

Hebrews 8:8-13 – The New Covenant

Jesus is our great high priest who ministers in the true dwelling place of God in heaven. Jesus' priestly ministry is much more excellent than the priestly ministry of the Aaronic priests. Jesus is also the mediator of a better covenant. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. The phrase "new covenant" is only mentioned in the Old Testament one time. It is explained in Jeremiah 31:31-34. These verses are quoted in Hebrews. The verses are the longest Old Testament quote in the New Testament. Unlike Psalm 95:7-11, the author of Hebrews does not spend much time explaining the Jeremiah quotation.

Read Hebrews 8:8-13.

In verse 8, with whom did God find fault? Verses 8b through 12 are a quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The quote is almost word for word with the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the LXX (38:31-34). There are some minor differences. Jeremiah 31:31 includes the phrase "new covenant". With whom did God establish the new covenant? Does the new covenant apply to Gentiles? Besides Jeremiah and Hebrews, where else is the "new covenant" mentioned? See Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. (8:8)

What covenant was mentioned in verse 9? What problem occurred with that covenant? ESV has "did not continue in my covenant". KJV and NASB are similar. NIV has "did not remain faithful to my covenant". BDAG says that "continue" could be translated as "persevere". What was the condition of that covenant? See Exodus 24:3-8. What did God say he would do if the people of Israel did not keep the covenant? See Deuteronomy 28:15-68. The phrase "old covenant" is only used once in the Bible, in 2 Corinthians 3:14. (8:9)

In verse 10, what does "after those days" refer to? How was the new covenant to be different from the Mosaic covenant? What was the contrast between how the Mosaic covenant was written and how the new covenant was written "on their hearts"? What is the difference between this and Proverbs 7:2-3 which says "keep my commandments and live; ... write them on the tablet of your heart". Did Old Testament believers have the law written on their hearts? What scriptural support is there? Do unbelievers have the law written on their hearts? See Romans 2:14-15. (8:10)

Where else in the Old Testament did God promise to be "their God" and that they would be "his people"? See Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 24:7, 32:38; Ezekiel 11:20, 14:11, 37:23, 27; Zechariah 8:8. In Exodus chapter 6, when Moses told the people of Israel, who were at the time slaves in Egypt, that God said he would be their God and they would be his people, the people "did not listen to Moses". In Leviticus 26:12, God being their God and they being his people was part of the blessings conditioned on obedience. (8:10)

Why don't people need to teach each other to know the Lord under the new covenant? Does that mean that we should do away with sermons and Sunday school classes? What does this verse mean? John 6:45 says "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me". Did Old Testament believers all know the Lord in the same way as New Testament believers? What scriptural support is there? What was to be the extent of knowledge of the Lord under the new covenant? (8:11)

Under the new covenant, how does God deal with the people's iniquities and sins? How did God deal with the people's sin under the Mosaic covenant? (8:12)

The writer of Hebrews found significance in the use of the word "new" in describing the covenant that would not be like the covenant at Sinai. BDAG says about the word "new" in this context; "in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. In such a case the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old". What significance did the writer of Hebrews give to the "new" covenant in contrast to the covenant at Sinai? BDAG says the word "obsolete" here means "make old, declare/treat as obsolete". What is the significance of the covenant at Sinai growing old and "ready to vanish away"? BDAG says "ready to vanish away" could be translated "is near destruction".

Richard Pratt Jr has an article on [ligonier.org](https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/out-old-and-new) (<https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/out-old-and-new>). I have some disagreements with his article. He argues that the "new" covenant isn't really new. He says of "new"; "Rather, it means "renewed," "renovated," "rebuilt," or "refreshed." In other words, God did not promise an entirely new covenant in Jeremiah 31." For the meaning of "new" as "renewed", he sights Isaiah 61:4, Ezekiel 36:26 and Job 29:20. Isaiah 61:4 is not a good example because it involves the verb form and not the adjective "new" like in Jeremiah 31. Ezekiel 36:26 argues against his definition. Here God promised to give a new heart which is described as "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh". That is not renovating the old heart. It is replacing the old heart with a new and better heart. The desire to turn "new" into "renew" is based on his desire to have a consistent covenant theology. In arguing that there is nothing "new" about the "new" covenant he says "Every man, woman, and child in Old Testament history who had saving faith like Abraham did had the law written on their hearts." He sights Deuteronomy 10:16 (a command to circumcise "the foreskin of your heart") and Jeremiah 4:4 (a similar command to circumcise yourselves and remove "the foreskin of your hearts"). A command for people to take action and obey is a far cry from God writing the law on our hearts. I don't think the writer of Hebrews would agree with Richard Pratt Jr in his understanding of a "renewed" covenant in Jeremiah 31. The point is that we are now under a new covenant and we are no longer under the covenant made at Sinai. The tabernacle, the priests, the sacrifices, the holy days were copies, patterns and shadows of the reality which was to come. Jesus Christ is the reality and fulfillment of all these things and now the tabernacle/temple is no longer needed. Neither are the priests, the altar, the sacrifices and the holy days. In Hebrews "new" covenant is not in contrast to the covenant that God made with Abraham. It is in contrast to the covenant at Sinai. The message of Hebrews is to not turn back to the Mosaic law but to fully embrace our new high priest, Jesus Christ, his priestly service on our behalf and the new covenant of which Jesus is the mediator.