

**HEBREWS 25
(Hebrews 8:6-13)**

**WE HAVE A BETTER COVENANT
By Ron Harvey
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INTRODUCTION

All the way through the book of Hebrews the word better stands out. Jesus is better than the angels. Melchisedec was better than Abraham. The sacrifice of Christ is better than the sacrifice of animals. The priesthood of Christ is better than the Levitical priesthood. Abraham looked for a better country – that is a heavenly.

And if you look in the first verse of our text for this evening, you will find that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, which was built on better promises.

Now when it says that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, you could use the word priest. He is the priest of a better covenant. We have already seen that he is a much better priest than those in the Levitical priesthood. He is better because:

1. He is not a temporary priest but a permanent one.
 - a. Melchisedec (and so Jesus) was a priest after an endless life.
 - b. Jesus sat down in heaven indicating permanence.
2. He is a spotless priest. He was not sinful himself like other priests.
3. He ministers in heaven as opposed to in a cubicle in a tent.
4. He offers a better sacrifice (himself).

But now we see that not only is Jesus a better priest, but he is a priest of a better covenant. And if there is a better covenant - that means that there is a worse covenant. And so tonight we will attempt to define and describe these two covenants which are contrasted here.

Now we will spend most of our time this evening evaluating that worse covenant. And we will evaluate it so that we can clearly see the contrast with the better covenant.

Now let's first allow our text to make the contrast.

1. In verse 6 the one is called better and by implication the other must be worse.
2. In verse 7 one is by implication faultless in comparison to the other which is faulty.
3. In verse 13 one is new and the other is old.

Now there are many comparisons between these two covenants, but these are the most obvious that jump out of our text.

A look at the Old Covenant

Now let's look first at that covenant which is most often described as the Old Covenant. And I want to establish first that,

1. The Mosaic Covenant was a temporary arrangement.

Now notice when that covenant came into existence.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. (v.9)

So when did God make this covenant? He made it when he took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. More specifically, it seems that he made it about two months later when he brought Israel to Mt. Sinai and he gave the law to Moses and Moses gave it to the people. This was the beginning of that covenant. It is called the Mosaic Covenant because Moses was the mediator of that Covenant.

Now please note that Adam was created in about 6,000 BC and the Mosaic Covenant was made around 1,500 BC. So, God dealt with mankind for 4,500 years before he made this covenant with Israel. And let me ask his question. Did God save God men long before the Mosaic Covenant

came along? And the answer is yes. We conclude that God saved Adam and Seth and Enoch and Noah and many others long before there was any Mosaic Covenant.

Now this would indicate that the Mosaic Covenant was not indispensable to salvation. It came relatively late in the annals of human history. And the fact is that God saved men by grace long before this covenant with Israel came along.

I like to think of it like this. God always had a covenant of redemption. He always had an agreement or a covenant with himself to save fallen man.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Now you can't read this passage without having something hit you in the face – and that is that something concerning salvation went on before the foundation of the world. The words that are used here indicate that he chose us before the foundation of the world and he predestinated us before the foundation of the world.

Now it is not the point of this message to explore election and predestination. But I do want you to see that these salvation concepts arose out of the “good pleasure of his will.”

And in verse 11, it says they arose out of the counsel of his own will.

Now all of this implies that God covenanted among himself to save men. And we will call that the eternal Covenant of Redemption. And, that Covenant flows unbroken from eternity past to eternity future. It is never undone. It is never abrogated. It is never changed. It is absolutely unconditional.

Now this covenant of redemption is a covenant of works. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had work to do to redeem fallen men. And the Covenant relies solely on the ability of each person of the Godhead to do his part and to do it thoroughly.

Now you can see that all of this was planned and agreed to before the foundation of the world and it depends on the power of God alone. Does the Covenant depend on any work on the part of man? No. The Covenant is between God and God alone, made before the foundation of the world.

Now when this Covenant of Redemption is expressed in some way to a man, we call that a Covenant of Grace. When God tells a man, I will save you, then that is a promise. And because he asked nothing in return and because nothing but God's promise is at issue, it is a Covenant of Grace.

When God spoke to Abraham and made salvation promises to Him, this was an outbreak of the Covenant of Redemption. And to Abraham it was a Covenant of Grace because there was nothing required of him.

And the Covenant of Grace was manifested in Genesis 3:15 when God first promised a Savior. And it continues on throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament and to the end. If God saves men, then it is by his Covenant of Grace. Salvation has always been by grace, it will always be by grace. As far as men are concerned, salvation has always been by grace. That is, it is by someone else's work and not by his own.

But then, God came along in 1,500 BC and makes a covenant with a nation – Israel. And we want to notice that this covenant was from the very beginning designed to be a temporary arrangement. It was a 1,500 year blip on the radar screen of God's redemptive plan.

Wherefore serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.

Gal. 3:19

Now it is safe to say that God saved people before the covenant came along and he has saved many, many people after the usefulness of the covenant passed away. The covenant was here for about 1,500 years and then the seed came and its purpose was completed.

And so, we conclude that this Mosaic covenant was a very temporary arrangement.

2. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional arrangement.

Now remember that God's overriding Covenant of Grace is an unconditional arrangement with men. He simply says, I will do something to save you.

But look at Deuteronomy 28:1 where he describes the Mosaic Covenant.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord the God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth. (28:1)

And notice one gigantic little word in this arrangement. It is the word "if." If you do all his commands, He will bless you."

The Lord shall establish thee a holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. (28:9)

And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them. (28:13)

So the Lord said, I will bless you if you obey me. But also notice what would happen if they did not obey.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: (28:15)

So you see that the Mosaic Covenant was quite different than the Covenant of Grace, it is conditional.

3. The Mosaic Covenant was a national arrangement.

This was not a covenant for the Gentiles. This was not a covenant for the Philistines or the Amorites or the Canaanites. It was a covenant specifically for Israel. This was not a covenant to be obeyed universally. It was for one tiny nation. All other nations were sinners before the time of this covenant, during the time of this covenant and after this covenant. They were sinners irrespective of this covenant. This covenant was an arrangement between one nation and God.

4. The Mosaic Covenant is characterized by earthly promises.

See Deuteronomy 28:3-13 where among other things they would be blessed with: fruitful ground, fruitful cattle, bountiful flocks of sheep, full baskets, bread ("store"), victory over enemies, full storehouses, plentiful goods (v.11), rain at the right time, a good economy, a leadership position in the world.

And, if they disobeyed there would be earthly catastrophe.
(Deuteronomy 28:16-68.)

So, God conditionally promised them earthly blessings by this Mosaic Covenant.

Next, I would have you note that,

5. The Mosaic Covenant is characterized as a covenant of works.

By its very nature, the Mosaic Covenant is a covenant of works. If you obey you are blessed. If you disobey you are cursed. Wherever you see a reference to the Mosaic Covenant or the law you are likely to find a reference to works. Look at the following two verses:

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Gal.3:2)

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. (Gal.3:12)

6. The Mosaic Covenant is characterized by bondage.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law. (Gal.4:5)

Now notice that those that were under the law needed redemption. They needed redemption because they were in bondage.

You remember the story of Abraham. He had a son by Hagar and he had a son by Sarah. And look what the scriptures say about this story.

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Gal.4:22-26)

Now according to the allegory, the son of Hagar is in bondage. Ishmael was born to a slave. But Isaac was born to a free woman. And the two sons correspond to the two covenants. Now Ismael was the castaway. He wasn't the son of promise. Isaac was the son of promise. And Hagar and Ismael in the allegory correspond to Mt. Sinai and "to the Jerusalem which now is."

This is very, very instructive. The Covenant which was given at Mt. Sinai to Moses and to Israel was a covenant which engendered bondage. It was a covenant of works which resulted in nothing but condemnation. There was no hope of salvation under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant said, "Do these things and have earthly blessings." It was never a Covenant that promised salvation.

For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. (Gal.3:21)

This statement is made in the theoretical. It says, if it were possible,

then it would have been so. But the point is that it is not possible to devise a law that would save men. A law cannot give life. A law can only point out our flaws. It magnifies our sin. It shows us to be utterly hopeless. But it can never give us life. This is the clear, unequivocal statement of Scripture. You can write this down as an irrefutable principle of God's Word.

Sinners cannot derive life and righteousness from a law.

If there had been such a law, it says God would have done it by law. But it is impossible. A square peg cannot be inserted into a round hole. And law cannot give life to a sinner.

But God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel. And the natural effect of that is that it put them into bondage. This is why Ishmael is equated with Mt. Sinai in the allegory. And notice what else is equated with Ishmael – “Jerusalem which now is.”

Now Ishmael is not the chosen one in this allegory. Isaac is chosen and Ishmael is an outcast. Isaac is saved and Ishmael is lost. Isaac is the child of promise. Ishmael is a child of bondage. And who does Ishmael represent in the allegory? He represents the nation of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant.

That city on a hill, Mt. Zion, that holy city of the Jews, answers to Hagar and Ishmael. Why? Because the Jews were under a covenant of bondage. It was a covenant of works. It was a covenant that could not give life nor righteousness. And you see it proven over and over again in the nation of Israel. Oh how they relied on their covenant. And that covenant could not give them life!

You see, Isaac is not seen as being under the Mosaic Covenant, but under the promise to Abraham. Isaac was under grace! But Ishmael, he hearkens to Sinai. He falls under the Mosaic Covenant. He answers to that earthly city Jerusalem which is inhabited by a nation in bondage to the Mosaic Covenant.

In the allegory, Hagar and Ishmael are pictures no less of the people of Israel under a covenant of bondage. And Hagar and Ishmael correspond to the city of Jerusalem – that is, those Jewish people who had Jerusalem as their religious headquarters.

You see, Israel was destined to suffer the curses promised under the law because they were sinners and they could not and would not obey it. And so, like Hagar and Ishmael they were enemies of the children of promise. They were enemies of the true people of God. Look at Gal.3:29. Ishmael persecuted Isaac and even so, the Jews persecuted God's spiritual people.

Saul raced from town to town killing Christians and hauling others out of their houses and into prison. The Jews stoned Stephen to death because they were children of the bondwoman. They hated Christ when he came. The Bible says, He came unto his own and they received him not. Why? Because they were children of the bondwoman. After Christ was killed the Jews continued to persecute his people. Why? Because they languished under a Covenant that could not and was not designed to give them life. And they suffered the curses that were associated with the Covenant.

Their baskets and their storehouses were empty. Their land did not yield fruit. Their cattle and their flocks did not increase. When they went into the city and when they went out they were cursed. The Lord sent them vexation. Everything they set their hand to do went wrong. Pestilences came upon them. The Lord smote them with fevers and with inflammation and with the sword and with mildew. The Lord turned their rain into powder and dust. When they went to war with their enemies they were overrun. Their carcasses fell and they became meat for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. The Lord smote them with the scab and with the itch and they could not be healed. He smote them with blindness and with madness. It says, when they built a house, someone would come and take it away from them. When they took a wife, another man would sleep with her. Their children were taken away from them by oppressive nations and they longed for them all day long. The Lord smote them in their knees and in the legs with sores that could not be healed. And they were scattered among the nations. God sent locusts to devour their trees. Their economy was ruined so that they borrowed from other nations.

Why did all of this happen to Israel? It happened because they disobeyed God and they suffered the awful curses of the Mosaic covenant.

7. The Mosaic Covenant was a demanding covenant.

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.

There was no grace under this Mosaic covenant. The slightest violation was worthy of severe punishment. Now be very clear, God displayed grace during the time of the covenant, but the grace that he showed was not pursuant to the Mosaic Covenant. If God had mercy on men it was by the same covenant of grace that he exhibited to Adam and Eve and Enoch and Noah and Abraham. The fountain of God's grace is not found in the Mosaic Covenant except by type. True enough, there were pictures of grace in Christ, but the nature of this covenant was works and not grace.

8. The Old Covenant is characterized by death.

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious . . . (II Corinthians 3:7)

9. The Old Covenant is characterized by condemnation.

For if the ministration of condemnation be glory . . . (II Cor. 3:9)

10. The Old Covenant was a faulty covenant. (Heb.8:7)

Now this is a hard saying since the Old Covenant was given by God. There is never anything faulty about what God does. And yet it says, "If it had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." You see the idea. If that Old Covenant had been perfect, then there would have been no need for another covenant.

Example: If I had a favorite baseball bat and I hit a homerun with that bat every time up, then I would be foolish to get another bat. On the other hand, if I went 0 for 50 with that bat, then I might consider using another bat.

Now Israel went 0 for forever with that Old Covenant bat. They failed every time up. It was too heavy for them. It weighed a thousand pounds. Why, they couldn't even pick the bat up it was so heavy.

And that's because that Old Covenant was not intended for the use of salvation. And if you tried to use it to get to heaven, you found that it was faulty.

Example: If I try to use my wife's vacuum cleaner to mow the lawn, then I would be very frustrated because it is not designed to mow the lawn. It would be faulty in terms of being able to mow the lawn.

And so, the Old Covenant is said to be faulty. But of course, the fault was really found in the people. It was their sin nature. It was their wicked heart that was at fault.

11. It was a typical covenant.

Now we don't need to spend much time here. We have seen over and over in Hebrews that the things under this Old Covenant were pictures. Animal sacrifices were pictures of the real sacrifice of Christ. Moses was a type of Christ. Aaron was a type of Christ. The entire Levitical Priesthood was a type of the priesthood of Christ. Melchisedec is a type of Christ. Egypt is a picture of bondage to sin. The wilderness wanderings are a picture of our sojourning in this world on our way to our place of heavenly rest. Israel itself is a type of the real spiritual people of God.

And so you see that that Old Covenant has its significance in its typology. It was never intended to be an end in itself. It was intended to eliminate all hope except in Christ. And in that it did a very effective job.

If the Mosaic Covenant was designed to save, then it was an utter failure. In fact, it was designed to teach that law cannot save.

Any scheme of salvation that ultimately depends on me, my performance or my work, is doomed from the start.

Now almost a thousand years after the Mosaic Covenant was given to Israel, after they had proven over and over that they could not abide by its terms, God graciously revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that he would make a new covenant.

See Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Now I want you to notice a fundamental difference between the language of this New Covenant and the language of the Old Covenant. Remember how the Old Covenant said, If you do these things you will be blessed and if you disobey you will be cursed.

You will notice that there are no conditions in the New Covenant. The New Covenant says, “I will” and “they shall.”

This makes it clear that whereas the Old Covenant was a conditional covenant of works, the New Covenant is an unconditional covenant of grace. God simply says, I will save you.

You see, the New Covenant will do what that Old Covenant never could. We now know for sure that we cannot save ourselves. We now know by Israel’s example that we are sinners through and through. We now know that if salvation is by works we are doomed. We now know that though we say we can, we can’t. We now know that righteousness can never come by the law. We now understand that the law cannot give life. We now have seen the long history of Israel’s struggle to be justified by that Old Covenant. And we have seen their carcasses strewn from one end of the world to the other.

But our text says that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. (8:7)

And let me say, it is better first of all because it is all of grace and none of works. It is all of him and none of me.

God says, “Are you now convinced that you cannot save yourselves? Then watch me now. For this time, instead of writing my law on stones, I will write them on your hearts.

This is the crucial difference between the two covenants. In the first covenant, God wrote laws on tables of stone and said, “Now Israel, see if you can obey.”

But in the second covenant, he wrote his laws on our hearts and made us willing and happy to obey.

Salvation is all about grace. It is God doing for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves. It is God causing Aaron’s dead rod to bud with life. It is Jesus

calling a dead Lazarus out of the tomb to live again. In the words of Paul,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved;)

Eph.2:5

Now under that Old Covenant a man picked up sticks on the Sabbath Day. And they brought him to Moses and said what shall we do with him? And Moses asked the Lord. And the Lord said, "Take him outside the camp and stone him to death." You see, there was condemnation under that Old Covenant. There was harsh reality under the law and mercy was not found.

But look at the New Covenant.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:12

Thank God that old religious system has run its course. It was a strict schoolmaster. And when the people of Israel erred, they were punished severely. But all of that was to lead us to Christ. And in Him there is abundant pardon for sin. Grace flows where once there was no mercy.

Look. It says, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness."

Under the new covenant when you sin he is merciful.

Many people don't like that doctrine. They say don't tell people that because then they will think it is OK to sin. But I say grace is the only concept that will stop you from sinning. The law didn't stop Israel from sinning and a set of rules won't stop us from sinning. But a sound sense of his grace and mercy will break our hearts of stone into pieces.

Where would any of us be without his mercy on a daily basis? And it says, *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness.*

Are you in Christ? Then he is merciful to your unrighteousness. You say, "But my sins are great and they are too numerous to count." Even so, he is merciful to you day after day through Christ.

Why is he merciful to our unrighteousness? It is because he has sworn to be merciful to us by his New Covenant. Whereas he was harsh under the Old, he is gentle under the New.