

# STICKS, STONES, SABBATHS, AND SUNDAYS

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*Seeing the Sabbath in light of the New Covenant.*

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## CHAPTER 10

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# WHAT IS THE NEW COVENANT?

I have mentioned the New Covenant several times already, but before we go any further, it is paramount to the Sabbath discussion to have a good understanding of the New Covenant. God has made several covenants with humanity. There was a covenant made with Adam in the Garden of Eden (Creation Covenant), a covenant made with Noah after the flood (Noahic Covenant), with Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant), with Moses and the people of Israel (Mosaic Covenant), and with David (Davidic Covenant). Each covenant had a way of building upon the previous ones by revealing more. In addition, through the unfolding biblical covenants, God's promises and typological patterns are progressively revealed, ultimately reaching their fulfillment in Christ and the ratification of a new and better covenant. God always initiated the covenants, defined the terms for the covenants, and determined the consequences for the people keeping or breaking the covenants.

For this chapter, we will be focusing on the Mosaic Covenant, also known as the Old Covenant, as it relates to the New Covenant.<sup>1</sup> After the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites initially agreed to obey all of the covenantal commands that God had given them at Mt. Sinai.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." (Exodus 24:3,7)

The Israelites were quick to affirm that they would obey the rules of the covenant. However, their actions soon revealed the opposite. The Israelites almost immediately broke the covenant by rejecting the one true God who had mercifully rescued them from Egypt and graciously entered into covenant with them by creating an idol to worship instead of worshipping God. As God said of the event,

They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it, sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:8)

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 8:6

This would not be the last of the Israelites' disobedience, but just a hint of their perpetual covenant breaking that was to come. Along with repeatedly breaking the covenant, they also reaped the consequences that God had previously announced.

"But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit." (Leviticus 26:14-20)

Not to overgeneralize, but much of the remainder of the Old Testament is the story of Israel's cyclical breaking of the covenant. For instance, the book of Judges is the over three-hundred-year history of Israel's cycle of covenant breaking. Israel would rebel against God, God would punish them, Israel would cry out to God for help, God would rescue them, and once again, Israel would rebel. Generation after generation of Israelites continued to abandon God, break the covenant, and receive their due punishment. The last verse of Judges summarizes the sinful state of Israel very well by saying, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."<sup>2</sup> They were not loving God by seeking to obey him. Their actions revealed that they loved themselves more than God and desired to be autonomous (a law to themselves). Eventually, God punished Israel for breaking the covenant by raising nations of Assyria and Babylon to conquer and remove Israel from the land that He had given them.

## JEREMIAH

In the darkness of this continued covenant-breaking, God announces that He will make a new covenant far superior to the previous covenant. Look what God says through the prophet Jeremiah about the coming New Covenant.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took

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<sup>2</sup> Judges 21:25

them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

To assure that we don't skip over the magnitude of this announcement, let's examine several critical points of contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant that was to come.

### **"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah"**

Who is going to be the recipients of the New Covenant? Undoubtedly there will be people from the divided kingdom of Judah and Israel reunited in the New Covenant, but that is not all. We must read this announcement in light of the revelation that came through Christ. The New Testament teaches that the people of the New Covenant are not only Israelites, but also includes people from any nation. As Paul states:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:4-6)

Those in the New Covenant are all people who believe in the gospel for salvation. The New Covenant people are not those of the same descent but those of the same belief. The New Covenant people are no longer all Jews or only Jews, but instead, it is all, and any, who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. The promise given to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring comes to fulfillment through Abraham's offspring, Jesus Christ. Paul makes this point abundantly clear in his letter to the Galatians:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for

you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.  
(Galatians. 3:7-9, 28-29)

Under the New Covenant, God has acquired a new people for Himself, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. As Paul says, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. There are Jews, there are Gentiles, and then there are Jews and there are Greeks who are now of the church of God."<sup>3</sup> The New Covenant people, as we will see, are those who are under the New Covenant mediator, Jesus Christ.

**"I will make a new covenant ... not like the covenant that I made with their fathers"**

The two covenants are not the same, and this point must not be overlooked. God says that the New Covenant is "not like" the Old Covenant. This difference is good news because ever since the Old Covenant was inaugurated, the people continually broke the covenant agreement and received punishment from God. Those who adhere to Covenant Theology do not seem to appreciate the difference between these two covenants enough. Instead, they strive for continuity between the covenants, which leads to much confusion. Sadly, they acknowledge that a New Covenant has been made, but they then press it into the mold of the Old Covenant. However, rightly interpreted and seen for all of its robust beauty, the New Covenant cannot fit into the same mold. The Old Covenant had faults, is now obsolete, and has been replaced by a better covenant. Why would people strive to go back to the old or make the Old Covenant the same as the New Covenant, given that the purpose of the Old Covenant was to point forward to the coming of Christ? Instead, they should acknowledge the word of God given to Jeremiah and embrace the fact that the New Covenant is "not like" the Old Covenant. Then and only then can they begin to see the beauty of the New Covenant.

**"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts"**

God will solve the problem of the Old Covenant by getting to the root of the problem by placing His laws inside of them, emphasizing the transformation of the entire community. This internalizing of God's law for every member of the New Covenant differs from the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God's laws were external and given to a people comprised of believers and unbelievers. God gave instructions to Moses in the form of the Book of the Covenant, and the "Ten Commandments" were written on tablets of stone. The Israelites kept the tablets of stone in the Tabernacle/Temple in the Ark of the Covenant. Yet under the New Covenant, God will personally write His law, not on stone tablets again, but on the hearts of His people. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant people of God will all experience the transforming work of the Holy Spirit so that the entire people are a believing, regenerate people. Now instead of the Ark of the Covenant being the carrier of God's law, each of His New Covenant people will, in effect, be the Ark. Each believer is the temple of God due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the carrying of God's law within

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:32

them. Paul picks up on this significant difference as he explains the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians when he writes, "And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."<sup>4</sup>

### **"I will be their God and they will be my people"**

Every single person within the New Covenant will be God's possession. Israel was constantly suffering the consequence of their rebellious hearts, turning to other gods, and being rejected by God. However, under the New Covenant, God inscribes His laws upon each individual's heart to prevent such apostasy from happening. All of those within the New covenant will persevere in their singular worship of the one true God and will always be His people, never to be cast out or rejected by Him. The internal work of God is a permanent work that cannot be undone and guarantees that all who are in the New Covenant will remain. As Paul writes in Ephesians:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Likewise, Peter uses the language of possession as he describes those in the New Covenant.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

The Apostle Paul and Peter both acknowledge the permanent relationship that all New Covenant people now have with God. God has done a supernatural work within them that cannot be undone. He is and always will be their God, and they are and always will be His people.

### **"they shall all know me,"**

We do not want to take this passage to say that no teachers will be needed under the New Covenant or that every believer has perfect knowledge of the Bible at the moment of salvation. This is certainly not the case as we see that there was much teaching after the New Covenant arrived. However, the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that all members of

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:3

the New Covenant know God in a saving relationship. From the least to the greatest. This knowledge is a salvific knowledge of God, not just the basic knowledge of God that all have.<sup>5</sup>

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27-28)

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

(Galatians 4:4-9)

From these passages, it is clear that knowing God means much more than simply acknowledging that He exists, and so it is in the New Covenant. Those who know God are saved, are his possession (sheep), and obey His voice. Compare the knowledge of God given to those in the New Covenant to those in the Old Covenant, and you will see a vast difference. Jeremiah knows full well the problem, as he, the messenger of God, has been commanded to teach the people about God. However, the words of God that he shares with them are highly offensive. They laughed at him, beat him, imprisoned him, threw him in a well, and eventually stoned him to death.<sup>6</sup> This type of treatment was common for those who spoke to the covenant people on behalf of God.

"But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:19-21

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 20:7, 37:15-17, 38:6

command you, that it may be well with you.' But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers." (Jeremiah 7:23-25)

Under the Old Covenant, God had to continually send His messengers, the prophets, to the covenant people to implore them to know and obey God. However, members of the New Covenant all know God, have ears to hear, and a heart that desires to obey Him. All who are in the New Covenant have a salvific knowledge of God.

**"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."**

Even though the Old Covenant offered a temporary forgiveness of sins, the fact that the sacrifices had to be repeatedly offered pointed forward to the need for a greater, ultimate sacrifice that would permanently bring about the forgiveness of our sins. This is what Christ has achieved in his life, death, and resurrection in the ratification of a New Covenant. As a result, the Old Covenant is "not like" the New Covenant.

Putting these points together, we can say that the Old Covenant consisted of a mixture of believers and unbelievers, saved and unsaved. The Old Covenant pointed forward to the full and permanent forgiveness of the New Covenant, which was made up of only people God has forgiven by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Whose sins are forgiven, the saved or the unsaved? Only those who are saved, for they are forgiven of their sins and saved from the wrath of God. The New Covenant exclusively consists of those whom God has forgiven.

When this distinction between the covenants is not understood, all kinds of theological confusion occurs. For instance, Presbyterians believe that forgiven and non-forgiven people are included in the New Covenant. They do not see the New Covenant as being made up of only believers who, according to Jeremiah, know God, are God's possession, have His law written upon their hearts, and have been forgiven by Christ's atoning work. Instead, their desire to see continuity between the Old and New Covenants causes them to believe that non-believers are members of the New Covenant and become so at baptism. This is why they baptize babies. Although their children are not yet believers, they are encouraged to be baptized. They believe that baptism under the New Covenant equals the initiatory right that circumcision held in the Old Covenant. They reason, since the Old Covenant included both believers and unbelievers under "Israel," then the New Covenant is no different. However, such continuity does not exist. They forget that the New Covenant is "not like the old," and the purity of those within the New Covenant is a difference that must not be overlooked.

All members of the New Covenant have had their sins forgiven. To include someone who has not had their sins forgiven into the New Covenant is impossible. If we look back over the New



Covenant language of Jeremiah 31, the one putting people into the New Covenant is God Himself. God is the one who is supernaturally bringing members into the New Covenant by faith in Christ. Baptism becomes a symbol of one's salvation. This is why the New Testament only records people being baptized after believing, redemption, and forgiveness of sins have occurred. It was not ever prescribed to unbelievers, including the unbelieving children of believers. This is why babies and children should not be baptized until they are saved. To do so would confuse the Old and New Covenant membership requirements.<sup>7</sup> A person who is not saved is not a member of the New Covenant until God supernaturally places them into it.

## EZEKIEL

The prophet Ezekiel has much to say about the New Covenant.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of time, we will not dive into every passage, but at least pick a couple that, like Jeremiah, give great detail to the New Covenant.<sup>9</sup> As you read over these passages from Ezekiel, recall the generation after generation of Israelites who failed at keeping the covenant agreement, and notice how God solves this with the New Covenant.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20) I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you.

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25-26; Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Corinthians 7:19.

<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 11:18-21, 18:30-32, 34:20-31, 36:24-32, 37:15-28

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel uses the terms "covenant of peace" and "everlasting covenant" for the "new covenant." See Ezekiel 37:26

Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel."  
(Ezekiel 36:24-32)

There is a significant contrast between the description of the New Covenant and the description of the Old Covenant. The primary difference being emphasized by Ezekiel is the one who is making and keeping the New Covenant. God is going to make a new covenant, but in the New Covenant, God will act supernaturally upon every member of the New Covenant to assure that they do not break the covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the focus was upon what the people must do to keep the covenant. You could say the Old Covenant could be summarized as "I will, but the New Covenant as "God will."

1. "I will give them one heart"
2. "A new spirit I will put within them."
3. "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them."
4. "I will be their God." (Ezekiel 11:19-20)
5. "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land."
6. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols"
7. "I will cleanse you."
8. "I will give you a new heart"
9. "A new spirit I will put within you."
10. "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."
11. "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."
12. "I will be your God."
13. "I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses."
14. "I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you."
15. "I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations."
16. "I will act" (Ezekiel 36:24-32)

The New Covenant can be described as God acting on behalf of His people to give them a new heart, new desires, new way of thinking, repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and a permanent position of peace. Although the new covenant people are certainly involved, God gets the credit for their covenant-keeping. If it were not for His action ("I will"), there would be no difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The only thing Ezekiel mentions that the people of the New Covenant will do is repent. "Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not

good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations." However, even the repentance of sin is brought about as the result of God's acting upon His Covenant people.<sup>10</sup>

## HEBREWS

The book of Hebrews is focused on the supremacy of Christ. He is superior to the angels, the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, the Aaronic High Priests, the Tabernacle, and the covenant that He makes is superior as well. The majority of the book of Hebrews is spent comparing the Old Covenant to the New Covenant and demonstrating how Christ is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. The author is writing when many of the Jews were still "practicing" the Old Covenant system, including the sacrifices, priests, Sabbaths, and special days that accompanied it. However, Jesus Christ had come, established a New Covenant, making the Old Covenant obsolete. The Christian Jews who received the letter seem to be under constant pressure from the Jews who had rejected Christ and the New Covenant. What kind of pressure? A pressure to go back to the Old Covenant. However, the author of Hebrews exhorts them to press forward and never return to the Old Covenant. Why? Because God had replaced the Old covenant with a better one, thus making the previous one obsolete.

Though we will mainly focus on Hebrews 8, notice how such Old Covenant and New Covenant comparisons are made in other places as well:

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. (Hebrews 7:11-12)

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. (Hebrews 7:22)

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

These passages point out the imperfect nature of the Old Covenant and compare and contrast it to the perfection that has come in the arrival of the New Covenant.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 11:18

Though the author makes this point throughout the book of Hebrews, in chapter eight, he focuses on the differences by using a familiar New Covenant prophecy from the Old Testament: Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.

Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. (Hebrews 8:1-7).

In machine-gun fashion, the author of Hebrews delivers the fatal blows to the Old Covenant and its proponents by contrasting the weakness of the Old Covenant priests, ministry, sacrifices, place of ministry, and the promises compared to the New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, the High Priest that represents us is the Godman Jesus Christ, who offered the perfect sacrifice of Himself, in the heavenly realms, to bring those He represents into permanent fellowship with God. In every way, the New Covenant is superior.

God did not send the Messiah to make a New Covenant with His blood, only to allow the Old Covenant to remain in effect, allowing people to choose either one. This would be a complete misunderstanding of why God gave the Old Covenant in the first place. The first one, as prophesied through the prophets, had been replaced. Though the temple, priests, sacrifices, and special days of the Old Covenant were still being honored by many Jews, it was all for nothing. It was more than nothing; it was now anti-God behavior because it rejected the New Covenant and the giver of the New Covenant.. God had announced the New Covenant and had sent the New Covenant Mediator who had made the New Covenant sacrifice. To go back to the law, the priests, the animal sacrifices, the temple (all aspects of the Old Covenant), was to reject the New Covenant and remain in a covenant that was no longer honored by God.

Next, the author of Hebrews quotes the longest section of the Old Testament of any New Testament author. Where does he pull from to drive his point home? What prophet does he cite? He quotes the announcement of the New Covenant from the prophet Jeremiah to show that the New Covenant has arrived, and it is far superior to the Old.

For he finds fault with them when he says:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Hebrews 8:8-13)

The point of quoting this passage from Jeremiah was to remind the people of the greatness of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant had run its course; its time was complete. God had designed the first covenant to be limited in scope and duration, and the time of its usefulness was complete.

The author of Hebrews urges his audience to cling to the only covenant that remains effective, the New Covenant.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

On the day of the Passover Feast, which was also the evening of His betrayal, Jesus and His disciples partook of the Passover Meal. It was a meal that God commanded the people of Israel to take each year in remembrance of their redemption out of Egypt. The meal commemorated the day that God's wrath was poured out on the Egyptians but passed over the Israelites and they were thus set free from the bondage of slavery to go and worship God. When the wrath of God was poured out, He passed over any home that had followed His command to sacrifice a lamb and to place the blood on the exterior of the door. The Passover Meal had been celebrated ever since the great exodus for over a thousand years. This was no regular meal; it was a meal that God required, and part of the laws given to Israel.<sup>11</sup>

The tradition and protocol for taking the Passover Meal had been the same throughout the centuries. However, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus makes a momentous change to the

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<sup>11</sup> Exodus 12:14-20

meal. He announces that it is through his body and blood that the much anticipated New Covenant is about to be made. He says:

"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."  
(Luke 20:22)

"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28)

It was not until well into my adult years that I was awakened to the fact that forgiveness and atonement were tied to the announcement of the "new covenant." The New Covenant that was announced by the prophets had finally arrived. The long-awaited Messiah was also the maker of the New Covenant. As part of the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, God would forgive the people of their sins. But how was such a monumental task to be accomplished? This is answered by Jesus' announcement that it would be through His blood (His death) that the price for sin would be paid, and forgiveness would come. Jesus' language at the Last Supper certainly reflects the language of Jeremiah thirty-one. However, it is also language that is used by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote about the New Covenant that would be brought about by the work of the Messiah.<sup>12</sup>

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:11-12)

The forgiveness of sins announced in this passage by Isaiah would come as the result of the Messiah's establishment of the New Covenant<sup>13</sup> that the Messiah's suffering and death will bring about. During the Passover Meal, Jesus announced that the time of fulfillment was at hand. The next day, He would die for the sins of all that the Father had given Him. He would shed His blood, and the New Covenant would be established. So, the next time you take the Lord's Supper, let it be a reminder of forgiveness, atonement, and that the New Covenant has been established.

What does this mean for our study of Sundays and Sabbaths? The Old Covenant has been replaced, and the symbols that went with it. We are no longer required to eat the Passover Meal. Why? Because it, like the Sabbaths, circumcision, and special feasts days, were given to Israel as part of the

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<sup>12</sup> See Isaiah 54:1-55:1; specifically, however New Covenant prophecy begins in Isaiah 38:1

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah uses the term "covenant of peace" for the "new covenant." See Isaiah 54:10 <sup>72</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7

Old Covenant. Their purpose has been served under the Old Covenant. Now that the New Covenant has arrived, we celebrate something far greater than the exodus from slavery; we celebrate the Person and work of Jesus Christ by participating in the Lord's Supper, "for Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed."<sup>72</sup>

**Summary:** The history of Israel continually breaking covenant and receiving the punishment for doing so is repeated throughout the Bible. The prophets announced that God would create a New Covenant in which God would supernaturally act to keep the people from breaking the covenant. This New Covenant would result from the Messiah becoming our covenant mediator. In the New Covenant, the incarnate Son of God lived the perfect, sinless, righteous life that no one in the Old Covenant could do. This perfect record of sinlessness and obedience is why everyone in the New Covenant, is God's possession, knows God, has a new heart, is forgiven, and will receive eternal life. The New Covenant is far superior to the Old Covenant, as Christ has made it unbreakable, immutable, and everlasting.