3:28, 4:13, Galatians 2:16). Salvation is a gift (Romans 3:24). If we needed to add works to our faith (for our justification) then salvation would be a reward and not a gift (Romans 4:4, 14). We are justified with God at the point of faith (Romans 5:1, Galatians 3:11).

The new covenant also enables us to live a life in keeping with God's will. If at times we fail to do it, forgiveness is available (1 John 2:1). We are under grace not under law (Romans 6:4-5).

God saves us (justifies us) through the merits of the sacrifice of His Son (Romans 4:9). He then produces righteousness within us. This righteousness shows in the things we do. It shows in obedience to God's commands. Like the patriarchs of old, we receive justification through faith (Romans 3:24, 5:1, Galatians 3:8-9).

The works of Abel and the works of Abraham, testified they were righteous (John 8:39, Hebrews 11:4). Their works witnessed (testified) of their faith. The same can be said of all the other 'Old Testament witnesses' (see Hebrews 12:1). Just as their works testified of their faith, our works will testify of our faith. Faith without works is dead, being alone (James 2:17).

Jesus is our Saviour from sin. He is the propitiation (vicarious atonement) for our sins. He is our mercy seat (see Exodus 25:17-22). In the sanctuary, the mercy seat covered the (broken) law of God (Exodus 25:16-17, 30:6, 40:8). Christ's death paid the penalty (price) for the broken law. For those who place their trust in Him, those who come to Him in true repentance and confession, His righteousness will cover their past transgressions. In Old Testament times, God communed with humanity from the mercy seat (Exodus 25:22, 30:6, Numbers 7:8-9). Here dwelt the Shekinah – the visible manifestation of the very presence of God. God continues to communicate with us through His incarnate Son (Hebrews 1:2).

To become our righteousness, Christ was made to be sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). To those of us who have faith and trust, He is our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 3:26, Philippians 3:9, 1 John 1:2, 2:2, 4:10). There is nothing we can add to His sacrifice that would make us more acceptable to God (Galatians 2:21). We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:7). He is our peace with God (Isaiah 53:5 see also Romans 5:1).

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## Chapter 11

### An objection answered

Some may object to the reasoning that the new covenant was effective (in force) prior to the death of Christ. As proof of this they sometimes cite the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. This is where he wrote

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” Hebrews 9:16-17

At a quick glance, this may sound as though prior to Christ’s death, the new covenant was not effective (not operative) but those who take this view overlook the fact that the same writer explained (as we read above)

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise **the immutability of his counsel**, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:” Hebrews 6:17-18

God had promised that He would defeat Satan (Genesis 3:15). He had promised a saviour from sin. His promises are absolutely sure. The outcome therefore, in the mind of God, was absolutely sure. The only problem is of course that we do not have the mind of God. We therefore need to have faith in His promises – which is only the same as saying have faith in God Himself. It is this faith that will take us safely through to His kingdom. It is this faith that also gives us peace with God (Romans 5:1). Notice here that in order to show “**the immutability of his counsel**”, God confirmed it “**by an oath**”. This was to show that there is no possibility of His promises failing.

I realised that if taken at face value (meaning without giving it much thought), Hebrews 9:16-17 could easily be taken to contradict the conclusion I had drawn from Scripture. This conclusion is that the new covenant was effective (active/in force) before Jesus died (see above). This led me to research these verses further although I did not realise at that time, where this would lead me.

The first thing I encountered was that John Wesley, in his commentary on the New Testament, said this about Hebrews 9:17

“Hebrews 9:17. After he is dead - Neither this, nor after men are dead is a literal translation of the words. It is a very perplexed passage.” (*John Wesley’s notes on the New Testament*)

Needless to say, John Wesley (who preferred to study the Greek text rather than English translations) found this passage of Scripture somewhat puzzling (unclear). He did say though that ‘after death’ (KJV ‘after men are dead’) is not a valid translation. When researching further I found that a number of commentators had the same or very similar thoughts. From what I could see therefore (and this was from the very beginning of my research), this text was not as straightforward as some think it to be – also as some English translations make it appear to be. I could see it was deserving of further study.

One commentary made this observation (this was after saying that in the Greek text, Hebrews 9:16 and 17 are one sentence)

“Verse 17 provides the grounds for what was stated in v. 16 as evidenced by the use of *gar*, “for.” The Greek phrase *epi nekrois*, “when somebody has died” is difficult to interpret. Literally the entire clause reads: “for a covenant/testament is confirmed upon dead [bodies]. The phrase *epi nekrois* should not be translated “at death” as is often the case, since there is no evidence for this, according to Lane. The preposition means “on the basis of” regardless of the meaning of *nekrois*”. (*David L Allen, ‘The New American Commentary, Hebrews’, page 481*)

To a degree, this is much the same as John Wesley concluded. Notice the author says that the words in verse 17 are stated *because* of what is written in verse 16. Notice too he refers to these verses as speaking

of something being 'confirmed' (ratified) rather than something that happens 'after death' or 'at death'. We will return to this point later.

I did notice that various commentators made the observation that this verse reads better 'over the dead' or 'over corpses' or 'on the basis (because) of dead' (bodies) rather than 'at death' or 'after death'. This would invalidate the idea that the writer of Hebrews is saying that a covenant is only effective 'after' or 'at death'. Some point out that the word 'only' cannot be derived from the Greek text (various English translations say 'only after death' or 'only at death' etc.). I also found that many had concluded that the word 'men' cannot be derived from the Greek of this text (it is a supplied word). This was becoming quite an intriguing passage of Scripture.

According to some commentators, the preceding verse (verse 16) would better be read such as these translations here

"For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established" Hebrews 9:16  
English Standard Version

"In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it," Hebrews 9:16 New  
International Version

"Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead."  
Hebrews 9:16 New Living Translation

"For where there is a will, the death of the one who made it must be proven." Hebrews 9:16 Net Bible

"For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity come in." Hebrews 9:16  
Douay Rheims

These translations do not give the same rendering as the KJV ("For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator"). They accentuate more on the idea that death must be 'proven' or 'established'. Read them again and you will see what I mean.

Regarding this verse, the renowned Biblical Scholar F. F. Bruce made this comment (emphasis original)

"It is important to notice that v.16 does not say that he who makes the covenant must die, but that **it is necessary to prove** (his) **death** (GK. Pheresthai meaning 'brought forward', 'presented', 'introduced upon the scene', 'set in evidence'). Traditionally this was effected through the slaying of some animal 'introduced' by those entering into the covenant." (*F. F. Bruce, The International Bible Commentary, 1986 edition, page 1523*)

Concerning the Greek word 'pheresthai', David Allen, whom we quoted above, wrote the following

"The meaning of the word pheresthai, "to prove," can be interpreted in three different senses: (1) In the sense of "offering" within a sacrificial context; (2) "to be represented," or (3) in the sense of "bringing something forward." The word is never found extra biblically in relation to "will" or "testament." (*David L Allen, 'The New American Commentary, Hebrews', page 481*)

It would appear therefore that the writer of Hebrews is making the point that at sometime, the covenant/testament maker had to produce (the proof of) a dead sacrifice (a covenant-victim) – or as we might say today, produce a certificate of death (proof of death). In other words, at sometime, the promise had to be proven (shown) to have been ratified (made secure) by death.

The Greek word here translated "will" or "testament" is 'diathéké'. This word can mean either 'a covenant' or 'a testament'. I found that many differences of opinion prevailed as to how, in these verses, it should be rendered. Some say that the writer of Hebrews is making use of both aspects of the word (playing on words) whilst others disagreed with this reasoning. John Wesley commented on this in his notes on Hebrews 9:16. He wrote

“I say by means of death; for where such a covenant is, there must be the death of him by whom it is confirmed - Seeing it is by his death that the benefits of it are purchased. It seems beneath the dignity of the apostle to play upon the ambiguity of the Greek word, as the common translation supposes him to do.” (*John Wesley’s notes on the New Testament*)

Wesley appears not to think very much of the idea that the author of Hebrews was playing on words. In this verse he also picks up on the idea of confirmation. We will return to this point later.

Others reasoning along the same lines pointed out that nowhere in the New Testament, nor in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), is ‘diathéké’ used to denote a last will and testament therefore if in this verse this is the way the writer of Hebrews was using it, then it is the only place in Scripture where this happens. This is quite an important observation.

I also noted that the observation is made that up to this point, each time the author of Hebrews uses ‘diathéké’, its usage can only refer to 'a covenant' situation – also that every time he uses it after this verse it is the same. Why therefore, so it is reasoned, should he switch here to it meaning a last will and testament? I found also that there was a strong argument in favour of the author meaning 'an arrangement' or 'disposition' or 'disposal' of a thing. We shall see this shortly.

Whichever it is though, one thing is sure. This is as David Allen wrote in his commentary

“Whether one chooses the translation of “covenant” or “testament” for diathéké, the point of Heb 9:16-17 is to show the necessity of the death of the covenant-maker/testator for the covenant/testament to be ratified.” (*David L Allen, ‘The New American Commentary, Hebrews’, page 481*)

Notice it says here “to be ratified”. It does not say to be made effective. Again, rather than anything else, this is speaking in terms of confirmation.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on Hebrews, had this to say about this verse

“For where a testament is - A learned and judicious friend furnishes me with the following translation of this and the 17th verse: -

"For where there is a covenant, it is necessary that the death of the appointed victim should be exhibited, because a covenant is confirmed over dead victims, since it is not at all valid while the appointed victim is alive."

He observes, "There is no word signifying testator, or men, in the original. Διαθεμενος is not a substantive, but a participle, or a participial adjective, derived from the same root as διατηκη and must have a substantive understood. I therefore render it the disposed or appointed victim, alluding to the manner of disposing or setting apart the pieces of the victim, when they were going to ratify a covenant; and you know well the old custom of ratifying a covenant, to which the apostle alludes. I refer to your own notes on Gen 6:18 (note), and Gen 15:10 (note). - J. C." (*The Adam Clarke Commentary. Volume 6 page 711, 1832*)

Here it is said that the death of the victim needed to be “exhibited”. This is in keeping with the translations of this verse we have seen above. Note also the reference to “the disposed or appointed victim” (instead of the word testator) - and the remark “alluding to the manner of disposing or setting apart the pieces of the victim, when they were going to ratify a covenant”.

This is directing our thoughts to where God made the promise (covenant) to Abram that he would make of Abram's seed a great nation (even though at the time, Abram was childless). When Abram asked God for a sign, God told him to gather certain animals. It then says that Abram took these animals “...and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not” (see Genesis 15:1-10). We are then told concerning these dissected (divided) animals



“And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:” Genesis 17:18

This 'passing between the divided parts' was God's sign (pledge) of a covenant. Remember too the remark made by F. F. Bruce (see above) when referring to the establishing of a covenant. He said “Traditionally this was effected through the slaying of some animal ‘introduced’ by those entering into the covenant.”

Clarke's commentary continued

“Mr. Wakefield has translated the passage nearly in the same way.

"For where a covenant is, there must be necessarily introduced the death of that which establisheth the covenant; because a covenant is confirmed over dead things, and is of no force at all whilst that which establisheth the covenant is alive." This is undoubtedly the meaning of this passage; and we should endeavor to forget that testament and testator were ever introduced, as they totally change the apostle's meaning.”(Ibid)

Again we see the idea of 'introduction' (of death) and confirmation (“a covenant is confirmed over dead things”).

Apart from Hebrews 9:16 and 17, the Greek word translated (in the KJV) as 'testator' (diathemenou) is used 5 other times. It is translated in the KJV as 'appoint' and 'appointed' (Luke 22:29), 'made' (Acts 3:25), 'make' (Hebrews 8:10) and 'make' (Hebrews 10:16). Notice it says here “we should endeavor to forget that testament and testator were ever introduced, as they totally change the apostle's meaning”. This is most significant because most appear to interpret this verse based upon the idea that the writer is making reference to a testator – also his last will and testament.

As can be seen, the idea is still maintained that a covenant is not of force whilst the one who made the covenant is alive. We shall return to this point later, suffice to say for now that it must be borne in mind that whilst they are still alive, covenant/testament makers have the right to do with their possessions whatever they wish to do with them. In other words, before they die, also in accordance with an existing covenant or a testament, a person can legally distribute his or her possessions. To put it another way, the possessions of a covenant/testament maker are not only distributable at death. They are distributable prior to death. This is especially when talking in terms of a covenant – which is the main issue here. This is why the idea of a last will and testament can be extremely misleading. Normally we only think of this as being effective after death.

In Old Testament times, God's promised new covenant blessings were available to people when they were alive. The people did not have to wait until Jesus died before they received these blessings. As we noted above, in Old Testament times, people received the power to keep God's commandments. They had God's law written in their hearts. They also received forgiveness when they repented of sin they had committed. Nevertheless, these blessings were only available *because* of what Jesus would achieve through His death at Calvary. These blessings existed by the promise of God.

This does not mean that further (added) blessings were not available after Jesus died. Throughout earth's history, ever since the first sin, there has been a gradual unfolding of the plan of salvation. In its train, this has brought new light and blessings (from that light). This will continue through to when Christ returns for His people. As new light comes, the blessings increase.

Concerning the Greek word 'diatheke', Albert Barnes (a renown Presbyterian minister) in his notes on the Bible, makes this observation

“The word διαθήκη diathēkē - "diatheke" - is not what properly denotes "compact, agreement," or "covenant." That word is συνθήκη sunthēkē - "syntheke" or in other forms σύνθεσις synthesis and συνθεσίας synthesias; or if the word "diatheke" is used in that signification it is only remotely, and as a secondary meaning;” (Albert Barnes' notes on the Whole Bible - Hebrews 9:16)

He went on to say about this same Greek word

“It is not the word which a "Greek" would have employed to denote a "compact" or "covenant." He would have employed it to denote a "disposition, ordering," or "arrangement" of things, whether of religious rites, civil customs, or property; or if used with reference to a compact, it would have been with the idea of an "arrangement," or "ordering" of matters, not with the primary notion of an agreement with another.” (*Ibid*)

It was immediately after the fall that God first made known His covenant (Genesis 3:15). This was His 'arrangement' to redeem mankind from sin. This was not an agreement (a contract) He had made with humanity. Simply put, it was His promise.

God knew that Christ would die at Calvary therefore on the basis of His promise (that could not fail), He could, before Christ died, 'legally distribute' amongst men and women the benefits of His death. Some may say that God could not do this but who are we to tell God what He can and cannot do?

Barnes also made this comment

“It is no less remarkable that neither in the Septuagint nor the New Testament is the word διαθήκη *diathēkē* - “diatheke” - “ever” used in the sense of “will” or “testament,” unless it be in the case before us. This is conceded on all hands, and is expressly admitted by Prof. Stuart; (Com. on Heb. p. 439), though he defends this use of the word in this passage” (*Ibid*)

I found that concerning these two verses in Hebrews chapter 9, there was much to ponder. Many commentators seemed to think the Greek was difficult understand. It was following this realisation that I began a search of what the Greek words in these texts actually mean. I did realise that this 'word research' would not be an end in itself but it would contribute to my understanding.

Early English translations of verse 17 are very interesting. Take these for example

“For a testament is conferred in deed men; ellis it is not worthe, while he lyueth, that made the testament.” Hebrews 9:17 The Wycliffe Bible (1395)

“For a testament is confirmed when men are dead: for it is yet of no value, as long as he that maketh the testamet is alyue.” Hebrews 9:17 Bishop's Bible (1568)

“For upon death only is it confirmed; because while he who made it lived there is no value in it.” Hebrews 9:17 John Etheridge translation of the Peshitta

Notice the first part of this verse. The words “of force” and “after men are dead” etc. (as in the (KJV and other versions) are noticeably absent. Instead it is said that death confirms (makes sure) a testament. According to these translations therefore, a testament, after the person who made it is dead, is made secure (confirmed) by reason of death. In other words, the testament-maker's death makes it unalterable (unchangeable/guaranteed).

The Greek word ‘*bebaios*’ translated in the KJV as 'of force' actually means ‘firm’ or ‘sure’ or ‘secure’. It has nothing to do with the idea of something becoming (being made) effective. Its root word is ‘*bainō*’ meaning ‘standing on firm (solid) ground’ or ‘to walk where it is solid’. It is also used in legal terms. It can mean a legal guarantee or a warranty deed. It is reasonable to assume therefore that this is why those early translations (see above) translated this word as 'confirmed' (made sure).

In this same epistle, the author used ‘*bebaios*’ 4 other times. Three of those times (in the KJV) it is translated ‘steadfast’ (Hebrews 2:2, 3:14, 6:19). The other time it is used (KJV) it is translated ‘firm’ (Hebrews 3:6).

In all the other places where it is used (in the KJV), it is translated with exactly the same meaning. In 2 Corinthians 1:7 it is translated ‘steadfast’ whilst in Romans 4:16, 2 Peter 1:10 and 1:19 it is translated ‘sure’. This gives the idea (in Hebrews 9:17) that the writer is saying death makes a testament/covenant ‘sure’, ‘firm’, ‘steadfast’ or ‘secure’ (confirms it).

In studying this verse, I did take note of how it was translated in the New American Standard Version (NASV). This is because this version (a revision of the 1901 American Standard Version), otherwise known as the New American Standard Bible (NASB), is said to be an excellent word for word translation. In this translation, 'bebaios' is translated as the following

Romans 4:16 (guaranteed)

2 Corinthians 1:7 (firmly grounded)

Hebrews 2:2 (unalterable), 3:6 (firm), 3:14 (firm), 6:19 (steadfast), 9:17 (valid)

2 Peter 1:10 (make certain), 1:19 (more sure)

Did you notice that all these texts render 'bebaios' much the same way (sure/secure/firm etc.) except in Hebrews 9:17 where it is translated as 'valid'?

Here is how the NASB translates Hebrews 9:17

[“For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.” Hebrews 9:17 New American Standard Bible](#)

In this translation, the last part of the verse says a covenant “is never in force while the one who made it lives”. It seems to me that one way or another, most modern translations attempt to show that the new covenant was not in operation before Jesus died.

The word translated 'force' is from the Greek word “ischuó”. It comes from the Greek word 'Ischus' which basic meaning is 'I have strength' or 'I am able' or 'I am in full health' or 'I am strong' etc. This gives the idea (in this context) that the 'strength' (force) of a covenant or testament is the death of the covenant-maker. It makes sure (secure) the promises. This is because the promises are, at the death of the covenant-maker, made unchangeable. This is its full force (full strength). Death would make a covenant legally valid (establish it as legally binding) and unchangeable.

It is also interesting that a number of commentators say that in the Greek text, the last section of Hebrews 9:17 (KJV – “is of no strength at all while the testator liveth”) is in the form of a question. Some translations have it that way. The author could be saying therefore that “a covenant is made sure (secure and unchangeable) upon the establishing of death (the bringing forth of a covenant-victim). This is it's (force) strength (isn't it?)”.

Taking everything into consideration it appears to me that it is more than likely that the writer of Hebrews was not conveying the thought (in Hebrews 9:17) that the new covenant only became effective (active/in force) after the death of Christ (meaning that it was not in force before Christ died), rather he was saying that in order to make it legally valid and binding (to be in full health/full strength/full force), a covenant-maker would need to produce (exhibit) a dead body. This 'corpse' would confirm/secure (guarantee) the covenant. The covenant would then, after being ratified, be unchangeable.

In the normal way of things, the only way to feel absolutely confident regarding someone's promises (as in a last will and testament or a covenant etc.) is to wait until the will/covenant-maker is dead. This is because it is then that these promises become unchangeable. This though is not the way it is to be with God's people and God's promises. As we have seen, in Old Testament times, God's people believed (had faith/confidence in) God's promises before they were fulfilled. They did not say they would only believe them after they had been fulfilled. This would have been more like disbelief than faith. As Job exclaimed

[“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.” Job 13:15](#)

To these faithful patriarchs, because they were confident that God would keep His promises (would not break His covenant), trusted His promises implicitly. As far as they were concerned, these promises were as sure as a 'done deal'.



Faith believes the unseen (Hebrews 11:1). How would it have been if Abraham had said to God (when God made promises to him), "I will believe it when I see it"? Would God have counted this as faith?

Those who brought a sacrifice and offered it to God were testifying of their own sinfulness. They were also testifying of their need of a saviour and their faith in God's promises. This promise was of a saviour to come (Hebrews 11:4). This is assuming of course they brought the sacrifice in faith. If it was not offered in (mixed with) faith then it was meaningless (Hebrews 4:2, 11:6).

In Hebrews 9:17, the writer was pointing out that to seal or confirm God's covenant of grace (Genesis 3:15) - meaning to bring it to full health (full strength) - Christ had to die. He was saying that Christ could not remain alive and complete His covenant. This covenant therefore (the new covenant), even though it had always existed by the promise of God, eventually had to be confirmed (ratified/made valid and legally binding) else it would never have been of eternal value. This was accomplished by the promised death of the sacrificial victim.

Both covenants were sealed with blood. The old covenant was sealed with the blood of animals. The new covenant was sealed with the blood of God's only-begotten Son. The writer is making clear that unless death of the covenant-victim is established, the promise will simply remain a promise. To make the covenant sure therefore (to seal the promise), this death was absolutely necessary. It could not have remained a promise forever.

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## Chapter 12

### Trouble in Galatia

A very serious problem arose in the church at Galatia. False teachers had come amongst the members. Paul wrote a 'very stiff letter' to the Galatians. It contained a very serious warning. Immediately following his introduction (therefore capturing the attention of his readers from the very start) he wrote these words

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." Galatians 1:6-7

Notice carefully the words of Paul. He said he was amazed at how quickly the believers in Galatia had been "removed from him" who had called them "into the grace of Christ". This was a very serious situation. It was a salvation issue. According to Paul, these Galatians had been led to accept "another gospel" - which as he said was not really another gospel because there is only one gospel. This is the gospel of grace (unmerited favour).

So what was this 'other gospel'?

This was a gospel of 'meritorious works' - something diametrically opposed to Christians being called "into the grace of Christ". Paul therefore wrote to the Galatians saying

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:16

In principle, the apostle's letter to the Galatians was much the same as his letter to the Romans. Some scholars believe they were written around the same time. Both letters were certainly dealing with the same subject. It was to show the relationship between law and grace. It was to show that we are saved through faith and not through the works of the law. Works have their place but they never contribute to our salvation. The issue was also concerning the relationship that existed between the Jewish faith and Christianity.

Christianity grew out of Judaism. How these related to each other though, after the Jewish nation rejected the Christian faith, was very often a matter of contention. Jewish converts to Christianity often found it difficult to let go of some of the practices that God had imposed upon the Jewish nation. This is understandable. We shall return to this point later.

The problem with the Galatians was not that they were meticulously keeping the Ten Commandments. No one, especially Paul, would say it was wrong to live a blameless moral life (although he would have said that even this would not contribute to a person's salvation). A reading of the letter reveals they had been persuaded to believe that God wanted them to keep certain of the ceremonial law.

In his letter, Paul is presenting a principle. This is that there is no law in existence that will save us (Galatians 3:21). He is also saying that no amount of 'law keeping' will save us (whatever laws we keep). We are saved through a living faith in God. We are therefore justified by faith without the works of the law (Romans 3:28, 5:1, Galatians 2:16, 3:11, 3:24).

After saying that he himself lived by the "faith of the Son of God" he wrote

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Galatians 2:21

In order to 'achieve' salvation, the Galatians were turning to "weak and beggarly elements" (Galatians 4:9). This resulted in them observing "days, and months, and times, and years" (verse 10). These were times and appointments imposed by God on the Jews. They were not to be imposed upon the gentiles (Acts 15:4-21). In seeming exasperation and passion for the truth of the gospel, also fearing for the eternal safety of the Galatians (see verse 11), Paul said to them

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Galatians 3:1-5

These were very strong words. They were a strong rebuke to the belief that salvation could be earned, bought or contributed to by works. Our only hope is faith in Christ's righteousness (Philippians 3:9). The answer to Paul's question therefore needs not to be stated.

It is the work of Christ at the cross that reconciles to God (Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Colossians 1:20). Our works do not contribute to this reconciliation. It is Christ's grace that reconciles. Christ died for us whilst we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). We are ordained to good works but this is the product of our salvation not the means to it (Ephesians 2:10). This is the gospel. We are not to be ashamed of it (Romans 1:16-17). We cannot contribute to our salvation. All that we can do is to have faith in Christ who by His death at Calvary made our reconciliation with God possible. This can all be traced back to the Father's love for humanity (John 3:16).

Paul then cites Abraham as an example of righteousness by faith. He says

“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Galatians 3:6-7

The same writer went on to say that God had said He would even justify “the heathen through faith” therefore those “which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (verses 8 and 9).

He then explained that those who do not continue to keep the law are cursed. This of course would be everyone because all of us have sinned and none of us can keep God's law of ourselves. This is why he concluded

“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:11-14

Except for Jesus, no one in their life has ever perfectly lived out God's law. It is evident therefore that through the things we do (through the law), none of us of ourselves can merit salvation (Romans 3:20). This is whether in Old Testament times or New Testament times.

The law condemns each one of us therefore (as far as the law is concerned) we are ‘cursed’ (see Galatians 3:10). This is why Christ came and died as our substitute. He became that curse “on a tree” (verse 11). This was so that we may have eternal life. This was in fulfilment of God's promise (Genesis 3:15) – also God's eternal purpose in Christ (Ephesians 3:9-12). It was faith in this promise that God counted as righteousness (Romans 4:5-6, 9, Romans 5:1 Hebrews 11:4).

Paul then refers to the promise given to Abraham. This is the new covenant. This was a reaffirmation of God's original promise in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). God confirmed it with Abraham. He then says, after saying the seed is Christ

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Galatians 3:17-18

Paul was making clear that the law, given by God 430 years after the promise was made (confirmed) to Abraham, could not in any way annul (make void) the promise (Galatians 3:17). Our inheritance (as

Christians) explained Paul, came not through the law but through the promise (verse 18). As Christians we are heirs of that promise.

This being the case - and taking into consideration why Paul was writing this letter in the first place - there was only one question to be asked. 'What then is the purpose of the law'? (see Galatians 3:19).

Paul addresses this question by saying

“...It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” Galatians 3:19

At Sinai, two main types of law were given. One was the moral law whilst the other was the ceremonial law. Both were given “because of transgressions”. Needless to say, this is especially with respect to the moral law. This is because the moral law reveals sin. It has always done so and always will do. This is exactly the same as Paul was to point out to the believers in Rome (see Romans 5:20).

Sin is a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). On the other hand, the ceremonial law told of God's provision for dealing with the sin problem. It told of His love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness. It foretold of a saviour to come and the final disposition of sin. It was the gospel in type.

It also, because it was designed to show that an innocent sacrifice must die because of a broken law, highlighted the sacredness - also the unchangeableness - of the 10 Commandments. Thus the two laws, ceremonial and moral, were very closely linked. The light therefore shining from the ceremonial law made the Ten Commandant law glorious. When a person realised they had broken the moral law, true repentance would lead them to the sanctuary.

Paul's statement therefore can be said to have a dual application. Both laws were “added” at Sinai. Both were designed to draw a person to realise his or her need of a saviour. Both were designed to lead a person to have faith in Christ.

Interestingly, the word “added” is translated from the Greek word ‘prostithemi’. It can also mean to ‘lie with’ or ‘place (lay) along side’. This gives the idea of the law being placed alongside (added to or appended to) the promise.

The apostle then explained that the law was not against the promises of God because “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (verse 21). As it is, there is no law that can give life and righteousness. If there were, it would have made the promise unnecessary. Paul reasoned therefore “the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” (verse 22).

Paul then reasoned with the Galatians concerning the law. He wrote

“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Galatians 3:23-25

Faith is not exclusive to us living this side of the cross. A reading of Hebrews chapter 11 clearly shows this much. Faith is very much an ‘Old Testament’ experience. Those living in Old Testament times were justified by faith (Romans 4:1-9, 16, Hebrews 11:1-2, 4-5, 13, Galatians 3:8-9).

Some have reasoned that those living in Old Testament times needed more faith than those living in New Testament times. This is because (so it is reasoned) more faith is needed to believe a promise will be kept (in the future) than is needed to believe it has already been kept. There are pros and cons on each side of this question.

In directing our minds to the first sacrifice recorded after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the writer of Hebrews explained

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Hebrews 11:4

The law (ceremonial and moral) had a work to do. It was to lead a person to Christ. The moral law shows that we are sinners in need of a saviour whilst the ceremonial law (system) revealed in type, God's provision for the salvation of mankind. It revealed a sacrificed saviour and His work as our high priest. When Abel chose to offer this sacrifice he was acknowledging that he was a sinner in need of salvation. He showed too his faith in God's promise of a saviour to come. It showed that he was righteous. He believed God.

The moral law (the Ten Commandments) has not changed. It does exactly the same work today as it has always done. It leads us to appreciate God's covenant of grace. The ceremonial law, having fulfilled its task when Christ died, is no longer obligatory. To still 'keep it' would invalidate its purposes. After Christ had come it would be pointless to keep it. Type had met reality (the anti-type).

Unfortunately, from Paul's 'schoolmaster' illustration, some have concluded that after faith in Christ has come, the Ten Commandments are no longer applicable (because as Christians we are under grace) but this is a mistake. To a degree, this faulty reasoning has come about because of a wrong understanding of the apostle's use of the Greek word 'paidagogos' (translated 'schoolmaster').

In a Greek or Roman household, a 'paidagogos' was a trusted slave. He would act as a boy's companion and guardian. He was a leader and a governor (custodian) of boys. The word 'schoolmaster' gives the wrong impression. He was not the teacher (Gr. didaskalos) but someone who would lead (accompany) the child to the teacher. The word 'paidagogos' literally means 'boy leader' (a leader of boys).

The 'paidagogos' would help govern the boy's conduct. As the boy was growing up (maturing), the 'paidagogos' would show him what was right and what was wrong. When the boy had fully matured (grown up into manhood) he would no longer be answerable to (governed by) the 'paidagogos'. In Greek and Roman literature, in his daily function as a governor of boys, the 'paidagogos' was often presented as strict and severe. He would rebuke and discipline the child.

The law, particularly the moral law, functions much the same. It tells what is right and what is wrong. It also, because it demands perfection, is strict and severe (unbending). This is why it condemns us (Romans 3:20, 1 John 3:4). It therefore leads us to realise our need of a saviour. This is when faith comes (to a person) and conversion takes place. Those who realise their need for Christ are repentant. They turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. Thus, acting as a 'paidagogos', the law leads us to Christ (the teacher).

When faith comes to a person, the moral law still exists. It is just as applicable after conversion as it is previously (we shall return to this point in the next section). If after conversion I steal or tell lies or take God's name in vain etc., I have just as much broken the law (sinned) as I did before conversion. This does not mean that if I sin I lose my salvation. This is because I am under grace and not under law. The only way I will lose my salvation is if I fail to repent of that sin and fail to ask for God's forgiveness. In other words, if I fail (refuse) to take hold of the new covenant promises I will eventually be lost. The Word of God tells us

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:” 1 John 2:1

This is wonderfully comforting although we must not abuse this privilege. It is in keeping where John had previously written

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9

This was the message of the sanctuary. It was God's provision for dealing with the sin problem – revealed in types and symbols (see also Hebrews 7:25).

Whilst God's desire for each of us is that we do not sin, if we do happen to sin then we need to repent, confess and ask God for forgiveness - and then believe God's promise that we are forgiven of that sin. We are not to doubt God's promises. It was exactly the same in Old Testament times. As the wise man wrote,

“whoso confesseth and forsaketh” his sins “shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). We must not regard God as a tyrant waiting to condemn and punish the sinner. We must see Him instead as a kind father urging a wayward (naughty) child to be sorry for their waywardness. We must remember as Jesus said, “For the Father himself loveth you” (John 16:27). Peter reminds us

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

In similar fashion the prophet Joel wrote

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” Joel 2:12-13

The Psalmist wrote the same

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy....The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.” Psalms 103:8, Psalms 145:8

This is referring to the 'Old Testament God'. He is not the sort of God that many have made Him out to be.

Conversion is when God writes the moral law (the 10 Commandments) in our hearts. It then becomes the springboard for everything we say and do. The 10 Commandments therefore do not disappear at conversion. They are transferred to the heart as a living principle. As Christians we establish God's law (Romans 3:31, 1 John 5:3).

From that time on a new spirit governs us (from within) but even with us as Christians, the commandments of God are still the detector of sin (1 John 4:3). This is how we can explain to Christians of other denominations that God still requires His people to keep His seventh day Sabbath (Saturday) holy. We can show it to them in God's written Word (Exodus 20:8-11). We would not be able to do this if the law is only written in our hearts.

Those who reason that in writing to the Galatians, Paul was saying the Ten Commandments were 'done away with' have not really reasoned this through very carefully. I say this because when writing to the believers in Rome, the apostle said that by faith, Christians upheld and established the law (see Romans 2:13, 3:31, 7:7, 12-14, 22). Paul was not saying one thing to the believers in Rome and something exactly the opposite to the believers in Galatia. It is those who are still carnally (earthly) minded (the unconverted) who are not subject to the law of God (see Romans 8:5-8).

Some may object by saying that Paul said “the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Timothy 1:9). This is very true but he was not in any way disparaging the law or saying that after we have faith in Christ it is not necessary to keep it.

Paul upheld the law of God. He said that as Christians we establish the law (Romans 3:31). Certainly he would not have been speaking at variance with what Jesus taught. Jesus said that the moral law would continue unchanged as long as time would last (see Matthew 5:17). Our Saviour came to magnify God's law and make it honourable. This is also the purpose of His followers (see Isaiah 42:1-4, 21). In fact Jesus said

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:19

The one thing that Paul did emphasise, which is only the same as concluded in this study, is that law keeping cannot contribute to our salvation. This is something it was never intended to do. Its purpose, because it reveals God's standard of righteousness, was to show us we are sinners in need of a saviour and to lead us to Christ.



Paul's remarks therefore ("that the law is not made for a righteous man") cannot be used to mean that he was leading Christians to ignore God's law (1 Timothy 1:9). As he said previously

["But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;" 1 Timothy 1:8](#)

This lawful use is to reveal righteousness and show us what is sin (Romans 3:20, 5:20, 7:7, 1 John 3:4). It also reveals we are sinners in need of Christ (Galatians 3:24). It is not meant to save us. At least not in itself.

When we become Christians, we know from within what is right and what is wrong. This is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The ceremonial law was also a 'paidagogos' (schoolmaster) to bring people to Christ. It governed them until the seed should come. It should have led the Jews to Christ. It should have shown them that sins needed to be confessed and that a sacrifice would be needed to pay for those sins. It should have revealed to them the love and compassion that God has for fallen humanity. Unfortunately, rather than depending on the One to whom the sacrifices pointed, many appeared to become dependant upon the sacrifices themselves (Romans 9:31-32). As the writer of Hebrews said in one place

["For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."](#)  
[Hebrews 10:1-4](#)

The sanctuary services were only a shadow. They were not the reality. In reality it is Christ's sacrifice (His blood) that atones for sin. This has always been so. When Jesus died, these shadows were nailed to the cross with Him (Colossians 2:14). Type had met anti-type.

In the wilderness, fiery serpents had bitten the Israelites and because of it people were dying. God provided the cure. He told Moses to make a serpent of brass and hold it up on a pole. He said that all those who would look up at the serpent would live (Numbers 21:6-9). There was no power in the serpent. It was a look of faith that saved people. If they had not looked they would not have lived.

The uplifted serpent represented Christ. All we need to do is to look to Him in faith and we too shall live. It was thus that Jesus reasoned with Nicodemus (John 3:14-15).

It was the same with the sacrificial services. Neither the system itself or the sacrifices had any more power in themselves to save than did the uplifted serpent. They were types. They represented Christ. They were to lead the people to have faith in Christ. The sanctuary therefore was also a schoolmaster (a paidagogos) to lead people to have faith.

God did not delight in an abundance of sin offerings. This was misunderstanding why the sacrificial system had been given. He would rather that the people had not sinned (1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 1:11, Micah 6:6-8).

The Jews did not seem to 'grow up'. They did not seem to 'mature'. They should have realised that the shedding of animal's blood could never have taken away sin. It seems that most still remained under the schoolmaster (under the law) (see Romans 9:31-32). In other words, they tended to depend upon the sacrifices they could see and touch rather than on the One to whom the sacrifices pointed that they could not see. In order to depend upon the latter they would need to exercise faith.

If the believers in Galatia had continued to believe that their 'law keeping' could contribute to their salvation, they would have eventually made null and void the sacrifice of Christ. This is why Paul spoke so sharply to them.

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## Chapter 13

### An illustration (conversion and the law)

When writing to the believers in Rome, Paul explained the function of the moral law (the Ten Commandments) in relation to conversion. He gave an illustration in which he said

“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Romans 7:1-4

In this illustration there is a husband, a wife and 'another man'. As we shall see, this 'other man' is Christ. There is also the law of God.

Paul says here that law (God's law) has dominion (rule/lordship) over a person as long as he or she lives (see also 1 Corinthians 7:9). Here is brought to mind the moral law (the 10 Commandments). This in itself is enough to show that he was not saying the moral law was 'done away with' when Christ died. Paul wrote this letter some twenty or so years after the death of Christ.

In this 'marriage illustration', Paul is highlighting the situation of the wife. He is saying that until her husband dies, the (marriage) law binds her to him. The apostle explains that if she marries 'another man' whilst this husband is still alive, she is committing adultery (breaking the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment). On the other hand, if the husband dies, the law concerning marriage does not apply to her (in her unmarried state). As he puts it, “**she is free from that law**”. She would then be free to marry another man without becoming an adulteress (without being condemned by the law).

So during this transition from her first marriage to her second marriage, what happened to the law? In particular, what happened to the law that said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14)?

The answer is that nothing happened to it. It just wasn't applicable. It maintained its place and held its dignity. When the woman became married to the second husband, the law (against committing adultery) once again applied. It was as much in force in her second marriage as it was in the first. In between marriages it was not relevant (did not apply).

In this marriage illustration, the husband represents our 'old man' of sin. To continue to acknowledge him as though he is still alive can only (eventually) mean eternal death. Paul is saying that if he (the old man of sin) is 'dead' when we become married to Christ (the other man) then we are not committing adultery. It is this 'old man' therefore (the first husband) that needs to be crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). How is this accomplished? Paul explained, we “**become dead to the law by the body of Christ**”, or as he put it to the believers in Galatia, we are crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20).

It is by beholding Christ on the cross that crucifies our old man of sin. When we look to the Saviour in faith, we must consider our old nature (the old man) to be dead (Romans 6:1-7). By beholding we shall become changed (2 Corinthians 3:18). We must look and live.

When that 'old man of sin' is dead we shall serve God in a new spirit. As Paul continued to say after his marriage illustration

“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Romans 7:5-6

This is the difference between when we are not born again and when we are born again. Prior to conversion we are “in the flesh” so we serve the law in the flesh. This can only result in failure and sin. When we are born again we “serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”. This does not mean we shall never sin again (1 John 1:21) but it does mean our relationship towards the law changes. No longer are we condemned by it but we serve it in love and delight. It just becomes natural to do it. This is without even thinking about it. It becomes our way of life – our first nature. Christ is living within.

In the marriage illustration, the second marriage is ‘legal’ if the first husband (the ‘old man’) dies. In the second marriage, the law is as applicable as it was in the first marriage. In the transition between marriages, the law does not change. It just wasn’t applicable.

It is exactly the same when a person experiences conversion. When the ‘old man’ of sin dies we are free to marry Christ but in that ‘second marriage’, God’s law is as applicable as it was when we were married to the ‘old man’ of sin. It is still a detector of sin. In our conversion though it did not apply. We became dead to the law by the body of Christ. We were saved without the works of the law.

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## Chapter 14

### The perfect allegory

When writing to the Galatians, Paul gave an illustration comparing the old and new covenants. It is the perfect allegory. He wrote

“Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Galatians 4:21-26

The apostle is here likening the two covenants to the production of Abraham's two sons (Ishmael and Isaac). As we noted above (as was said by the writer of Hebrews), Isaac was the son of promise. Ishmael was different. He was conceived because Abraham and Sarah chose to do it their way (not waiting for the promise to be fulfilled in God's way) therefore Paul said that Ishmael was “born after the flesh”.

Ishmael was born because Sarai (later to be called Sarah), believing herself to be too old to bear a child, gave to her husband Abram (later to be called Abraham), her handmaiden Hagar as a wife (Genesis 16:1-3). This was so that Hagar could produce a child to fulfil God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:1-6). They probably believed they were giving God a 'helping hand'. In this matter they did not trust the power of God. Thus, by their own works, they sought to do what God said that He would achieve in and through them as He had promised. By their actions therefore, albeit maybe unconsciously, they sought to deprive God of the glory that was His in miraculously giving them a son.

When we do things 'our way' instead of God's way we will always be doing things 'after the flesh'. This is simply human works. If we are led by God's Spirit we will do things God's way. We will be filled with the righteousness of Christ (Romans 8:1-4). God's people are children of the promise. They are the sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14). They have passed from death unto life (John 5:24, 1 John 3:14).

To believe that by our own efforts alone we can fulfil God's will, we are falling into the same trap as did the Hebrews at Mount Sinai (with the old covenant). Instead, we are to depend upon (have faith in and act upon) what God tells us. In other words, we need to depend upon what God has promised to do within us - also believe what He has already done for us - through the sacrifice of His Son.

Righteousness does not come to us through the law (or through law keeping). It comes to us through faith. This is faith in Christ. The only thing that recommends us to God is Christ's righteousness. This was the crux of Paul's message to the Galatians. The keeping of God's law (whatever the law) does not contribute to our salvation (2 Timothy 1:9). Our salvation is totally the work of God. We receive it not by works, nor faith plus works, but through faith alone. As Paul explained to the believers at Ephesus

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

If we make any attempt to justify ourselves by our works, then we shall have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4). If something is of grace (as is the gift of eternal life) then it cannot be of works (Romans 11:6). Works and grace are opposites (see Romans 4:4). As Paul wrote, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus (Romans 6:23). Works cannot obtain a gift else it would not be a gift. It is either one thing or the other but not both (Romans 4:4). Christians are under grace not under law (Romans 6:14-15).

Our redemption is through the blood of Christ (Matthew 26:26-28), Ephesians 1:7). It is through His grace we are justified and forgiven. We have salvation because God kept His promise. Our salvation comes through faith in God's promises.

## Chapter 15

### The Epistle to the Hebrews

In the epistle to the Hebrews, the author refers to the two covenants therefore it is important that in this study we should take a look at what he has to say about them. Before we do this though, it would be beneficial to consider the epistle itself. Background is always very important.

It is only reasonable to assume that this epistle (letter) was written prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. If it had been written following its destruction, then surely the author would have mentioned it. This is especially as a large portion of the letter is taken up with explaining its functions and purposes. As it is, there is no mention of it being destroyed.

Perhaps not so noticeable is that in certain places, the writer speaks of the temple as though it is still functioning. Various statements are written 'present tense' (for example see 8:4, 10:3, 11). If it had not been functioning (if it had been destroyed by the time the epistle had been written), then one would have thought the writer would have written 'past tense' – or at least give some indication that it had ceased to function.

Primarily, the writer's intended audience would have been Jewish Christians. The writer assumes his readers to be very well acquainted with the Christian faith (see Hebrews 3:1, 4:14-15, 6:1-3 etc.) - also with the sanctuary and its services (and practising them). The writer is very conversant with both.

For quite some time I wondered whether the author was addressing Jewish converts who were 'not letting go' of the sacrificial system or whether he was writing to those who were returning to it. I am now of the conclusion that in the main it was the former – meaning he was mainly addressing those who were 'not letting go'. This is even though they had accepted the Christian faith. This would not be surprising. In fact it would be in keeping with what Luke tells us in Acts.

When referring to the events of Pentecost (50 days from the resurrection of Christ) he related

[“Then they that gladly received his \[Peter's\] word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:41](#)

We are not told what percentage of these [“three thousand souls”](#) were gentile and what percentage were Jewish but it is more than likely that the vast majority were Jewish. These baptisms were primarily the result of the seeds sown by Jesus. He had sown these during His earthly ministry. Others were reaping where the Saviour had sown.

Up to this time, the disciples had mainly confined their labours to the Jews. This was in keeping with the instructions of Jesus (Acts 1:4-8). They were first to go to the lost sheep of Israel. The Jews had been ordained to be the first to hear the good news of a crucified and risen Saviour. We need to remember that until the end (fulfilment) of Daniel's 70-week prophecy, the Jewish nation was still God's chosen people (see Daniel 9:24-27). This would extend to AD 34.

We need to remember too that many of these Jews would have been visiting from all parts of the world so they would have taken the message of Christ's death and resurrection back to where they lived. So it was, by the Jewish believers in Christ, the message of Christianity was taken far and wide.

In Acts 4:1-4 we are told that the result of Peter and John's preaching in the temple was that “many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand”. These would have been mainly Jews. Those that were added are referred to as “multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). Luke also tells us that as time progressed, “a great company” of the Jewish priests accepted the Christian faith (see Acts 6:7).

On the downside, we also learn from Luke that “certain men” of the sect of the Pharisees had come from Jerusalem teaching that unless a person “be circumcised after the manner of Moses” and “keep the law of Moses” they would not be amongst the saved (see Acts 15:1-5). This caused Paul and Barnabas great concern. As Luke records, these two apostles “had no small dissension and disputation” with these

Pharisees. In fact this led to both of them, along with other members of the church, to go to Jerusalem and seek counsel concerning this question. It can only be concluded therefore that at the time of this incident, the church had not yet settled this matter. Paul referred to this when writing to the church in Galatia (see Galatians 2:1-2). Exactly the same problem had been happening there.

Those Jews who were saying that all Christians (gentile and Jewish) should be doing these things (else they could not be saved) were obviously participating in these ceremonies themselves so it can only be concluded that there were Jewish converts to Christianity (Jewish Christians) who were still keeping certain rites and rituals associated with Jewish law.

Luke also records that later, on another occasion, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (this was just prior to Paul being taken prisoner) after they had heard Paul's report, said

“... Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.” Acts 21:20-22

There is no record of Paul teaching that the Jews should abandon any of the laws of Moses therefore any accusations in this direction were false. What we do find is that he upheld the Jerusalem counsel that it should not be imposed on the gentiles who had adopted the Christian faith. It appears that in allowing the Jews to go on doing these things without hassling them, Paul was being very understanding. He must have realised it was not easy for them to stop doing them.

At this time amongst Christians, tension must have been a little strained. Some, particularly the Jewish converts, were urging for a 'keeping' of the Law of Moses whilst others were adamant it was unnecessary.

So in summary, what can be said about the Epistle to the Hebrews? We can say it was written

- During the first decades of the Christian era but prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70
- After many thousands of Jews had converted to Christianity – many of whom were of the priesthood.
- When some Christians were still practising the rites and rituals etc. bound up in the sanctuary.
- When some Christians were insisting that the gentiles should be keeping the 'Jewish faith'.
- When some Christians were saying it was not necessary for gentiles keep the Jewish rituals.

It is very possible that one of the main reasons why this letter was written was to show why, after the death and resurrection of Christ, it was not necessary for Christians (Jewish or gentile) to keep the laws pertaining to the sanctuary. It was to encourage, because the sanctuary service had outlived its purpose, the 'letting go' of these things. It was very important that these laws should be regarded as obsolete. This is because the keeping of them was a distraction from faith in the One to whom the entire system had pointed.

It is also likely that the intent was to prepare the Jewish converts for the coming destruction of the temple in AD 70. This would be a momentous happening for them (probably beyond us to imagine today). They needed to understand that those things pertaining to the earthly sanctuary had, in the ministry of Christ, been fulfilled and that at that time, decades after He had returned to Heaven, He was, as our High Priest, continuing His work in the heavenly sanctuary. This was the true sanctuary – the 'authentic article' upon which the earthly sanctuary had been modelled. As the writer of Hebrews explained, Christ is

“A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:2) also that “... Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:” (Hebrews 9:24)



Once this truth was understood and accepted, it would, in times of despair and trouble (such as the forthcoming destruction of the temple), be an anchor to the soul. The destruction of the temple was in keeping with the prophecies of Jesus (Matthew 24:1-2).

Coming too was a terrible persecution. This letter would strengthen their faith - also the faith of all Christians since that time. This is especially regarding the work of the Saviour prior to His promised return to earth (John 14:1-3, Acts 1:9-11, Titus 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, Revelation 1:7 etc.). All of this needed to be understood. This was not just for them but for future generations of Christians.

Before we move on, there is something important worth noting.

As we noted above, there were those who were saying that unless a person be "circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1). To the Jews, the sign of circumcision was very important. It was part of their national identity. When this was not urged upon the gentiles there was controversy.

The reason why I mention this is that if Paul and the other apostles had been teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment was not binding upon gentiles (as some suggest they were teaching), then there would have been an even greater uproar. This is because as we know, the Sabbath was extremely important to the Jews. They often condemned Jesus for the way He regarded this day (Matthew 12:1-2, 10, Mark 3:1-2, Luke 14:1-6, John 5:1-18, 9:16). As it is, there were no accusations against any of the apostles that they were teaching that a 'new day' (such as Sunday in honour of the resurrection) had been instituted to replace Sabbath. This is further evidence in itself that the apostles made no suggestion that God's moral law (the 10 Commandants) had undergone change and that Christians were now obliged to keep another day (such as Sunday) instead of the seventh day Sabbath (Saturday). On the basis of this, no appeal can be made to the New Testament for a change in the Sabbath day (from Saturday to Sunday).

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## Chapter 16

### Ready to vanish away

It can quite easily be imagined just *how* some of the Jewish Christians felt about the gentiles not being urged (by the decision of the church council at Jerusalem) to keep certain ceremonial laws (see Acts chapter 15). It is also quite easy to understand *why* they would have felt this way. These ceremonies had been part and parcel of the Jewish faith – imposed upon them by God – for almost 1500 years. Can you imagine how you would have felt if you had been a Jew? It could not have been easy to stop doing the very things you knew (and had in writing) that God had ordained to be done. You would have needed a very good reason to stop doing them. It would not be surprising to learn that those ‘campaigning’ that the sanctuary services etc. had become outdated (obsolete) would have been thought to be committing blasphemy.

From beginning to end, the entire sacrificial system was figurative of what Christ would accomplish by His ministry. This was as our sacrifice and our High Priest.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, this earthly system had accomplished its work. It was now ready to disappear. Amongst other things it had told of the coming of the Messiah, His earthly ministry, His sacrifice – also His work in the true sanctuary in Heaven (Hebrews 9:1). It was a teaching aid to show how God dealt with the sin problem. It typified the plan of redemption.

Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as our high priest, is the one thing our Saviour never spoke about with His disciples. It can easily be imagined therefore that this would have been one of the things He had in mind when He said to them

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” John 16:12-14

The earthly sanctuary system itself, whilst still holding valuable lessons concerning the ministry of Christ, had now, after His death, become obsolete. This though, as has already been said, could not have been easy for the Jews to accept. This must have been one of the reasons why the epistle to the Hebrews had been written. It was to explain why this system needed to disappear.

This had to be done with wisdom from on high. It had to be shown that Christ had fulfilled the purposes of the earthly sanctuary therefore its functions were now unnecessary. Such I believe was the writer's intent.

Whilst it would be too much to comment on the whole book here, we will take a look at that which is relevant to our study.

The writer had first presented Christ as ‘the express image’ of God's person (Hebrews 1:1-3) also that God had addressed Him as God (verses 8-9). Christ had also been presented as co-Creator of the world (verses 2 and 10) – also that He upheld all things by the word of His power (verse 3). He had been shown therefore to be greater than the highest of the angels and therefore worthy of worship (verses 4-6). The writer also made clear that Christ had been made human for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9-10, 14) – also that in the incarnation, although still fully divine, He had taken upon Himself all the liabilities and limitations of fallen humanity (verses 16-18). This is the mystery of the incarnation.

All of this paved the way for the author of Hebrews to present the man Jesus as greater than the man Moses through whom the sanctuary laws etc. had been given (see Hebrews chapter 3). This provided the basis to show that Christ and His Heavenly ministry was far greater than the earthly sanctuary with its earthly priesthood. The words of Moses were ‘idolised’ by the Jews (John 5:45 8:3-5, 9:28-29).

Much more could be said about the opening chapters to this epistle but space is limited. Suffice to say that the writer presented Christ as a “high priest” not according to the law (Hebrews chapter 7).

As he so clearly stated

“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.” (Hebrews 7:12)

The law spoken of here must be the ceremonial law. This cannot be applied to the moral law (the 10 Commandments). The entire context demands it has application only to the laws of the sanctuary.

For the Jewish converts, even though they had accepted Christ as the messiah, this change was obviously not easy to accept. It was in keeping though with where Paul had said

“For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.” 2 Corinthians 3:11

Some have concluded that Paul is making reference here (“that which is done away”) to the 10 Commandment law itself but this is a misunderstanding. In this study we have seen over and over again that he said that Christians *uphold and establish* God’s moral law. In fact Jesus said that the moral law (as opposed to the sanctuary law) would abide forever (Matthew 5:17-19).

The story is told of a man who commissioned a tailor to make him a new suit. The tailor showed him some bales of cloth and asked the man if he liked any of them. The man chose one. He said it was perfect. The tailor then produced a suit he already had made of that same cloth. The man responded, “When I saw the cloth on the roll I thought it was perfect but now I have seen it made up, it looks even more perfect”.

This is how it is with the 10 Commandments and Jesus.

When we meditate on these commandments (as they are written by God’s own hand on two tables of stone) we can only say that in every sense of the word they are perfect but when we see them ‘made up’ – as lived out in the life of Jesus – we can only say how much more glorious they look.

It was the glory on the face of Moses that was fading away – not the commandments on the tables of stone. The commandments on the tables of stone were undoubtedly glorious but they too faded into insignificance when compared with the glory as seen in the keeping of them in the life and ministry of Christ. As glorious as the law is (written on tables of stone), its ministration spelt death to the sinner but the ministration of Christ, as typified by the ceremonial law, made the law more glorious. Christ brought life to the law. Without this ministration the law was - and still is - only a ministry of condemnation. Paul was here comparing two ministries - not two laws. One ministry was of the letter whilst the other was of the Spirit.

It is the same with us as individuals. When we allow the Holy Spirit to do the work within us that God desires to be done, we will not only be living in accordance with the letter of the law but also in its spirit. We will be living epistles of Christ dwelling within. This is the ministry of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6-9).

The ministry of the ceremonial law, typifying the realities of the ministry of Christ, was also glorious but it had to disappear. Through the death of Christ, this ‘earthly’ dispensation had come to the end (Colossians 2:14). That which remained though was far more glorious.

That which was ‘done away with’ was not the moral law (the 10 Commandments). This law will continue forever (Matthew 5:17-20). This is the law that we, as Christians, establish (Romans 3:31, 7:7, 8:4, 13:10, 1 Corinthians 7:19, 1 John 5:2-3). It is a law of love – the law that governs the universe. As was said above though, there was a very close relationship between the two laws. The ceremonial law brought light and glory to the moral law.

The writer of Hebrews sought to turn the eyes of those still participating in the sanctuary service towards a living Christ. He wanted them to have faith in the things that could not be seen and not depend on things that could be seen. He made it clear that the blood of animals, no matter how much of it was shed, could never actually take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). The only One who could forgive sin (and take it away) was the One to whom the sacrifices and the shed blood had pointed.

The earthly sanctuary, whilst once being an invaluable teaching aid to understanding the plan of salvation had now, after Christ had fulfilled its purpose, become a distraction. For once and for all it had to disappear. If it didn't, then there was a distinct danger of it taking away from Christ what He had achieved in fulfilling it. There had to be a full and complete dependence on the merits of a crucified and risen Christ. This must not in any way be diminished – which is what would have happened if the sanctuary service had continued.

In chapter 8 of this epistle, the writer brought to the attention of his readers the main point of what had been previously written. He said that Christ is our High Priest “who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”. He described Him as a “minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”. Then, after explaining that the earthly sanctuary service was an “example and shadow of heavenly things”, also that as a High Priest, Christ needed to have something to offer (see Hebrews 8:1-5) he explained

“But now hath he obtained **a more excellent ministry**, by how much also **he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises**. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” Hebrews 8:6-9

It was the old covenant (the covenant that God made with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai) that was faulty. This is because it was dependent upon the promises of men. The writer of Hebrews is comparing the two covenants. He is saying this “**better covenant**” is God's original covenant (Genesis 3:15). This is because it is dependent upon the promises of God – promises that never fail.

Here in this passage of Scripture, the writer is referring to the old covenant (the faulty one based upon the promises of men) as the “**first covenant**” yet we know it was not the first in time. He is just saying to the Jewish mind that if the covenant that God had made with the Hebrew people at Sinai (the first covenant) had been faultless – meaning if men could have kept their promises to obey God without God's help (without God's grace) - then there would have been no need for God's covenant (another covenant) – which as noted previously, is a covenant of grace. As it was (and still is), without God's grace (without God's help), no one can obey God. This is how it has been since Adam and Eve sinned. It will remain the same until Christ returns.

As we have seen from this study, the old covenant was doomed from the start. None of us can be saved under its terms because none of us, without God's grace, can possibly keep God's law.

The old covenant is a failed covenant. It failed because it was dependant on human promises and human effort (human works). God's covenant is different. This is His ministry. This is His work. It is dependent upon Him keeping His promises. This covenant enables a person to keep God's law. How is this accomplished? God explains

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Hebrews 8:10-12

The “**fault**” of the old covenant was not the promises themselves (promising to obey God), neither was it in what had been promised. The fault was with the people who made the promises. By themselves they could not do what they said they would do (obey God) therefore their promises were impotent. God has provided salvation for everyone through what He had said He would do (Genesis 3:15, John 3:16). This is His promise. This is His covenant. This is the new covenant. It is God's ministry. It is the ministry of the Spirit.

This last part of the covenant promise (“**and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more**”) will soon reach its fulfilment. This is when in the judgment, the sins of God's people are blotted out from the record books of Heaven (Acts 3:19-20). Thus will God's covenant reach its complete fulfilment (Jeremiah 31:34).

The writer's next remarks are very interesting. If you bear in mind that some of the Jewish converts were still practising the ceremonial laws – meaning still adhering to the rites and rituals bound up in the sanctuary worship – also that all these things were fulfilled in Christ – these words become very meaningful. The writer concluded

“In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

Take a look again at those last words. The writer is saying that the “old” is decaying and waxing old. He says it is “**ready to vanish away**”. In other words, it has not yet disappeared but it is poised to do so. He is referring to the ceremonies attached to the sanctuary. These are ceremonies that had been made obsolete by the ministry of Jesus. If that “**which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away**”, then this would include all the religious ceremonies attached to the sanctuary.

It is interesting that in this verse (verse 13), as it is in verse 7, the word 'covenant' is a supplied word – meaning it is not in the original text. It was added by the translators. It is the same with the next verse (Hebrews 9:1). This is because the translators believed it necessary (to add it) to be able to understand the text. Is this necessarily true though?

According to certain sources, instead of having the word 'covenant', various early translations of Scripture translate “**the first**” as being 'the tabernacle'. Concerning this I will quote some commentators – but remember – many of these would more than likely believe that when Christ died, a completely new covenant began that 'did away with' (abolished) the entirety of the laws that God had imposed upon the Hebrew nation. This of course would include the 10 commandments and the keeping of God's original seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday). They would say these were 'old covenant laws'.

John Owen in his commentary on Hebrews noted

“But many Greek copies do expressly read σκηνή, “the tabernacle.” So is the text expressed in Stephen's edition, wherein he followed sixteen ancient manuscripts, adhering generally unto the concurrent agreement of the greatest number; and the word is retained in the most common edition. But there are ancient copies also where it is omitted: and they are attested unto by all ancient translations, as the Syriac and Vulgar Latin; the Arabic supplying “covenant,” in the room of it. Wherefore Beza left it out, and is followed by the generality of expositors, as he is by our translators.”  
(*John Owen's Exposition of Hebrews*)

Other commentators made these observations

“Though almost all Greek copies have *Greek: skene*, tabernacle: yet even the Protestant translators add in a different print, *covenant*, as if *Greek: diatheke* was understood” (*George Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary*)

“Some copies read, πρώτη σκηνή the first tabernacle; but I suspect that there is a mistake as to the word “tabernacle;” nor do I doubt but that some unlearned reader, not finding a noun to the adjective, and in his ignorance applying to the tabernacle what had been said of the covenant, unwisely added the word σκηνή tabernacle. I indeed greatly wonder that the mistake had so prevailed, that it is found in the Greek copies almost universally “ (*John Calvin's commentary on Hebrews*)

“*Then verily the first covenant* — Many copies read here πρώτη σκηνη, *the first tabernacle*; but as that reading does not agree with Hebrews 9:2, Beza and Mill prefer the reading of the Alexandrian and other MSS. of good authority, which have πρώτη, leaving the reader to supply διαθηκη, *covenant*, from the preceding verse.” (*Benson commentary*)

“Our translators have introduced the word covenant, as if διαθηκη had been, if not originally in the text, yet in the apostle's mind. Several MSS., but not of good note, as well as printed editions, with the Coptic version, have σκηνη tabernacle; but this is omitted by ABDE, several others, both the Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Vulgate, some copies of the Itala, and several of the Greek fathers; it is in all probability a spurious reading, the whole context showing that covenant is that to which the apostle

refers, as that was the subject in the preceding chapter, and this is a continuation of the same discourse.” (*Adam Clarke commentary*)

As we noted previously, the two covenants are not two dispensations in time. In other words, 'the new' did not follow 'the old' like the New Testament dispensation followed the Old Testament dispensation. The latter two are dispensations in time but in themselves they do not constitute the two covenants. The new covenant, as we noted above, began (and was effective from) the time that Adam and Eve first sinned whilst the old covenant, an agreement between God and the Hebrews, was entered into 2500 years later at Mount Sinai. This is a failed (broken) covenant. No one can be saved by it. Its success was dependant on the promises of faulty humanity.

Returning our thoughts to Hebrews 8:13: It was the earthly ceremonial system with its ordinances and sacrifices that were appointed by God to illustrate the work that Jesus would do as our sacrifice – also as our High Priest – that was waxing old. What should also have been waxing old was the idea (the belief) that there was still value in keeping these earthly ceremonies.

If the sanctuary service had been fully understood by the Jews - and if they had seen that its ceremonies etc. would be fulfilled by the coming messiah - then it is more than likely that none of these Jewish converts to Christianity would have continued to participate in it. As it was, some were still 'hanging on' to these ceremonies (with maybe some even returning to them). This is even though the keeping of them had lost its original significance.

The problem was - if we can call it that - is that there is no specific command in Scripture not to do these things (or to stop doing these things). It was just a case of growing in maturity (growing up) to realise these things had to cease. This was spoken of though 6 centuries before Christ came. It can be found in Daniel's prophecy concerning the coming messiah. This is when he wrote (note the highlighted)

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: **and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease**, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” Daniel 9:25-27

The writer of Hebrews was calling those who were still participating in the sanctuary services etc. to mature (grow up) in their Christian experience (Hebrews 5:12-14). They were being called to see that all these things had been fulfilled in the ministry of Christ. A new and living way had now arrived (Hebrews 10:19-20). This was through the body (flesh) of Christ.

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## Conclusion

My conclusion to this study is no different than that which is written in the overview. This conclusion is that the new covenant was instituted when Adam and Eve first sinned. This is God's covenant. It is His promise. It is His arrangement to save mankind from the results of sin. It was – and still is – a covenant of grace. It is a covenant that is totally dependant upon God keeping His promise. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God invites us to participate in this covenant.

Under this covenant God redeems individuals. This is as they place their faith and trust in Him. Outside of this covenant there is no salvation. Anyone therefore, if they wish to have eternal life, need to come under under this covenant.

To enter into this covenant (with God) a person needs to have faith in God. This is a faith that seeks to be in harmony with Him and with His will for mankind. This covenant has always been available to mankind. It is not exclusive to those living since the time of Christ's death. All those who had faith in God, enter into this same covenant experience with Him.

The old covenant is different. This was an agreement that God entered into with the Hebrew nation at Mount Sinai. This covenant was completely dependant upon the people keeping their promises. They promised to do everything God asked them to do. Their standing with God therefore, under the terms of this covenant, depended upon their own works. Many as individuals have attempted to 'achieve' this covenant but all have ended the same way. They have all failed.

Christ is the only One who has achieved the perfection called for in the law of God. It is through His merits alone that we are accepted by God. His righteousness is attributed to us through the new covenant experience.

God desires us to be partakers of the new covenant, He delights in extending His grace and mercy to those who seek to be in harmony with Him. Whichever covenant we partake of though is entirely up to us. To partake of the new covenant we will need to have faith in God and trust as He says (Hebrews 5:9).

May God bless each one of us as we think upon these things.

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