

# The Old And New Covenants

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### Introduction:

- I. “The Epistle was prompted by the desire to strengthen and comfort the readers in their trials and persecutions (10:32-39; ch. 11 and 12), but especially to warn them against the danger of apostasy to Judaism (2:2, 3; 3:6, 14; 4:1, 14; 6:1-8; 10:23, 26-31). And this could be done best by showing the infinite superiority of Christianity, and the awful guilt of neglecting so great a salvation. Strange that but thirty years after the resurrection and the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, there should have been such a danger of apostasy . . .” (Philip Schaff, *History of The Christian Church*, 1:814-815).
  - A. Perhaps we could narrow Schaff’s “infinite superiority of Christianity” to “infinite superiority of the new covenant.”
  - B. Sadly, it is not so strange that apostasies occur shortly after the reception of superior blessings. Consider the history of Israel (Jg. 1-2), and the Galatians (1:6-9).
- II. The apostasies that concerned the writer of Hebrews still threaten us today. The letter relates to modern people and modern issues.

### Body:

#### I. WHAT IS A COVENANT?

- A. Our English word *covenant* derives from two Latin words, *con*, together, and *venio*, I come, and connotes a contract or agreement made between two parties who mutually bind themselves to fulfill the conditions of their contract. We speak of treaties with Indians, nuclear weapons treaties between nations, etc.
- B. The Hebrew word *covenant* (*berit*) probably derives from an Akkadian root meaning “to fetter.” It refers to a pact, compact, covenant –
  1. Between men.
    - a. Abraham and the Amorites (Gn. 14:13)
    - b. Abraham and Abimelech (Gn. 21:22-32)
    - c. Jacob and Laban (Gn. 31:44-54)
    - d. David and Jonathan (1 Sm. 18:3; 20:8, 16-18, 42)
    - e. Marriage (Mal. 2:14)
  2. Between God and man: covenant, as a divine constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges.
    - a. With Noah (Gn. 6:18; 9:9-17) – a divine promise that there would be no other deluge.
    - b. With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gn. 15:18; 17:2-21; Ex. 2:24, etc.) – a promise to multiply their seed, give them the land of Canaan, and make them a blessing to the nations.
      - 1) The most common verb in the OT for making a covenant is “to cut a covenant.” This apparently comes from Gn. 15:9-17 where God appeared as a smoking furnace and a burning lamp (flaming torch) that passed between the pieces (v.17).

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- 2) Gn. 15 illustrates God’s “sole initiative” in making and fulfilling this covenant.
  - 3) Gn. 17 highlights at least five features of the covenant:
    - a) Establishment (7, 19)
    - b) Permanence (7, 13, 19, 21)
    - c) Conditionality (9, 22-27, obedience)
    - d) Sign (11)
    - e) Penalty for breaking (14)
  - c. With Israel at Sinai, along with a covenant sacrifice (Ex. 19:5; 24:7-8, etc.)
    - 1) Renewed in plains of Moab (Dt. 28:69)
    - 2) With blessings and curses (Dt. 29:20)
  - d. With David (2 Sm. 7:12-17; Ps. 89:3, 28)
  - e. Promise of a “new covenant” (Isa. 55:3; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 37:26)
  3. God’s covenant with Israel became their divine constitution.
    - a. ***Its nature:*** God commands/prohibits and promises; Israel obeys.
      - 1) They “entered into” (Dt. 29:12) God’s covenant
      - 2) They “joined” (Jer. 50:5) God’s covenant
      - 3) They were to “observe carefully” (Dt. 4:6) all of its commands (Dt. 8:1), especially loving God with all their heart... (Dt. 6:5). During apostasies, some leaders attempted to turn the people back to their original agreement.
        - a) Jehoiada (2 K. 11:17)
        - b) Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29:10)
        - c) Josiah (2 K. 23:3; cf. Ex. 19:8; 24:7).
        - d) Ezra (Ezr. 10:3)
    - b. ***Its form:*** a declaration (Dt. 4:13). Israel did not propose terms with God; they responded to His terms. *Covenant* is parallel or equivalent to these words, each of which emphasizes man’s responsibility to keep the conditions that God imposed
 

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      - 1) Word (Ps. 103:18)
      - 2) Statute (Ps. 103:18)
      - 3) Precepts (Ps. 103:18)
      - 4) Testimony (Ps. 25:10)
      - 5) Law (Ps. 78:10)
      - 6) Loving-kindness (Dt. 7:9)
    - c. ***Its preservation:*** tables of the covenant (Dt. 9:9, 11, 15) inscribed with ten words, and then, written in a book (Ex. 24:4, 7; Dt. 31:24-26).
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- d. ***Its location:*** ark of the covenant (Nu. 10:33; 1 Sm. 4:3-5; 1 K. 8:9) (cf. BDB, 136; Vine, 50-51).
- C. The Greek word (*diatheke*) is used about 280 times in LXX, about 33 times in the NT where it is translated “covenant” 20 times and “testament” 13 times (AV). The NASB always translates it “covenant.” Both approaches need modification.
1. Greeks used *suntheke* of mutual, bilateral agreements between human parties for marriages, political agreements, etc. This word does not occur in the NT where the concept of covenant concerns God, the superior party, and mankind. [Its verb form occurs only three times (Lk. 22:5; Jn. 9:22; Ac. 23:20.)]
  2. In the *diatheke* covenant, the superior party ***dictates*** the terms of the arrangement (lit., puts it through).
  3. In NT books, most versions translate *diatheke* “covenant” in every passage except Hb. 9:16-17 (and sometimes Ga. 3:15) where they render it “testament” or “will.” Only context can determine the meaning of a word that carries more than one definition. E.g., the word “letter.”
  4. In Hb. 9:15, the context requires “covenant.” In verses 16-17, the context requires “will” or “testament.” In verses 18ff., the context shifts back to “covenant.”
    - a. 15, 18ff. use the word in a ***religious*** context.
    - b. 16-17 use the word in a ***legal*** context in which the writer answers the question, “But what is the necessary connection between the death of Christ and the new diatheke?” (cf. TDNT II:131). Verses 16-17 serve as an analogy. Upon his death, a person leaves his possessions to his heirs.
  5. Though the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon primarily discusses classical works, its comments on this word are surprisingly appropriate: “*disposition* of property by will, *testament* . . . II. 2. name of an Eysalve, because the recipe was *deposited* in a temple . . . III. *compact, covenant* . . . freq. in Lxx, Ge 6:18, al.; . . . *Ev. Luc. 22.20, 2 Ep. Cor. 3.14; disposition* (with allusion to I), *Ep. Gal.3.15*, cf. *Ep. Hebr.9.15* (pp. 394-395).
  6. BDAG mentions the simplex *theke* (only in Jn. 18:11 in NT, rd) but then adds, “for the mng. of this word one must begin with the mid. form of the verb . . . which is freq. used in legal and commercial discourse of disposition of things . . . w. implication of promissory obligation. Disposition of one’s personal effects would naturally come under testamentary law, hence *last will and testament* (so exclusively in Hellenistic times . . . Hb 9:16f; Ga. 3:15; cp. 17 . . . As a transl. of (*berit*) in LXX . . . retains the component of legal disposition of personal goods while omitting that of the anticipated death of a testator. A Hellenistic reader would experience no confusion, for it was a foregone conclusion that gods were immortal. Hence a *d.* decreed by God cannot require the death of the testator to make it operative. Nevertheless, another essential characteristic of a testament is retained, namely that it is the declaration of one person’s initiative, not the result of an agreement betw. two parties, like a compact or a contract. This is beyond doubt one of the main reasons why the LXX rendered (*berit*) by *d.* In the ‘covenants’ of God, it was God alone who set the conditions . . . Since God’s holy will was set forth on more than one occasion (Gen. 6:18 . . . and oft.) one may speak of *d. decrees, assurances*. . . Much emphasis is laid on the *d. kaine*, mentioned as early as Jer 38:31 . . . Blood was shed when the old covenant was

proclaimed at Sinai Hb 9:20 (Ex 24:8); the same is true of the new covenant Hb 10:29 . . . Mt.26:28 . . .” (pp.228-229).

## II. FIVE PURPOSES OF THE LAW OF MOSES

- A. To stop every mouth (Ro. 3:19. Job 38-42. Ezra 9:6; Isaiah 6; Lk.5:8).
  1. Near context, a sequence of sins (10-18).
  2. Law addresses those who serve under it (19). *That every mouth may be stopped* (shut, stop, close the mouth). In 2 Co. 11:10 Paul states the reverse; he knows he speaks truth and no one will silence him. Also, Mt.22:12.
- B. To produce guilt (Ro. 3:19).
  1. *Guilt* (liable to judgment, punishment). In papyri of officials who are held answerable.
  2. The evidence against us is too great to contest the charges. We must plead guilty.
- C. To provide man an objective knowledge of sin (Ro. 3:19-20).
  1. The Law left no doubt as to what sin was (7:7, 12-13).
  2. The Law served as a plumb-bob to show man how far out of line he was (Ro. 5:20).
- D. To bring its hearers to Christ (Ga. 3:22-25).
  1. *Scripture has confined...* (22). (To enclose, shut in on all sides, imprison; implies no possibility of escape.) In Lk.5:6 of a catch of fish. The Scriptures drive men to desire a solution to their sin problem.
  2. *Kept under guard...*, as a garrison that keeps ward over a town; (“held captive,” ESV) (23). *Kept for the faith...* (same word translated *confined* in 22; imprisoned).
  3. *Law was our tutor* (schoolmaster, guardian, pedagogue) (24).
  4. *No longer under a tutor* (25).
- E. To restrain evil (1 Tim. 1:8-10). The Prohibition.
  1. The Law cannot provide the very thing that unbelievers need most – forgiveness of sins, righteousness (Ga. 2:21; 3:21). In fact, the Law produces death, not life (2 Co. 3:7-9).
  2. Does this mean that we are not under any law today? No! (Ro. 8:2; 1 Co. 9:21; Ga. 6:2; Ja. 1:25; 2:12, etc.)

## III. THE NEW COVENANT

- A. Jer. 31:31-34: Jeremiah’s most important contribution to the scheme of redemption.
  1. Gn. 3: The fall. Shows sin to be man’s fundamental problem. Chapters 3-11, it continues to spread and to grow worse with the passing of time.
  2. Gn. 12: Abraham. The rest of the OT primarily concerns itself with the seed of Abraham and all this implies.
  3. Ex. 24: Provided Law for Israel, ratified the old covenant. Their Law accomplished three things:
    - a. Gave Israel a standard that set them apart from all other nations.
    - b. Revealed the character of God.

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- c. Gave a *temporary* reconciliation and forgiveness of sins.
  - 4. 2 Sm. 7: The covenant with David. God would fulfill His promise to Abraham through an individual, an anointed King.
  - 5. Jer. 31: The first clear statement that the covenant of Ex. 24 was temporary.
    - a. Original context: Jer. 30-33. Israel was already in exile; Judah was on the way. This was God's punishment for breaking the covenant. He would stop keeping His side of the covenant and let the nation fall.
    - b. Like a Jew in debt to his brother, Judah would have to work off her debt at half wages until Sabbatical justice had been fulfilled (Jer. 16:14-18; 23:3-8). [N.B.: the reference to *David*, a righteous Branch who would reign as their king, indicates Messianic overtones. See also 30:9.]
    - c. But this would not be the last word from God. He loved His people so much that He would set up a new covenant. Jeremiah offers hope to people who really don't deserve it.
- B. Jer. 31:31-34 analyzed in Hb.8:7-13:
1. **Covenant** (6-7). Jesus is the *Mediator* of a better covenant. Christians under the new covenant enjoy the very benefit that Job had wanted (Job 9:32-33; 1 T. 2:5; Hb. 9:15; 12:24).
    - a. "For" introduces a reason for the *better covenant*.
    - b. A bilateral agreement binds equals; a unilateral agreement binds "unequals." God, the party of the first part, dictates the terms; man, the party of the second part, agrees and obeys. [The author frequently quotes passages from the OT. Cf. 2:6-8 (Ps. 8:4-6); 3:7-11 (Ps. 95:7-11); 10:5-7 (Ps. 40:6-8), etc. Twice he quotes Jeremiah's prophecy (10:16-17).]
    - c. The word *place* (v.7) means *occasion* or *opportunity* as in Ro. 12:19 and Ac. 25:16.
    - d. Israel's problem: Treated God's covenant as if it were an agreement between equals.
    - e. Jeremiah foretells an event as significant as the Exodus; in due time, God would again give laws to His people.
  2. **New** covenant (7-8).
    - a. Three times: "The Lord says..." (8-10).
    - b. "New" is not simply the conclusion of the Hebrew writer, but of the OT itself. The covenant is "new," not only in time, but in kind or quality. [In 12:24 the writer uses another word for *new* implying new in time, recent.]
      - 1) The new covenant would not be like the old covenant. It would be a "better" covenant (7:22) enacted on "better" promises (8:6).
      - 2) The promise of a "superior covenant" implies a fault with the first one. In this context the Hebrew writer gives evidence to support this claim.
    - c. Logic: In God's scheme, the existence of something proves its necessity. If the first had been blameless, He would not have planned another.
      - 1) The old covenant could not justify (Ro. 3:20; Ga. 3:11, 21).
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- 2) The Hebrew writer does *not* say that the old covenant did not accomplish the purpose for which God gave it. This would imply that God made a mistake. See Ro.7:12. [The *Skeptics Annotated Bible* uses Hb. 8 to contend that the Law of God was not perfect.] The fault did not lie with God, but with the people who refused to keep covenant with Him. Far from failing to accomplish its objective, the old covenant showed people that they were sinners and drove them to Christ for the solution. The old covenant was *weak* and *useless* in that it could not bring men into permanent fellowship with God (7:18).
  - 3) But since the second covenant is eternal (13:20), it *is* blameless, despite the ravings of skeptics and libertines.
3. ***House of Israel...Judah*** (8).
- a. *Fault* shares same root as *faultless* in v. 7. Jeremiah blamed Israel for not keeping the covenant.
  - b. *Days are coming...* In v. 10 and Jer. 31:33, “*after those days*” means “after they have fully come.” God has spoken at the end of these days, Hb. 1:1-2. The days that Jeremiah prophesied have arrived. [N.B.: Jeremiah’s prophecy could not have been fulfilled in Israel’s restoration to the promised land after their exile. The old covenant remained in force *after* the exile (cf. Neh. 8). The prophecy, therefore, concerns the coming of the Messiah and the new covenant in His blood.]
  - c. The expression “new covenant” first occurs outside old covenant literature in the institution of the Lord’s Supper (1 Co. 11:25; Lk. 22:20).
  - d. The new people of God would no longer observe the 1000 year old division that separated Israel and Judah. The new covenant would make a new Israel-Judah, composed not of tribes but of individuals (Ga. 3:28; Ep. 2:13-15). Verse 10 mentions only Israel.
4. ***As a father...*** (9).
- a. *Not according to . . .* The new covenant would avoid the “defects” of the old.
  - b. *Took them by the hand . . . because they did not continue in My covenant.* The old covenant did not fail because of a lack of power or grace on God’s part. The deliverance from Egypt shows that He was more than adequate in both power and grace to deliver His people from any danger.
    - 1) This passage pictures a father holding the hand of his small son to keep him from getting lost or hurt.
    - 2) God wanted His people to walk with Him, but Israel decided to walk alone. (Hb. 3:7-11), they were covenant-breakers (Jer. 31:32) who refused to “abide in” His covenant (cf. Ps. 95; Hb. 3:16-19; 4:11). They became bitter, unbelieving, and disobedient.
  - c. *And I disregarded them...* God turned away from them and withdrew His concern for their situation, just as a lord might treat his unfaithful servants. He neglected them by leaving them to their own willful ways. [See a similar thought concerning Gentiles in Ro. 1.]
5. ***Characteristics of the new covenant – four promises*** (cf. 6).

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- a. *Laws in their mind and write them on their hearts* (10).
- 1) *Israel* refers to Jew and Gentile who make up the “house of Israel,” (Ga. 6:16). The new covenant embraces all nations (Mt. 28:19).
  - 2) This refers not merely to memorization (though it may include it, Dt. 6:6-9), or to obedience by compulsion, or to obedience by mechanical observance to an external code and ceremony, but to obedience by choice – a hearty service of love and loyalty. The old covenant was *inferior*; the new is *interior*. (2 Co. 3:3).
    - a) In 10:16 the writer changes “with the house of Israel” to “with them,” and transposes “minds” and “hearts.”
    - b) The writer uses *mind* synonymously with *heart*. Plato distinguished thought and speech, making thought “a silent inner conversation of the soul with itself.”
    - c) The *heart* is not mere feelings or affections as in Western usage, but the center of thought. The law becomes a part of our conscience and appeals to our loyalty (Ga. 2:20).
    - d) A radar gun may force speeders to drive slowly, but it doesn’t turn them into law-abiding citizens. Placing a detector at 100 foot intervals may convince officials that they have convinced every motorist to drive safely, but the real test comes when they remove the detectors. Outward laws may eliminate crime, but they never eliminate criminals.
  - 3) Ezk. 36:25-27, the parallel passage, embraces at least two ideas:
    - a) Return from captivity.
    - b) Messiah; spiritual cleansing; new heart; Spirit within you. Ct. Jer. 3:10. During Josiah’s reign, many outwardly “conformed” to law, but not from the heart. [N.B.: Some under the old covenant had the Law of God in their heart (e.g., Ps. 40:8; 119:11), but this was the exception and not the rule. Most Israelites were quite content to leave the law written on tables of stone.]
      - 1] By contrast, all who truly enter the new covenant will be converted.
      - 2] The Word of God will dominate the life (Col. 3:16. Hb. 11:6).
      - 3] They will serve out of gratitude (1 Jn. 4:19). The loving mother cares for her child, not merely because of law, but of love. This motivation moves her to do more than the law actually requires.
- b. *I will be their God, they will be my people* (10).
- 1) A recurring promise in the OT: Ex. 4:23; 6:7; 19:5-6; Jer. 7:23; 11:4, etc. God and Israel once belonged to each other.
  - 2) A recurring promise in the NT: Rv. 21:3 (also see 14:1; 22:4). Cf. Ro. 8:14-17. Especially consider the parallels in 2 Co. 6:14-7:1, where the quotations reflect the language of a Sovereign to a vassal. The king agrees to protect the vassal; the vassal promises to obey – sole allegiance.
    - a) 16c: “*God has said: ‘I will dwell in them,’*” (Lv. 26:11).
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- b) 16d: “*And walk among them,*” (Lv. 26:12).
- c) 16e: “*I will be their God, And they shall be My people,*” (Lv.26:12).
- d) 17a: “*Therefore, ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord,’*” (Isa.52:11). As Israel left Babylon, they could not take goods received in exile that were connected with idolatry and impurity. Based on this example, the Corinthians too must burn the bridges behind them.
- e) 17b: “*Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you,*” (Ezk. 20:34). How often were Israelites to bring idols into the Temple? (Ex. 20:2-6)
- f) 17c: “*I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty,*” (2 Sm. 7:14; Isa. 48:6. Cf. Mk.10:29-30).
- c. *Will not teach every man...; all will know* (11).
- 1) *Will not teach...*
    - a) In the old covenant, an Israelite was born, and then he learned of God (at least in theory, Ho. 4:6). There would always be babies in Israel who had entered the covenant and would have to learn about God afterwards. (Gn. 15:18; 17:7-8, 12-14).
    - b) Under the new, a person learns, and then he is born. (Isa.54:13; Jn.6:44-45). [This passage does not contradict the charge to encourage others in good works, (10:24-25).]
  - 2) *Know the Lord* (refers to the **acquisition** of knowledge); *all will know Me* (refers to the **possession** of knowledge). Thales, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, said “Know thyself.” The Gospel offers the highest ideal of all: “Know the Lord.”
    - a) Christians enter the covenant by being born *again* (Jn.3). Inward acceptance of God’s will necessitates knowledge of God. Though Nicodemus had been a teacher of the old covenant for years, he did not understand the spiritual birth or the spiritual kingdom.
    - b) John 1:13 describes the manner of birth under the new covenant –
      - 1] *not of blood* (lit., bloods, an idiom, as 2 Sm. 16:8; Ps. 26:9. Cf. “waters,” Mt. 14:28) refers to physical descent.
      - 2] *not of will of flesh* refers to the sexual desire of a man or woman.
      - 3] *not of will of man* refers to the procreative urge of a man. Jews gloried in great ancestors, but no mere human father can produce this birth.
      - 4] *of God*. (Ja. 1:18; 1 Pt. 1:23).
  - 3) *From least...to greatest...*a literary form (merismus) that uses both extremes as a means of including everything in between. Cf. Mt.11:25. In this passage it parallels the word *all*. If all people knew the Lord, there would be unity because all would follow the same standard. “Exact knowledge of God was at once necessary and difficult. It was so difficult, that the rise of a class like

the scribes, whose business it was to interpret the law, became inevitable; it was so necessary, that a man could not be legally righteous without a minute acquaintance with the contents of the statute book . . . This it was which made the legal yoke grievous. It was not enough to be a good man; you must likewise, as touching the positive precepts of the law, be blameless. And it was so difficult to be ritually blameless, that one might know God essentially very well, even as a prophet knew Him, and yet be in Divine things an *ignoramus*, from the point of view of the priestly code. For this incongruous state of matters abrogation was the only remedy” (A. B. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 301, quoted in Lightfoot, p. 159).

- d. *I will be merciful to their iniquities...* (12).
- 1) *For...* makes the forgiveness of sins the basis for the previously mentioned blessings.
  - 2) His forgiveness is fundamental to any renewal and maintenance of the covenant. This is what the first covenant lacked (9:9; 10:1-4, 11); it actually reminded them of their sins year after year (10:3). By way of contrast, in the new covenant, God remembers sin no more (10:17).
  - 3) Hebrew parallelism makes the lines of this verse synonymous. God deals mercifully with sins by remembering them no longer.
  - 4) Under the old covenant, devout Israelites remembered their sins every year (Hb. 10:3). Under the new covenant, God forgets them. There is no other sacrifice for sins (Hb. 10:16-18). This is the real power of the new covenant. Even if an artificial flower tricks a bee, it will not put honey in the hive.
6. 13: A summary, warns those who want to return to the old covenant that in using the word “new” (v.8), God Himself makes the first obsolete. “*He has made...*” refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy. The very mention of a new covenant had even then made the first old. [The word describes garments that are wearing out (Lk. 12:33).]
- a. “Old” implies aging; aging results in disappearing. Christianity makes Judaism obsolete. [“*Growing old*” describes the advance of old age (Jn. 21:18).]
  - b. In legal terminology, a new will would annul a previous one (TDNT 2:124-126). In this passage, the conclusion is based on more of an inference. If one covenant is new, the other must be old. It shouldn’t surprise anyone that God replaced the old with the new.
7. But why does Hb. 8:13 describe the passing of the old law in the present tense?
- a. First, we must avoid the assumption that this passage contradicts the near or remote context of Hebrews and other passages that clearly affirm the termination of the old law. (E.g., Ro. 7:1-7; Ga. 3:23-25; Ep. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-17). Note especially the past tense forms in Hb. 7:11, 28; 8:7; 9:1.
  - b. As the writer penned these words, most Jews had rejected the new covenant and continued to view the old covenant as binding upon them both in civil and religious duties. Jewish leaders knew that a new covenant would threaten their way of life. (Ac. 6:13-14).
    - 1) In a few years, the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) would remove any doubt that God had rejected the old system. The priesthood ended. Animal

sacrifices ended. Worship in Jerusalem became a thing of the past. Their Temple disappeared. This destruction was not an act of anti-Semitism, but an act of divine judgment (Lk. 19:43-44).

2) Athanasius (b. A.D. 373) said, “It is a sign, and an important proof, of the coming of the Word of God, that Jerusalem no longer stands, nor is any prophet raised up nor vision revealed to them -- and that very naturally . . . For . . . when the truth was there, what need any more of the shadow? And this was why Jerusalem stood till then – namely, that [the Jews] might be exercised in the types as a preparation for the reality” (NPNF II, Vol. III). He could just as easily have said, “Welcome to Hebrews!”

3) “The cross fulfilled and annulled the legal covenant; the destruction of Jerusalem and of its temple was its grave” (W. Kelly).

c. The last clause of verse 13 reads like a general truth. Anything old is near to the point of passing away. See a similar illustration in 3:4. [Cf. Jn. 3:8, the wind blows where it desires. 2 Co. 9:7, God loves a cheerful giver.]

#### IV. CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

##### A. 2 Co.3:6-18:

1. *Ministers of the new covenant* (6) teaches that Paul’s competence lies in the ministry represented by the new covenant.
2. *Not of the letter* (6) reminds us of the tables of stone written with the finger of God. It killed faithless Jews. The letter is the Law (6-9; Ga. 3:10).
3. *Spirit gives life* (6; cf. 9). Paul does not contrast the outward and inward sense of Scripture, but the old and new covenants.
4. *Ministry of death, written and engraved on stones...* (7). The ten commandments stand for the entire Mosaic Law.
5. *Was glorious* (7). Ex. 34:29ff. If you had seen Moses’ face shining, you would have concluded that the old covenant was glorious. [N.B.: the only place that combined the writing of the Law and the shining of Moses’ face is the giving of the ten commandments, but these commandments are the very items that have been done away (7, 11, 13).]
6. *Ministry of the Spirit . . . more glorious* (8). Paul argues from lesser to greater. If you think the first covenant was glorious, look at the new – it saves sinners!
7. *Ministry of condemnation* (9). Paul continues the argument of v.8. Therefore, a minister of the old covenant was an instrument of death and condemnation.
8. *Ministry of righteousness* (9). The new covenant is characterized by and leading to righteousness (cf. 11:15). The minister of the new covenant is an instrument of life and salvation.
9. *The glory that excels* (10). Another comparison. “The moon makes a dim light after the sun rises.” Christ is the Son, Moses, the servant (Hb. 3).
10. *What is passing away* (11; cf. 7, 13). If the old covenant was passing away, it could not have been God’s final solution for sin. If the ministry that was vanishing came with great glory, how much more spectacular the one that endures?

11. Paul’s great boldness of speech comes from the superior character of the new covenant (7-12). To turn from Paul’s ministry and listen to hostile voices is to lose this hope.
12. *Unlike Moses* (13). Moses used to put a veil over his face (iterative force) to prevent Israel from seeing the temporary nature of the old covenant. Paul’s opponents who considered Moses the ideal minister should consider the lesson of Ex. 34:29-35.
13. *But their minds were blinded* [rendered insensible, dull] (14-15). In putting a veil over his face, Moses also veiled the old covenant – a state that continues until this day. What happened at Sinai is repeated by Jews as they read the old covenant.
14. *Old covenant* (14). “Old” implies that the covenant has outlived its usefulness as a ministry. No one can fully understand the old covenant without understanding Christ (cf. the eunuch, Ac. 8:31-35).
15. Paul’s success in converting Jews was depressingly low (Ro. 9:1-3). Verse 15 explains why. It was not due to a flaw in his ministry, but to a veil of moral stubbornness that covered the heart of his audience.
16. But whenever one turns to the Lord, the veil vanishes (16). To imitate Moses is to remove the veil.
17. Christians, having free access to God, need no veil (17). Our liberty involves freedom from bondage to the law (Ga. 5:1), enslavement to sin (Ro. 6:18-23; Jn. 8:32-36), and our old nature (Ro. 6:6; Ep. 4:22).
18. In the old covenant, one man (Moses) temporarily and outwardly beheld the glory of the Lord; Christians undergo a complete inward transformation (18), progressing from one degree of glory to another. Summary of 2 Co. 3:

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Ministry of death, 7	Ministry of Spirit, gives life, 6,8
Ministry of condemnation, 9	Ministry of righteousness, 9
Glorious, 9	Much more glorious, 9
Passing away, 11	Remains, 11
Veiled, 14	Veil taken away, 16
Moses, 15	Christ, Lord, 14-15

B. Hebrews:

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Promise, Jer.3:31-34	Fulfillment, Ac.3:25; Hb.8; Ga.3:17,29
Impotent, ineffectual, Hb.7:18-19	Powerful, effective, Hb.7:19
Temporary, Hb.7:18; Hb.10:9; 2 Co.3:11	Permanent, Hb.7:24
Limited hope, Hb.7:19	Better hope, Hb.7:19
Inferior, Hb.7:22	Better, Hb.7:22
Preparatory, Hb.7:27	Final, “once and for all,” Hb.7:27; 9:12-14,26
Shadow, Hb.8:5; 10:1	Substance, Hb.10:1; Col.2:17
Reveals need for second, Hb.8:6-7	Faultless, Hb.8:6-7
External, 2 Co.3:6	Internal, Hb.8:10
Knowledge about God, Hb.8:11	Knowing God, Hb.8:11
Planned obsolescence, Hb.8:13	Consummation of ages, Hb.9:26; 13:20
Indirect access through priests, Hb.9:8	Direct access to God, Hb.7:25; 4:15-16
Could not cleanse conscience, Hb.9:9,13	Cleanses conscience, Hb.9:14; 10:22

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Symbolic, Hb.9:9	Reality, Hb.10:1
Animal sacrifices, Hb.9:12,20; 10:1-4	Sacrifice of Christ, Hb.9:12-14; 10:5-10
Could not forgive sin, Hb.10:4,11	Sins forgiven, Hb.10:18
Sins constantly remembered, Hb.10:2-3	Sins forgotten, Hb.8:12; 10:17

## V. THE CONDITIONAL NATURE OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT

- A. Someone has said that the Bible contains some 2500 warnings, urging God's people not to apostatize. Some of the clearest occur in Hebrews.
- B. An illustration: (Hb. 3:7-14).
1. ***The Reality Of Apostasy*** (7-11).
    - a. The writer repeats the exhortations that the Holy Spirit gave in the OT (7).
      - 1) It seems strange that the God of the universe would have to remind His children to listen to Him!
      - 2) There is hope for us as long as we are willing to listen. The moment we lose this attitude, we lose hope of recovery.
    - b. The children of Israel regretted leaving Egypt and lost their faith in God (8). Apostasy is not abnormal! We do not desire or accept crime, but we must admit the role it plays in our society. Every locked door recognizes its existence. Christians do not desire or accept apostasy, but we must admit the role it plays in local churches.
    - c. The purpose of the Psalmist (Ps. 95) is to warn his people against repeating the mistake of their ancestors (9). The Hebrew writer shares this warning with Christians. Apostasy never occurs because people lack the evidence they need to prove God's existence, presence, or blessings. The Israelites saw God's miracles for forty years, but still fell away. Christians have received even more of God's good things than the Israelites.
    - d. To "know the way" from Bristol to Murfreesboro does not mean the ability to locate the highway on a road map, or to know the number of the interstate, but rather to travel on it. To know God's ways is more than gaining information about His laws, but rather to experience them, to obey them (10).
    - e. How does God react to stubborn disobedience (11)? Wrath! This is not rash, reckless anger, but judicial judgment. A man who jumps off the Empire State Building doesn't cause God to throw a fit. His divine wrath takes effect in a crushed, broken body. In reaction to Israel's disobedience, God's wrath wiped out an entire generation.
  2. ***The Reason For Apostasy*** (12).
    - a. *Beware* means "Look out for dangers!" It connects with verse 6:6 . . . (7-11) . . . 12. The writer reminds his readers of stubborn Israelites who died in the desert; God denied them entrance into the promised land. The writer exhorts readers to hold on to their courage and hope as members of the household of God. Consider these contrasts:
      - 1) Disobedience – Hearing obediently
      - 2) Unbelief – Faith

- 3) Hardening – Salvation
- 4) Neglect – Steadfastness
- 5) Apostasy – Entrance to life
- b. *Who* must beware? “Brethren.”
  - 1) Some brothers and sisters think that it is no one else’s business what they do. Wrong. (Ga. 6:1; Ja. 5:19-20). The Lord makes it our business.
  - 2) But the primary application of the command to beware concerns self-inspection. (Cf. 12:25; Mk. 13:5, 9, 23, 33).
- c. *Why?* We may develop an evil heart of unbelief. The writer’s purpose: to promote perseverance and to prevent apostasy. This is a major theme of Hebrews.
- d. *To what effect?* To prevent departing from the living God. (Cf. Mt.7:23).
  - 1) While we don’t know the specific recipients of the letter, we have plenty of evidence that shows they were Christians.
  - 2) The letter contains five major apostasy passages.

<i>Warning Passages In Hebrews</i>		
<i>Sin</i>	<i>Passage</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Drift away (1)	<b>2:1-3</b>	Just reward (2)
Transgression...disobedience (2)	2:1-3	How shall we escape (3)
Neglect (3)	2:1-3	So great a salvation (3)
Harden your harts (7)	<b>3:7-4:13</b>	Anger (3:10, 17)
Rebellion, trial, go astray, have not known ways (3:8-10)	3:7-4:13	Not enter rest (3:11, 18-19)
Evil heart of unbelief, departing from God, hardened (3:12-13)	3:7-4:13	No longer with God (12), partakers of Christ (14)
Sinned, unbelief (3:17, 19)	3:7-4:13	Fell in wilderness (3:17)
Come short (4:1)	3:7-4:13	Fall after same example (4:11)
Word...did not profit them (4:2)	3:7-4:13	No gospel, no salvation (4:2)
Fall away, crucify Son of God, open shame (6)	<b>6:4-6</b>	Impossible to renew to repentance (4-6)
Forsaking assembling (25)	<b>10:25-39</b>	No longer a sacrifice for sins (26)
Sin willfully (26)	10:25-39	Fearful expectation of judgment (26)
Adversaries (27)	10:25-39	Fiery indignation that will devour... (27)
Reject (28)	10:25-39	Without mercy (28)
Trampled Son of God underfoot (29)	10:25-39	Vengeance (30)
Insulted Spirit of grace (29)	10:25-39	I will repay... (30)
Cast away confidence (35)	10:25-39	Lord will judge His people, (20); fearful thing to fall (31)
Draws back (38)	10:25-39	Perdition (39)
Sin that easily ensnares (1)	<b>12:1-29</b>	Rejected (17)
Weary, discouraged in souls (3)	12:1-29	Will not escape (25)
Forgotten the exhortation (5)	12:1-29	Our God a consuming

<i>Warning Passages In Hebrews</i>		
<i>Sin</i>	<i>Passage</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
		fire (29)
Fall short of grace of God (15)	12:1-29	No grace, no salvation (15)
Become defiled (15)	12:1-29	(Tit. 1:15; Jd. 8)
Fornicator, profane...like Esau (16)	12:1-29	Like Esau (16)
Refuse Him who speaks (25)	12:1-29	No escape (25)
Turn away from Him (25)	12:1-29	No escape (25)

3. ***The Remedy For Apostasy*** (13).

- a. How? *Exhort*. A teacher encourages her students by promising them a good education if they will faithfully follow the curriculum. A trainer promises an athlete that he will become a champion if he will not deviate from the discipline he lays down (cf. Wm. Barclay).
- b. Who? *One another*. Christians look out for one another. One stick by itself won't make a fire, but many sticks together can heat a whole house. Mountain climbers link themselves together so that no one will be lost in the case of a fall.
- c. When? *Daily*. One of Satan's greatest weapons is "wait until tomorrow." Why is the Hebrew writer so urgent? We never know when death will come to us or to others.
- d. Why? *Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*.
  - 1) *Hardened* – demonstrated by the refusal to hear the voice of God and by the determination to continue doing as one pleases.
  - 2) *Deceitfulness of sin*.

4. ***The Resistance To Apostasy*** (14).

- a. "Look out for number one" usually implies a selfish attitude, but in the spiritual realm, I must first look to the needs of my own soul before I can help another. (Cf. Mt. 7:1-5; Ga. 6:1).
- b. One of our greatest dangers is growing weary and discouraged. We partake IF we hold fast to the end.
  - 1) Cf. 6 and 14 –
    - a) We *are* the house of God (6); we partake of Christ (14)
    - b) We hold on to confidence (6); we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end
  - 2) "IF" –
    - a) 2 Pt. 1:10: Never fall IF you do these things
    - b) 1 Jn. 1:7: Cleansed by blood IF we walk in the light
    - c) Jn. 8:31: Disciples indeed IF we continue in His words
    - d) Ga. 6:9: We shall reap IF we do not faint
- c. It must begin with me (4:1-2). An anemic lifeguard jeopardizes his own life and the lives of others.

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## VI. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO THE COVENANT (10:19-31)

- A. The admonition/exhortation (10:19-25): “Let us . . .” –
1. **Faith**, (22): **Let Us** Come Near . . .
    - a. Full assurance of faith is absolute trust; “without doubt.”
    - b. Motives for drawing near:
      - 1) **Having boldness** (19-20; 4:16).
        - a) For what? Entrance into the Holy of Holies.
        - b) How? Blood of Jesus. He is Agent through whom God grants us this access. He removed the barrier between man and God. (Jn. 14:6; Mt. 27:51).
      - 2) **Having a Great Priest** . . . (21; 4:14). Jesus made the Throne of Judgment a Throne of Mercy.
      - 3) **Having the heart sprinkled** . . . (22). The blood is God’s part (9:14); it removed the guilt that separated us from God.
      - 4) **Having the body washed** . . . (22). Baptism is man’s part. (Cf. 9:14 & 1 Pt. 3:21).
  2. **Hope** (23): **Let us hold fast** . . . What gives us this confidence of hope? The one who promised is faithful. (1 Jn. 3:3).
  3. **Love** (24-25): **Let us consider** . . . (to think [intensely] with the mind on one another). Why?
    - a. To stimulate (incite, spur) . . . to love and good works.
    - b. Not forsaking . . .
    - c. The assembling . . . (gathering together; meetings).
    - d. Of ourselves . . . (cf. 2 Pt. 1:1).
    - e. Exhorting . . . parallels “consider” of v. 24.
- B. The consequences of failing to meet the conditions of the covenant (10:16-31):
1. Willful sin removes the Christian from the benefits of the Lord’s sacrifice and brings judgment (26-27).
  2. Illustrated in Law of Moses – rebellion brought death (28).
  3. Application: The rebellion of a Christian deserves much worse punishment than the rebellion of an Israelite (29). The threefold indictment:
    - a. Tramples Son of God under his feet (Mt. 5:13; 7:6; Lk. 8:5).
    - b. Though the blood of the covenant sanctified him, he counts it a common thing.
    - c. He insults the Spirit of grace.
  4. Be afraid (30-31). N.B.: these words originally described God’s vindication of His people against their enemies (Dt. 32:35-36). Here it includes His judgment upon His unfaithful people.
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- a. Vengeance is Mine... (30).
- b. The Lord will judge *His people* (30).
- c. A fearful thing... (31). A penitent David expressed a preference for falling into the hands of a merciful God as opposed to the hands of unmerciful men (2 Sm. 24:14). This Hebrew writer makes it clear that this hope does not extend to impenitent apostates!

**Conclusion:**

- I. The writings of an early disciple include this defense of the gospel against the Jewish charge that Christianity is an apostasy from the Jewish religion: “The Old Testament itself points to its own dissolution and the establishment of a new covenant” (Schaff, 2:107f.).
- II. “That it was a shadow so designed, and not a fortuitous and unmeaning system, is plain from its correspondence with the body which is Christ’s, and its consequent fulfillment in Him. The harmony is universal and complete. The great High Priest has come and clothed Himself in humanity -- a living vestment far more costly than the robes of Aaron, ‘made for glory and for beauty’; and all other victims have been superseded by His oblation of Himself. Omniscience is His, and therefore no formal Urim and Thummim glitters on His breast. The Self-sacrifice He presented was pure as the fire from God by which it was consumed, and it has been visibly accepted. He has gone through the starry veil, and into heaven itself, with the names of all His clients inscribed upon His heart; and He pleads the merit of His blood before a mercy-seat not canopied by a cloud, but enveloped in the Majesty of Him who sits upon it. The woven and metallic cherubim disappear in the reality, for the angels having performed their allotted parts in the mystery of redemption, are ‘ministering spirits to them who shall be heirs of salvation.’ There is no need now that the law be engraved on stone, for it is written indelibly on ‘the fleshy tables of the heart.’ It is no longer required that there be a bath, or a ‘sea of brass,’ for believers are washed in the laver of regeneration. The golden lampstand has been extinguished, for the luster of the Enlightening Spirit fills the House of God. Nay, the entire church on earth is a spiritual priesthood, engaged in appropriate ministrations, serving now, indeed, in the outer court, but soon to be called up into the inner sanctuary” (*The John Eadie Greek Text Commentaries*, comments on Colossians 2:17, pp. 176-177).

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