

The New Covenant

With the tearing of the curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy place within the Temple¹, we have a visual or symbolic act of the New Covenant being ushered in. The Old Covenant sacrificial system was insufficient in atoning for the sins of man. God had established the old system with Moses, but through the prophets he revealed that it would not be enough to bring man to God in all righteousness. Through the prophet Jeremiah God tells us that one day there will be a new covenant:

*"The time is coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.
32 It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the LORD.
33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time," declares the LORD.
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

It is important to note that Jeremiah spoke this prophesy to the Southern Kingdom, the Land of Judah and Benjamin prior to the Babylonian Exile. In 586 BC Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians. The Northern Kingdom had already been carried off into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC, over a century before. While Jeremiah's prophecy speaks immediately to

¹ Matthew 27:51

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the time frame of the Babylonian Exile, his prophesy carries a secondary messianic meaning that is fulfilled in the time of Jesus and ultimately at his second coming. In the 1st Century AD, the people of Israel were looking for a Messiah who would usher in this new covenant with a newly restored kingdom. This new covenant was promised to both the House of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and the House of Judah (the Southern Kingdom), meaning that the messiah would return and restore the 10 lost tribes of the Northern Kingdom to their lands in Israel alongside the Southern Kingdom. No longer would they be two separate nations, but one.

The former covenant, *"the covenant I made with their forefathers"* (v.32) refers to the Mosaic Covenant inaugurated with the exodus from Egypt and fulfilled in the establishment of the nation of Israel when the Israelites took possession of the promise land as recorded in the Books of Moses. God promised to watch over Israel as a shepherd watches over his flock if Israel would abide by the laws God set forth in the covenant. The Covenant and its sacrificial system included the promise of another messiah to come who would be like Moses; and the sacrificial system itself and the holy days prescribed by God prefigured the fulfillment of God's salvation plan by that messiah to come. Part of the covenant included a series of "curses", or punishments, which would be brought upon those who persisted in violating the Law.² The final judgment incurred by persistently wayward Israel would be deportation into foreign lands. This judgment came upon the Northern Kingdom first in 722 BC, and later upon the Southern Kingdom with the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and the first temple (Solomon's Temple) in 586 BC. While the Mosaic Covenant set up a frame work through its sacrificial system to restore wayward Israel, it ultimately was not sufficient in drawing Israel close to God.

Through Jeremiah God described a New Covenant that would put his law in the hearts and minds of his people. No longer would his people need to be taught how to worship and honor God, they will have an inner knowledge of God and his standards. There would be a direct relationship between God and each individual. Ezekiel, also a prophet during the time of the Babylonian Exile, spoke of this new covenant. He spoke of both the restoration of Israel to its lands and that God would give each believer "a new heart":

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:24-27)

Prior to the New Covenant, the spirit of God would come upon only specific anointed individuals to fulfill work set forth by God. For example, the spirit of God came upon Samuel who served as God's prophet in the time of King David. The Spirit of God came upon Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. But now this new covenant promised the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, to all believers. The prophet Joel³ also spoke of the Day of the Lord when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the faithful and inaugurating the new kingdom under the new covenant:

²² Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28

³ Joel was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom, but several centuries before its exile to Babylon. It is believed that Joel was a prophet from 835-796 BC. *Life Application Bible Notes* (LABN)

*'And afterward,
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your old men will dream dreams,
 your young men will see visions.
 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29)*

A second very important aspect of the New Covenant concerns God's provision for the sins of mankind. With the previous covenant, the sins of the people brought upon them the curses that expelled them from the promise land. With the New Covenant, God will forgive Israel's sins and remember their sins no more. While God, who is both righteous and just cannot overlook sin; its penalty could be paid by a substitute. Instead of the continuous sin offerings presented every year at the temple God could provide a single offering in its place, once and for all time. In the Upper Room Christ announced that the New Covenant would be inaugurated with the blood of the covenant – His "*blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*"⁴. God had sealed the covenants with his people with the shedding of blood of animals – blood being the life force. Blood was shed first with Abraham⁵, later with Moses and the Mosaic Covenant⁶, and now with the Son of God and the New Covenant. The forgiveness of sin could only be part of the New Covenant because God provided the appropriate substitute to pay the penalty for man's sin.

Jesus' death is the final and perfect sacrifice that fulfills the sacrificial system instituted by God in the time of Moses. The sacrificial system pointed the way towards what God would eventually do for his nation through his messiah. Now that Christ has come and made the final offering, the New Covenant can be instituted. We will be looking closely at Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 today and focusing on why the sacrificial system wasn't sufficient; just how it is that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirement; and what that means for all who put their faith in Jesus.



Read Hebrews 9:1-28

Hebrews 9:1-7 describes for us the substitutionary sacrifice carried out by the High Priest on behalf of the nation of Israel in the temple. This was the system God set up for the atonement of sins. We are told in verse 9 that these offerings were not sufficient in clearing the *conscience* of the worshiper and they were something of a place holder until the time of the "new order", or New Covenant. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC) explains it this way:

The "regulations for worship" mentioned in verse 1 were now dealt with so that they underlined the insufficiency of the Old-Covenant service. Whereas the outer room of the tabernacle could be entered regularly by the officiating priests, it was only on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16) that the high priest entered the inner room (i.e., the "holy of

⁴ Matthew 26:28

⁵ Genesis 15

⁶ Exodus 12, 24

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holies") and then only with sacrificial blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. This restricted access clearly demonstrated that a true entrance into God's presence (symbolized by the most holy place) had not yet been disclosed. That at least was the message the Holy Spirit intended to communicate by this arrangement. The Levitical arrangements were designed to convey the idea that the true way to God did not lie in them. What this indicates for the present time is that the Old-Covenant sacrificial system did not meet human need at its deepest level. It could not clear the conscience of the worshiper. Hence the regulations which formed part of the observant worshiper's adherence to this system were chiefly concerned with externals which were only meant to apply until the time of the new order.

Old-Covenant rituals served for the ceremonially unclean and only made them outwardly clean. Something more is needed. Before we proceed on to the "something more", notice the mention of the "earthly sanctuary" in verse 1. Ancient Judaism firmly believed that the earthly sanctuary, temple, or tabernacle, was a copy of something more real – a heavenly sanctuary. It was a replica made of earthly materials of true sanctuary of God in the heavenlies⁷.

Returning to the "something more" being needed to cleanse the heart of the sinner beyond what the atonement sacrifice can provide, Hebrews 9 continues in verse 11 to explain what can cleanse the heart of the sinner. "When Christ entered the most holy place once for all by His own blood rather than by animal blood, He likewise demonstrated the superiority of His service because His blood had obtained eternal redemption. Thus the value of His sacrifice is immeasurably greater than the animal offerings of the Levitical arrangements. A perfect ransom price had been paid for human 'redemption,' and because it need not be paid again (this sacrificial act was "once for all,") that redemption is an "eternal" one."⁸ The sacrifices offered under the Old Covenant were sufficient only in that those who offered the sacrifices did so *by faith*. The belief of the individual offering the atonement sacrifice presented himself with the desire to be reconciled to God and God accepted that sacrifice until the true sacrifice would be offered in the heavenly sanctuary, and only Christ is that perfect sin offering.



Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-12, 19-22

The Law was never designed to take away sin. The Law and the sacrificial system cannot remove sin. Its purpose was to illustrate how to live in communion with God and mankind; and provided a way to atone for the failure of mankind to live peaceably in the communion. The Law had no way of making the person perfect or sinless; it could only offer a way to atone for sin until the New Covenant came. The yearly atonement sacrifices served only

⁷ God gave Moses very specific instructions upon the building and worshipping in the tabernacle; and later David provided very specific instructions on the construction of the temple. The belief being that God was the architect of the tabernacle/temple and the worship therein mirroring the sacred activities in the heavenly tabernacle.

⁸ BKC (Emphasis mine)

to remind the people they were sinful. What was truly needed was *forgiveness of sin* to assuage the guilt. "What they needed most was forgiveness — the permanent, powerful, sin-destroying forgiveness we have from Christ. When we confess a sin to him, we need never think of it again. Christ has forgiven us, and the sin no longer exists."⁹ As we are told in 1 John 1:9 "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*"

Verses 11-14 contrast the work of the Levitical priesthood with that of Christ, the true High Priest. "Levite priests could never sit down on the job since their sacrificial services were never completed. But Christ's sitting "at the right hand of God" is both a signal that His sacrifice was offered for all time and also that He can now confidently await final victory over His enemies. The words "for all time" (*eis to diēnikes*) are translated "forever" in verse 14). Thus by a single sacrifice—in contrast with the many sacrifices offered by the priests "day after day" and "again and again... He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy". The translation "are being made holy" sounds like a continuing process. But this ignores the force of the expression "made holy" in verse 10. A better rendering is, "them who are sanctified" (*tous hagiazomenous*; cf. v. 29). "The sanctified" have a status in God's presence that is "perfect" in the sense that they approach Him with the full acceptance gained through the death of Christ."¹⁰ The One Sacrifice achieves sanctification for all.

Verse 19 tells us we can with *confidence* draw near to God. As New Covenant people ("brothers" v. 19) we can enter the very presence of God. The Most Holy Place has been opened to us by the body of Christ – an allusion to the tearing of the temple curtain in Matthew 27:51 at the time of Christ's death. We have a direct entrance into the presence of God. Our sins have not only been atoned, but we have been forgiven. "*The new and living way*" reveals that it is a fresh and life-giving reality come into existence with the New Covenant. We can approach God with confidence and a sincere heart *free from guilt* for our "*hearts [have been] sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience*" and Christ has made us holy through his sacrifice ("*our bodies washed with pure water*"). The presence of the Holy Spirit draws us ever closer to God our *Father*. This New Covenant accomplishes that which the Old Covenant could only prefigure – the breaking down of barriers between man and God. While we live under the blessings of this New Covenant, have received the Holy Spirit, and have access to God our Father through Christ Jesus; we have yet to fully enter the final blessing of the New Covenant which is entry into the new promise land – the New Jerusalem where we can dwell in full unity with God.

⁹ LABN

¹⁰ BKC