

Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant



Week Eight

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Hebrews 8:7–13

THE EMBODIMENT OF PERFECT OBEDIENCE

By living a perfect life, and then by dying in our place, Jesus mediated a new, better covenant between us and God. Through His death, Jesus canceled the penalty of death that our trespasses demanded and made possible to partakers of the new covenant.

This truth is explained in Hebrews 10:5–10, which identifies Jesus as having manifested the perfect obedience required by the covenant. It references Psalm 40, referring to Messiah's desire to render to God total obedience: "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:7, 8, ESV). "In the original context this phrase ['to do your will'] described moral obedience to the will of God. The author of Hebrews uses the phrase to show that the sacrifice of Christ fulfilled the will of God in providing an acceptable atonement, which the animal sacrifices had not provided."—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 460.

For Paul, this psalm acquired special significance with the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus embodied the obedience of the new covenant. He is our example. We have been saved, not only because of His death but also because of His perfect obedience.



inScribe

Write out Hebrews 8:7–13 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Hebrews 8:10–12. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.

inGest



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Hebrews 8:7–13. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Why can't the law save us?

How has Jesus kept your part of the covenant with God? How have you?



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THE NEED OF THE NEW

According to Hebrews, the fact that Jesus was appointed priest according to the order of Melchizedek implied that a new covenant had been inaugurated. The old covenant had been given on the basis of the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:11, NASB). The Levitical priests acted as mediators between God and Israel, and the law excluded anyone else from the priesthood. The author concludes, then, that a change of priesthood implies a change of the law of the priesthood, as well as a change of the covenant (Heb. 7:12, 18, 19).

The issue with the old covenant was that it could not provide perfection (Heb. 7:11). Paul is talking about the Levitical priesthood and its ministry (sacrifices, feasts, and so on). The animal sacrifices offered through them could not provide true, total cleansing from sin, nor direct access to God (Heb. 10:1–4; 9:13, 14; 10:19–23).

The fact that a new covenant was necessary does not mean that God was unfair with Israel when He gave them the old covenant. The Levitical ministry and the services of the tabernacle were designed to protect them from idolatry and also to point them to Jesus' future ministry. Hebrews stresses that the sacrifices were "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1, NKJV).

By pointing them to Jesus, the sacrifices should have helped the people put their hope and faith in "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, NKJV; compare with Isaiah 53). This is the same point that Paul makes when he says that the law was "our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24, 1995NASB) or that "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4, NIV).

In other words, even the Ten Commandments, as good and perfect as they are, cannot provide salvation (Rom. 3:20–28; 7:12–14). They provide a perfect standard of righteousness, but they do not provide righteousness, any more than looking in a mirror can erase the wrinkles of age. For perfect righteousness, we need Jesus as our Substitute.

The promise of a new covenant in Hebrews refers back to Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah, God's promise of a new covenant was, in fact, a renewal of the covenant that He had first made with Israel through Moses (Jer. 31:31–34). It could be argued, then, that Jeremiah 31 was not speaking strictly of a "new" covenant but of a "renewal" of the original covenant with Israel.

The issue with the old covenant was that the people broke it (Heb. 8:8, 9). The covenant was not faulty; the people were. If Israel had seen through the symbols to the coming Messiah and put their faith in Him, the covenant would not have been broken. Yet, to be fair, there were many believers throughout Israelite history in whom the purposes of the covenant were fulfilled and who had the law in their hearts (Pss. 37:31; 40:8; 119:11; Isa. 51:7).

Jeremiah's promise of a "new covenant" did not simply envision a renewal of the conditions that existed before the exile, which had been broken and renewed several times because the nation had lapsed several times into apostasy. And that's because the people were simply unwilling to keep up their end of the covenant with God (Jer. 13:23).

Thus, God promised to do a "new thing" (Jer. 31:22). The covenant would not be like the covenant that God had made "with their fathers" (Jer. 31:32). Because of the unfaithfulness of the people, the promises that God made under the Mosaic covenant were never fulfilled. Now, in virtue of the guarantee given by the Son (Heb. 7:22), God would fulfill the purposes of His covenant. God did not change His law or lower His standards; instead, He sent His Son as a guarantee of the covenant promises (Heb. 7:22; 6:18–20).

BETTER THAN BEFORE

Hebrews 8:6 has the Greek term *mesitēs* (“mediator”), which is derived from *mesos* (“middle”) and denotes the one who walks or stands in the middle. It was a technical term that referred to a person who fulfilled one or more of the following functions: (1) an arbiter between two or more parties; (2) a negotiator or business broker; (3) a witness in the legal sense of the word; or (4) one who stands as a surety and, thus, guarantees the execution of an agreement.

The English term “mediator” is too narrow a translation for *mesitēs* in Hebrews because it focuses only on the first two or three uses of the Greek term. Hebrews, however, emphasizes the fourth function. Jesus is not conceived as a mediator in the sense that He settles a dispute between the Father and humans, or as a peacemaker who reconciles parties in disaffection or as a witness that certifies the existence of a contract or its satisfaction. Instead, as Hebrews explains, Jesus is the *guarantor* (or surety) of the new covenant (Heb. 7:22). In Hebrews, the term “mediator” is equivalent to “guarantor.” He *guarantees* that the covenant promises will be fulfilled.

Christ’s death makes the institution of the new covenant possible because it satisfies the claims of the first covenant with Israel (and even with the first humans in Eden), which had been broken (Heb. 9:15–22). In this sense, Jesus is the guarantor who took upon Himself all the legal obligations of the covenant that had been broken. In another sense, Jesus’ exaltation in heaven guarantees that God’s promises to human beings will be fulfilled (Heb. 6:19, 20). Jesus guarantees the covenant because He has shown that God’s promises are true. By resurrecting Jesus and seating Him at His right hand, the Father has shown that He will resurrect us and bring us to Him.

Jesus is a greater Mediator than Moses because He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary and has offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for us (Heb. 8:1–5; 10:5–10). Moses’ face reflected the glory of God (Exod. 34:29–35), but Jesus is the glory of God (Heb. 1:3; John 1:14). Moses spoke with God face to face (Exod. 33:11), but Jesus is God’s Word personified (Heb. 4:12, 13; John 1:1–3, 14).

We may be tempted to think that in Hebrews 8:6 the new covenant has “better promises” in the sense that it has greater rewards than the old covenant had (a heavenly homeland, eternal life, and so on). The truth is that God offered the same rewards to Old Testament believers as He has offered us (read Heb. 11:10, 13–16). The “better promises” is talking about *different* kinds of promises.

The covenant between God and Israel was a formal exchange of promises between God and Israel. God took the initiative and delivered Israel from Egypt and promised to lead them into the Promised Land.

The covenant between God and Israel was ratified with blood. This blood was sprinkled both over and beneath the altar. The people of Israel promised to obey all that the Lord had spoken.

God satisfies the absolute demands of the new covenant for us because He gave His own Son to come and live a perfect life so that the promises of the covenant might be fulfilled in Him, and then offered to us, by faith in Jesus. Jesus’ obedience guarantees the covenant promises (Heb. 7:22). It requires that God gives Him the blessings of the covenant, which are then given to us. Indeed, those who are “in Christ” will enjoy those promises with Him. In addition, God gives us His Holy Spirit to empower us to fulfill His law.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

If Christ has satisfied the demands of the covenant for obedience, why is our obedience still so important?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/heb08-4



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Hebrews 7:11–19

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Deuteronomy 6:4–6

Deuteronomy 30:11–14

Exodus 24:1–8

Hebrews 10:5–10

Ezekiel 36:26, 27



What other verses come to mind in connection with the New Covenant?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 8:7–13.

WRITER OF HEARTS

The first covenant document was written by God on tablets of stone and was deposited in the ark of the covenant as an important witness of God's covenant with His people (Exod. 31:18; Deut. 10:1-4). Documents written in stone, however, could be broken; and scrolls, as Jeremiah had experienced, could be cut up and burned (Jer. 36:23).

But in the new covenant God now will write His law in the hearts of the people. The heart refers to the mind, the organ of memory and understanding (Jer. 3:15; Deut. 29:4), and especially to where conscious decisions are made (Jer. 3:10; 29:13).

This promise did not simply secure access to and knowledge of the law by everyone. It also, and more importantly, was to bring about a change in the heart of the nation. The problem of Israel was that their sin was engraved "with a pen of iron," "with the point of a diamond . . . on the tablet of their heart" (Jer. 17:1, NKJV). They had a stubborn heart (Jer. 13:10; 23:17); therefore, it was impossible for them to do the right thing (Jer. 13:23).

Jeremiah did not announce a change of the law, because the problem of Israel was not the law but the heart. God wanted Israel's faithfulness to be a grateful response to what He had done for them; thus, He gave the Ten Commandments to them with a historical prologue, expressing His love and care for them (Exod. 20:1, 2). God wanted Israel to obey His laws as an acknowledgment that He wanted the best for them, a truth revealed in their great deliverance from Egypt. Their obedience was to be an expression of gratitude, a manifestation of the reality of their relationship.

The same is true today for us. Jesus' love and care in dying for us is the prologue of the new covenant (Luke 22:20). True obedience comes from the heart as an expression of love (Matt. 22:34-40). This love is the distinguishing mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. God pours His love on us through His Spirit (Rom. 5:5), which is expressed in love (Gal. 5:22).



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Meditate on Hebrews 8:7-13 again
and look for where Jesus is.



What is He saying to you
through these texts?

What is the "written-in-the-
heart" law experience like?

How do you see Jesus
differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond
to seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/heb08-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?



After this week's study of the passage, where are areas you want the love of God to work in?

What are convictions you know God is speaking to you about?



Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inverseible.org/heb08-7

HEART IMPLANTATION

“There are two errors against which the children of God—particularly those who have just come to trust in His grace—especially need to guard. The first, already dwelt upon, is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do, to bring themselves into harmony with God. He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law, is attempting an impossibility. All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin. It is the grace of Christ alone, through faith, that can make us holy.

“The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption.

“But notice here that obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love. The law of God is an expression of His very nature; it is an embodiment of the great principle of love, and hence is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life? When the principle of love is implanted in the heart, when man is renewed after the image of Him that created him, the new-covenant promise is fulfilled, ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.’ Hebrews 10:16. And if the law is written in the heart, will it not shape the life?

Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship. Thus the Scripture says, ‘This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.’ ‘He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.’ 1 John 5:3; 2:4. Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.”

“The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.

“No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness. The soul that is transformed by the grace of Christ will admire His divine character; but if we do not see our own moral deformity, it is unmistakable evidence that we have not had a view of the beauty and excellence of Christ.

“The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.” (White, *Steps to Christ*, 59, 60, 64, 65.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Why is Jesus a Mediator of a better covenant?

How does obedience make manifest the reality of love?

If the closer we come to Christ, the more sinful we will appear in our own eyes, how do we not give up faith in despair?

How do Christ's guarantee, surety, and better promises change your experience?

What does the law being written in our hearts look like for you?

How do we avoid legalism?

How do we avoid cheap grace?

How do we know if we are "balanced"?