

**The Law, the New Covenant, and the Christian:
Studies in Hebrews 7–10**

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Introduction

There is no more important issue in the NT in regard to the Christian's relationship to God than that of the new covenant.¹ The justification for such a strong statement is this: if the new covenant is the basis on which the Christian is rightly related to God in terms of fellowship,² then failure to recognize that basis means the Christian will neither understand nor fully appreciate God's gracious provisions for his or her spiritual life. On the contrary, if the new covenant is strictly for Israel, then the Christian who claims it as his own is trespassing on and misappropriating the rightful prerogatives of another, attempting to live by the wrong standard.³

The present study does not attempt to answer all questions related to the new covenant—that is a book-length task.⁴ The goal, rather, is to consider what Heb 7–10

* Over the past six months earlier versions of this paper have been presented in a Baptist Bible Seminary Faculty Forum, a guest lecture at Central Baptist Seminary, Virginia Beach, in several PhD seminars at BBS, and at the Bible Faculty Summit in Ankeny, Iowa. I am indebted to the numerous people who interacted with me on this topic in those settings; it has helped shape and sharpen the present version. I have written several additional sections which are omitted in the present edition for two reasons. First, they would shift the focus from the exegesis of Heb 7–10 in that they address both preliminary issues as well as matters of theological integration that properly come after the exegesis. The assignment for this paper is strictly exegetical, not integrative. Second, the resulting paper would be far too long; as it is, there is more material included than we can consider in the time allotted.

¹ This is recognized in nondispensational treatments of the new covenant as well. See, e.g., Jason Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 280–86.

² The discussion here is with reference to a *Christian*; this in no way denigrates the doctrines of regeneration and justification by which one *becomes* a Christian.

³ This is precisely the claim made by Miles Stanford in his essay, “The Great Trespass” (Colorado Springs: By the author, 1991).

⁴ Were this essay a full treatment of the new covenant (but then it would be a book, not an essay!), it would be necessary to address, from the vantage point of Hebrews, the antecedent theology of the new covenant and suggest how that would impact the discussion in this corpus. That would include the OT material (primarily Jer 31), the discussion in the Upper Room recorded in the Synoptics, as well as 1 and

contributes to our understanding of the new covenant.⁵ It is essential that fundamental exegetical studies of this nature be the basis on which conclusions regarding the new covenant are based. A full-scale exegesis of all four chapters is, of course, impossible in a paper of this size, but perhaps the key portions can be mined to provide grist for our hermeneutical/theological mill as we process an exegetically-based, dispensational model of the new covenant. At the least, any such model must incorporate the data from Heb 7–10 that is summarized below; it is, after all, the final and fullest statement in the NT regarding the new covenant.⁶

Hebrews Introduction

The portion of Hebrews most directly relevant to the topic of the new covenant lies at the very heart of the argument of the book,⁷ so it is worth tracing that argument to see how the writer uses the several expository sections to support his exhortations and

2 Corinthians. A book-length monograph treating the full range of biblical material on the new covenant from a dispensational perspective is urgently needed. None, to my knowledge, has ever been written. The closest that we have is Bruce Compton's dissertation from a quarter century ago—which was never revised and published: "An Examination of the New Covenant in the Old and New Testaments" (ThD diss., Grace Theol Sem, 1986), updated and summarized in idem, "Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant," *DBSJ* 8 (2003): 3–48. I would very much like to tackle such a challenge, but it would be quite a few years before I could begin such a project, and then only if I had enough active years remaining to carry it through.

⁵ It is disconcerting to observe the omission of this major portion of Scripture from many discussion of the relationship of the Mosaic law to the Christian. Most of the debate rages in Paul or sometimes in Matthew, with perhaps an occasional listing of a parenthetical reference in Hebrews. It is true that there are not single-verse "proof texts" in Hebrews. What is required in this corpus is a biblical theology integration of the argument of the book as a whole and particularly of chapters 7–10.

⁶ Hebrews holds pride of place as the culminating and final discussion (canonically) of the new covenant. Only the Johannine corpus remained unwritten at the time Hebrews was penned, and there is no explicit discussion of the new covenant in any of John's writings. (There may be some implicit references to the new covenant in John; on this see Robert Lillo, "Theological Word Pairs As a Literary Device in the Gospel of John" [PhD diss, Central Baptist Seminary, Minneapolis, 2005.]) It is possible that the pastorals were also yet unfinished at this time, but they do not address the new covenant. The date of their writing is very close to that of Hebrews and the relative dating cannot be established beyond question. I do assume that all the Synoptics were written by the early 60s, Luke (the last of the three) no later than AD 62. I date Hebrews to the mid-60s, perhaps AD 64.

⁷ As Hughes notes, "the theology of the covenant belongs integrally to the argument of this central section of the epistle" (Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1977], 364). Frank Thielman phrases it this way: "The basic argument of Hebrews is among the most straightforward of the entire New Testament: the 'new covenant' is superior in every way to the 'first covenant,' and therefore Christians should suffer hardship faithfully rather than revert to Judaism" (*The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity*, Companions to the New Testament [New York: Crossroad, 1999], 111).

warnings.⁸ The book divides into three sections. The first, 1:1–10:39, presents three contrasts which show how Jesus is better. The second part consists of three comparisons to encourage faithfulness (11:1–12:29). The final part is a concluding exhortation (13:1–25). The five warning passages are nestled within these expositions. As the author expounds the superiority of Jesus to angels (1:4–2:18), he pauses to warn them not to drift away and neglect their great salvation (2:1–4). When he then turns to show how Jesus is better than Moses (3:1–4:13), he once again incorporates a warning against hard hearts that preclude entering God’s rest (3:7–4:13). The longest essay in the first part of the book, and indeed, the longest portion of the book as a whole (4:14–10:39), is devoted to demonstrating that Jesus is better than the OT Levitical system. This time there are two warnings, one embedded in the argument warns against falling away (5:11–6:12), and a second (10:26–39) which serves as a summary and transition to the next section. In the second major section the three-part comparison describes the faithfulness of OT believers who also suffered persecution and hardship (11:1–12:1), Jesus’ endurance of the cross (12:2–4), and the believer’s relationship to his heavenly Father (12:5–29). Following these comparisons, the fifth and final warning is given against refusing God who is a consuming fire (12:25–29).

The new covenant is a crucial aspect of the author’s argument that Jesus is better than the OT Levitical system—indeed, it dominates the second half of that argument, nestled between the third and fourth warning passages. When the contrasting old and new covenants are first mentioned at 7:11–12, the author has already pointed to the superiority of Jesus as high priest (4:14–5:10), predicated, in part, on it being according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20). The Melchizedekian typology is elaborated in 7:1–10. The argument takes a deliberate turn at 7:11 when the author begins to unpack the significance of Jesus being a Melchizedekian high priest.

Hebrews 7

Change in the Law, 7:11–17

The author of Hebrews begins this section of his argument with a question (v. 11): Why was there a need for a Melchizedekian priest? Were not the Aaronic priests capable of meeting the needs of God’s people? This question in v. 11 is the apodosis of a conditional statement,⁹

⁸ I assume the letter was written to believers, mostly Jewish, in Rome, probably in the mid-60s shortly after the great fire of Rome as the Neronian persecutions are just beginning. I have discussed this background in “The Original Readers of Hebrews,” *JMAT* 3 (1999): 20–49.

⁹ First class condition; *protasis*: Εἰ μὲν οὖν τελείωσις διὰ τῆς Λευιτικῆς ἱερωσύνης ἦν, and *apodosis*: τίς ἔτι χρεία κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἕτερον ἀνίστασθαι ἱερέα καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Ἀαρῶν λέγεσθαι; (*Protasis*:

the protasis of which implies the answer: perfection (τελείωσις) could not be attained through (δία) the Levitical priesthood.¹⁰ The rhetorical nature of the answer in the apodosis clearly implies that the protasis is false. Since God has now instituted a Melchizedekian priesthood, then there must have been an inherent deficiency with the previous Aaronic priesthood.

It is quite interesting that the argument at this point references the priesthood (ἱερωσύνη¹¹), not the law per se. Our writer does not ask directly, “was the law adequate?” An explanatory γάρ clause is found parenthetically within the conditional statement: “for on the basis of it [i.e., the Aaronic priesthood] the people received the law (νενομοθέτηται).”¹² Initially the explanation seems backwards: was not the priesthood based on the law rather than vice versa?¹³ Chronologically and legally, that is true, but the statement here should probably be understood functionally. The Aaronic priesthood was so fundamental to and pervasive of the law that it can easily be viewed as essential to the law

Wherefore if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood; *apodosis*: why is there still a need for another priest to arise, one according to the order of Melchizedek and not described according to the order of Aaron?)

¹⁰ Kent defines τελείωσις as “the making of men acceptable to God” and explains that “the Levitical priesthood could accomplish this only within limits” (Homer Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Baker, 1972], 132).

¹¹ This is not a common word in the NT; ἱερωσύνη, “priesthood,” occurs only three times, all in this passage (vv. 11, 12, 24; cp. ἱερεύς, “priest,” and ἱερουργέω, “to serve as priest”).

¹² Formally, “the people were nomized” (νομοθετέω, “to legislate, found by law,” BDAG, 676), they were placed under the authority of the covenant, both in its initial implementation and in its ongoing governance, by and through a sacerdotal ministry. The same verb is used of the establishment or “founding” of the new covenant in 8:6. The sense is slightly different due to the change in subject. Here it is the *people* who are “nomized” (ὁ λαός ... νενομοθέτηται); in chapter 8 the subject is the covenant, it is “founded/enacted as law” (διαθήκης, ἥτις ... νενομοθέτηται).

¹³ That ἐπ’ αὐτῆς means “on the basis of” and not “concerning” seems nearly certain. BDAG lists these two glosses together (365.8), but almost every example listed means “on the basis of.” Only one or two might be taken as “concerning”—and Heb 7:11 is explicitly translated by BDAG as “on the basis of” (also BDF §234.8.8). Likewise Daniel Wallace’s discussion (*Greek Grammar* [Zondervan, 1996], 376) lists only three meanings for ἐπί with the genitive: spatial (“on, upon...”), temporal (“during”), and causal (“on the basis of”); no listing is given for “with reference to.” Similar uses occur, e.g., in 1 Tim 5:19 (ἐπὶ δύο ἢ τριῶν μαρτύρων) and Mark 12:14 (ἐπ’ ἀληθείας τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ διδάσκεις). Also the γάρ makes little sense if ἐπ’ αὐτῆς means “concerning”—no explanation is offered. Lane argues for “concerning,” but both of his examples are drawn from Philo and only one uses ἐπί with the genitive (*Spec. Laws* 2.35; the other is a dative, 1.235); none from the NT or LXX (*Hebrews*, 1:174 n.b). I find no other instances of νομοθετέω with ἐπί + genitive in Josephus, the pseudepigrapha, or the Apostolic Fathers. Thielman also opts for “concerning” (based on Philo), but notes that “admittedly, this makes the phrase weak and redundant” (*The Law and the NT*, 133 n.19).

as the structure which mediated the entire covenant to the people.¹⁴ The priests were not simply cultic functionaries who offered sacrifices. Their complex role as not only immolators, but also as teachers and health officials (to mention but two of their additional functions) brought them into regular and frequent contact with the people.¹⁵ Apart from the priesthood, the law could not function.

The following verse (12) introduces a conclusion drawn from this rhetorical argument: a change of priesthood (i.e., from Aaronic to Melchizedekian) mandates a change of law. This does not refer to a modification of the existing law, but a change from one law to another.¹⁶ The two halves of v. 12 use forms of the same word: μετατίθημι (12a) and μετάθεσις (12b).¹⁷ Just as the Aaronic priesthood is totally replaced by the Melchizedekian priesthood, so the law which authorized the Aaronic priesthood is totally replaced by a new (as yet unspecified) law. This is a logical and necessary change: it is ἐξ ἀνάγκης—“of necessity.”¹⁸ Because the previous priesthood is such an intimate part of the law (v. 11b), the priesthood cannot be changed without changing the law itself.

Introduction of a Better Hope, 7:18–22

After spelling out the differences of Jesus’ priesthood,¹⁹ the writer reiterates the replacement of the law: the “former regulation” (προαγούσης ἐντολῆς) is not modified, renewed, or revised,²⁰ but is “annulled” (ἀθέτησις)—a “stronger word” than the μετάθεσις

¹⁴ Paul Ellingworth makes the same point: “in the author’s view, the Mosaic law is essentially a set of cultic regulations in which the role of priests is fundamental. Priesthood and law are indissolubly bound together; and within this relation, priesthood is logically prior” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC [Eerdmans, 1993], 372). See also Kent, *Hebrews*, 132.

¹⁵ For some discussion of the functions of the priests, see W. McCready, “Priests and Levities, VII. Priestly Duties and Responsibilities,” in *ISBE* rev., ed. G. Bromiley, 3:967–68 (4 vols., Eerdmans, 1979–88).

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce comments that μετάθεσις “implies not merely change but abrogation” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1964], 143 n.39).

¹⁷ μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται (Heb 7:12). Although “change” makes good sense here, it is possible that “remove” is intended since that is the more common usage in Hebrews (cf. 11:5; 12:27), though that may be a meaning associated with a physical movement. If the alternate meaning is relevant here, the verse would read, “When the priesthood is removed, there must also be a removal of the law.”

¹⁸ Something that is ἐξ ἀνάγκης describes “necessity or constraint as inherent in the nature of things” (BDAG, s.v. ἀνάγκη, 60.1).

¹⁹ He is from Judah, not Levi; qualified not by ancestry, but by his eternity, vv. 13–17.

²⁰ It is common for covenant theologians to view the new covenant as a “renewed” covenant. The standard statement of this is in the Westminster Confession of Faith: the covenant of grace “was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel” (7.5), and “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (7.6).

of v. 12.²¹ This was a technical, legal term in some contemporary, first century usage.²² With a non-legal referent (e.g., ἀμαρτία in Heb 9:26) it may mean “to put aside” or “do away with.”²³ It was also a technical term in Alexandrian textual criticism used to describe those passages marked as spurious with an obelus and therefore to be expunged from the text.²⁴ In these cases this word cannot mean “renewed” or “transformed,” nor can it be used to describe something that is otherwise said to be renewed or transformed; the semantics are incompatible with each other at that level.²⁵

Advocates, however, must acknowledge language of discontinuity as well. O. Palmer Robertson, e.g., says both that “this concept of newness implies a break with the past” and “a factor of continuity must be recognized... It will be essentially the same law of God that will be the substance of this engraving [i.e. of his will on the heart]” (*The Christ of the Covenants* [P&R, 1980], 280–82). Similar, though more carefully argued, is Paul Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (IVP, 2007), 180–82 (summary; see 146–81 for detail). Petrus Gräbe postulates a dual understanding of the relationship: for the OT context, “it is new in that it is a reconstitution of that which had lost its natural self-evidence,” but in the NT, “the motif of discontinuity assumes a decisive prevalence” in the “Christian reinterpretation” of Jer 31 (*New Covenant, New Community* [Paternoster, 2006], 49–50). For an even more drastic view of the continuity of the old and new covenants, see Fredrick Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change, Maintaining Christian Identity* (Eerdmans, 1999), 75, 90–92. There is a capable critique of Holmgren in Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 148–49. On the possibility that Heb 13:20 refers to a covenant of grace (which encompasses both the old and new covenants), see Richard L. Mayhue, “Heb 13:20: Covenant of Grace Or New Covenant? An Exegetical Note,” *MSJ*, 7 (1996): 251–57. A recent supersessionist argument has been put forward by Mark Nonos, arguing that the old covenant is “continued but augmented to be made effective in a new way or to a new degree, freshening up something worn-out” (“New or Renewed Covenantalism? A Response to Richard Hayes,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, et al., 183–88 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 185, italics in the original). Although not professing covenant theology, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. argues the same understanding (*The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Zondervan, 2008], 31, 202, 367, and 393. His primary defense of understanding it to be a “renewed” covenant is the similarities between subjects included in both old and new covenants—as if similarity proves identity. (He also cites some cognate Semitic terms, but they are irrelevant to the use of the Greek term in the context of Heb 7–10.)

²¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 147 n.56. Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 380) notes that ἀθέτησις is linked with ἀκύρωσις (“cancelling”) in the papyri. (In the NT, see the cognate verb, ἀκυρώω, “to make void, set aside,” e.g., Gal 3:17, “the law ... does not set aside the covenant previously established by God”—i.e., the old covenant did not set aside the Abrahamic. By contrast, the new covenant does set aside the old covenant.)

²² BDAG cites it as a legal technical term from BGU 44, 16 (AD 102); 196, 21; and 281, 18. See also J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1930; reprint, Hendrickson, 1997), 12, s.v. ἀθέτησις and ἀθετέω.

²³ Referring to Jesus: νυνὶ δὲ ἄπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν τῆς ἀμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θουσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται (but now once at the end of the ages he has appeared to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself, Heb 9:26).

²⁴ E. K. Simpson, “The Vocabulary of the Epistle to the Hebrews, II,” *EQ* 18 (1946): 190.

²⁵ A recent dissertation has argued extensively that the Law has been transformed; this is said to be “the result of what occurs when Christ intersects the Law. There are radical changes that occur in both the

That ἀθέτησις means “annulled” is reinforced in the present context by the following statement that in place of the annulled covenant, a better hope is introduced (ἐπεισαγωγή κρείττονος ἐλπίδος, v. 19). The meaning of ἐπεισαγωγή (a NT hapax) can be seen in Josephus who uses it to describe the *replacement* of the deposed Vashti by a new wife (Ant 11.196).²⁶ The words ἀθέτησις and ἐπεισαγωγή are correlative (note the μὲν ... δέ construction and the comparative form κρείττονος), reflecting what is taken away and what is put in its place. At this point in the argument the exact nature of the better hope is not specified.²⁷ All that is said is that this hope replaces the “former regulation” and that it is a “better” (κρείττων) hope. One would expect by such a comparison that the replacement would be something of a similar character to the commandment that is replaced. That assumption will be validated shortly, but first the writer refers to the function of this better hope.

Already there has been a discussion of the function of the former regulation, the law. In verse 11 it was stated negatively: the priesthood, which gave the law to the people, did not function in such a way as to enable “perfection.” Likewise in v. 18 the former regulation was described as “weak and useless” (ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀνωφελές), “for the law made nothing perfect” (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐτελείωσεν ὁ νόμος). We might hesitate to speak in negative terms regarding the Mosaic law, but Scripture is not abashed at this point. The combination of ἀσθενής and ἀνωφελής is striking in this regard. Even regarded as a relative statement (which it probably is), Scripture still insists that the law was deficient.²⁸ Nor can the force of this statement be diminished by arguing that the “former regulation” (προαγωγῆς ἐντολῆς) is only some part of the Mosaic covenant (e.g., the “ceremonial” law or those

priesthood and the Law that involve both discontinuity and continuity” (Barry Joslin, “The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews” [PhD diss, SBTS, 2005], 168). This essentially involves “the cessation of the Levitical priesthood and its cultus” and “the internalization and ... fulfillment in the New Covenant” (169, 170). Joslin explains the better hope as the Melchizedekian priesthood (190), but this is not parallel with the “former regulation.”

²⁶ This word does not appear otherwise in the LXX, Philo, Apostolic Fathers, or the pseudepigrapha.

²⁷ Commentators sometimes describe v. 19 in terms of the new covenant. Although this will prove to be correct in due course of the argument, it is important to expound the text in its own terms before drawing such conclusions. See, e.g., Hughes, *Hebrews*, 266.

²⁸ Some appeal to Rom 3:31 or 7:12 at this point: “we uphold the law” and “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good,” but that must be balanced not only with Paul’s argument in those contexts, but also with his other statements about the law including Rom 8:3 (“what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature”) and Gal 4:9 (“those weak and miserable principles”). The law can be described in quite diverse terms depending on the purpose of the description in any given context; there are no contradictions involved here. On these matters see Adeyemi, “New Covenant Torah,” 223–48.

portions dealing with the priesthood),²⁹ since this phrase is paralleled in the explanatory γάρ clause by ὁ νόμος, which without contextual qualification to the contrary,³⁰ almost certainly refers to the law as a whole.³¹

In contrast to the inferiority of the law, the newly introduced “better hope” is the “means by which we draw near to God” (δι’ ἧς ἐγγίζομεν τῷ θεῷ).³² The language of perfection (vv. 11, 18) appears to be semantically parallel to drawing near to God (v. 19); both describe the function of the respective referents, the law on one hand, the better hope on the other. They were the means for maintaining a relationship with God. The better hope enables Christians to enjoy “access to God without the constant necessity of removing the barrier of freshly accumulated sin.”³³

²⁹ The reference is not to a specific regulation as ἐντολή might seem to imply, but to the law as a whole. Although ἐντολή can refer to a specific law (e.g., Mark 10:19), it can also refer to the law as a whole either in the singular (e.g., Rom 7:8) or the plural (e.g., 1 Cor 7:19).

It is not uncommon to take a narrower view of this “former regulation” (προαγοῦσης ἐντολῆς). Hughes, e.g., defines it as those regulations of the old covenant which related to the priesthood and the sacrificial system: “The introduction of a new and different order of priesthood necessitated the setting aside of the law *insofar as its prescriptions for the regulation of the old priesthood and its ministry are concerned*” (*Hebrews*, 256, emphasis added). Or again, “The ‘change in the law’ is seen in this, that..., the numerous precepts of the law *respecting the function of the levitical priesthood* have been abrogated and have fallen into desuetude” (257, emphasis added), and “the *former commandment* refers in particular to the legislation whereby the Levitical priesthood and its succession were regulated.... Our author’s primary concern ... is with that part of the law ... which prescribed and controlled the sacrificial system” (264–65). Franz Delitzsch likewise says that “the νόμος of the Old Testament is not destroyed, but deepened and spiritualized.... the new covenant ... must be the end of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament” (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, transl. T. Kingsbury, 2 vols. [T. & T. Clark, 1871; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978], 2:165). See also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 381.

³⁰ In Hebrews the articular form of νόμος occurs 7 times (7:5, 19, 28 bis; 9:19, 22; 10:1) and always refers to the law as a whole. When the term is anarthrous the reference may be narrower (e.g., 8:10), or qualitative (e.g., 7:19), or it may have the same reference as the articular form, i.e., the law as a whole (e.g., 10:28). In none of the uses in Hebrews is there any reference to a larger, abstract concept of God’s law that transcends the Mosaic covenant.

³¹ Even Moo, who clearly says that “the entire Mosaic law comes to fulfillment in Christ, and this fulfillment means that this law is no longer a *direct and immediate* source of, or judge of, the conduct of God’s people” (“Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne Strickland, 319–76, 2d ed. [Zondervan, 1996], 343, emphasis in the original), acknowledges that often it is the sacrificial and priestly system that is the purview of the author of Hebrews (374), but he points to two particular passages in the book that suggest that the law as a whole is viewed as temporary: 7:11 and 8:7–13 (*ibid.*).

³² In the OT, ἐγγίζω with τῷ θεῷ often has priestly overtones (e.g., Exod 19:22; Lev 10:3), but may also refer to all the people of Israel (Psalm 148:14).

³³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 227. (Bruce’s comments relate to 10:2, but the same concept is in view.)

The law was intended to function as the means of perfection for Israel.³⁴ The author of Hebrews, however, explicitly refers to the better hope in relation to *Christians*. The first person plural personal ending on ἐγγίζομεν in this context can only refer to Christians. Although the author can use the first plural editorially (2:5; 6:9 *bis*, 11; 13:18), it usually has the wider inclusive reference to writer and readers (e.g., ἔχωμεν, 6:18)³⁵—and by extension in most cases, to all Christians.³⁶

To this point in the chapter the identity of this better hope has not yet been given. The author now spells out the specifics by means of an extended comparison in verses 20–22. Although it is not obvious in many translations (which have tried to simplify a complex statement),³⁷ verses 20 and 22 are explicitly linked using correlative³⁸ terms.

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 20, Καὶ καθ' ὅσον ... | And inasmuch as... (NASB) |
| 22, κατὰ τοσοῦτο καὶ κρείττονος διαθήκης ... | so much the more also... |

If it were put into a positive statement, the author's argument is that since this better hope was introduced with an oath, accordingly Jesus has become the guarantee (ἔγγυος)³⁹ of a better covenant by an oath.⁴⁰ This explanation is presented as directly related to the previous discussion of the better hope, being linked hypotactically by καί (which in Hebrews is not superfluous as it is in books with a more Semitic, paratactic style).⁴¹ The

³⁴ Whether the law had or has any function in relation to anyone other than Israel is not relevant at this point. The discussion in this context has been in relation to OT Israel.

³⁵ Other than the five instances cited above, all other first plural verbs in Hebrews have inclusive reference: Heb 2:1, 3, 8, 9; 3:6, 14, 19; 4:1, 2, 3, 11, 14, 15, 16; 6:1, 3, 18, 19; 7:19; 8:1; 10:10, 22, 23, 24, 30, 39; 11:3; 12:1, 9, 28; 13:10, 13, 14, 15 (44 instances total, some verses have multiple forms). If first person plural pronouns are added, 29/31 are inclusive references: Heb 1:2; 2:1, 3; 3:1, 6; 4:13, 15; 5:11; 6:20; 7:14, 26; 9:14, 24; 10:15, 20, 26, 39; 11:40; 12:1, 9, 25, 29; 13:6, 18, 20, 21, 23. Only two are more specific: ἡμῖν, 5:11 refers only to the readers (i.e., the writer is excluded) and ἡμῶν, 13:18 is editorial.

³⁶ Sometimes the generalized reference to all Christians is explicit, e.g., εἰσερχόμεθα γὰρ εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν οἱ πιστεύσαντες ... (for we who believe enter into rest, Heb 4:3).

³⁷ The comparison is not evident in NIV, ESV, HCSB, or ISV. It can be traced in NET and NASB.

³⁸ The formal correlative adjectives are ὅσος (v. 20) and τοσοῦτος (v. 22).

³⁹ ἔγγυος is a NT hapax; elsewhere in Hebrews Jesus is described as a mediator (μεσίτης) of the covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Some view these terms as distinct (e.g., Bruce, *Hebrews*, 151 n.70), others as essentially synonymous (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 388, a “legal synonym,” 410). Since outside the NT, “ἔγγυος is not used in connection with covenants or agreements” (ibid., 388), it is most likely not to be sharply distinguished here; it is rather a rare association used, perhaps, for stylistic purposes by the literary author of Hebrews.

⁴⁰ The parenthetical comparison in 20b–21 points to the OT priests' inferior standing since their priesthood was not validated by God's oath as was Jesus' priesthood.

⁴¹ Compare the similar function of καί in Heb 9:15. Relatively few paragraphs in Hebrews begin with καί; other than in catenae of OT quotations, paragraph-initial καί is only found elsewhere in 10:11 and 11:32. By

specific covenant has not yet been named, but the argument to this point has now equated the “better hope,” which has been introduced in place of the annulled law, as a covenant—in particular, a “better covenant” (κρείττονος διαθήκης). Thus the means by which the Christian draws near to God is a better covenant than the “former regulation” (the law, i.e., the old covenant). The writer will identify the covenant explicitly in the next chapter (at this point he may be assuming that its identity is understood and obvious). First, however, in verses 23–28 he traces the argument that Jesus, as permanent, Melchizedekian high priest, is superior to previous priests (ὅς οὐκ ἔχει καθ’ ἡμέραν ἀνάγκην, ὥσπερ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς..., v. 27). They were “men who were weak” (ἀνθρώπους ... ἔχοντας ἀσθένειαν, 28), but Jesus’ subsequent appointment by oath was that of a “son, perfected forever” (υἷὸν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετελειωμένον, 28).

Hebrews 8

Mediation of a Superior Covenant, 8:1–6

Chapter 8 begins with a summary (κεφάλαιον δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις, v. 1) of Jesus’ high priestly ministry in heaven on behalf of Christians⁴²—a ministry which was not suited to the earthly sanctuary. In the shadow (σκιᾷ, v. 5) tabernacle, Jesus’ ministry would have been out of place since he did not offer the sort of sacrifices prescribed by the law (vv. 3–4). His ministry is a superior one—as superior to the old ministry as the covenant (διαθήκης) of which he is the mediator is superior (implied: to the old covenant; v. 6). In v. 6 the correlative pronoun, ὅσῳ, with two comparative adjectives, διαφορωτέρας⁴³ and κρείττονος, draws the contrast very clearly.⁴⁴ Jesus serves in the heavenly sanctuary (τῶν ἀγίων λειτουργός, v. 2) in contrast to the Levitical high priests who offered sacrifices (τὸ

contrast, in Mark καί functions as the default connector, reflecting the use of waw in Hebrew and Aramaic. More than 60% of the sentences in Mark begin with καί.

⁴² The “we” (the first plural form in τοιοῦτον ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα) can only refer to Christians in this context. See Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” 40.

⁴³ διάφορος, “different, w. focus on value, *outstanding, excellent*” (BDAG, 239.2), with the comparative suffix, διαφορωτέρας (a rare form, see also Heb 1:4) means “more excellent, superior.”

⁴⁴ The syntax of this verse is not the simplest! It reads, διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσῳ καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται. The NIV makes good English and communicates the meaning accurately, but it is not easy to coordinate the word order. NRSV offers one of the better formal equivalents (supplying the subject for clarity): “But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.”

προσφέρειν δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας, v. 3) and served (λατρεύουσιν, v. 5) in the earthly, “shadow” tabernacle. His ministry is superior (διαφορωτέρας, v. 6) to theirs.

The covenant Jesus mediates, which is already enacted (placed in force, *νενομοθέτηται*, v. 6),⁴⁵ has still not yet been explicitly identified (i.e., by name), though it is implicitly contrasted with the old covenant—the covenant under which the earthly priests ministered. This covenant is superior to the previous one.

Replacement of a Deficient Covenant, 8:7–13

The argument now turns to address the specific identity of this covenant which Jesus mediates.

The Fault of the First Covenant, 8:7–8a

This still unidentified covenant was necessary because the first covenant was not faultless (v. 7).⁴⁶ The writer characteristically does not refer directly to the specific covenants involved using the full, descriptive titles that we prefer. Here he identifies the first covenant simply as “that first one” (ἡ πρώτη ἐκείνη, v. 7). It is evident from the context that this refers to the old covenant (i.e., the Mosaic covenant, the law). To identify the covenant with which the first one is contrasted, he will cite Scripture (vv. 8b–12), but first he pauses to evaluate the earlier covenant.

With a second class condition (εἰ ... ἦν, ... ἄν ... ἐζητεῖτο, v. 7) it is postulated that the first covenant was faulty: “If the first were faultless, then a place would not have been sought for a second.”⁴⁷ In positive terms, this means that the first covenant *was* faulty, thus the need for a second covenant to replace the first. The adjective *faultless* is a negated form (α + μέμφομαι > ἄμμεπτος) of the verb used in the following verse to introduce the quotation from Jer 31. This is now the second negative judgment regarding the Mosaic law (cf. 7:18) and prepares the way for the climactic statement to this effect in v. 8.

⁴⁵ As Compton correctly observes, “The [author of Hebrews] presents the new covenant in 8:6 as having already been ratified or “enacted” (“Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” 33). On the meaning of *νενομοθέτηται*, see n.12. The perfect tense describes the state or condition of the subject; the context makes the present reference clear since Jesus’ priestly ministry, based on this covenant, is a present reality (note the *vūn* [or possibly *voví*] at the beginning of v. 6 as a deictic marker).

⁴⁶ Note particularly the first/second contrast in v. 7 (πρώτη ... δευτέρα), somewhat obscured by NIV’s use of “another” for *δευτέρα*.

⁴⁷ To be explicit, the protasis, “If the first were faultless,” is assumed in a second class condition to be *false*. The apodosis then indicates what would have been the case had the protasis actually been true: “then a place would not have been sought for a second.”

The introductory clause (v. 8a) in the author’s thesis explains (γάρ) the writer’s basis for claiming that the first covenant was faulty.⁴⁸ The adverbial participle, μεμφόμενος, is probably causal: “because he found fault, he said....”

With what or whom did God find fault?⁴⁹ The answer to that question revolves, in part, around a textual variant.⁵⁰ If the standard UBS/NA text is followed, v. 8a clearly says that “God found fault with *them*” (i.e., presumably with the people: μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτούς λέγει). The accusative αὐτούς is found in **Ⲛ**^{*}, A, D^{*}, I, K, P, Ψ, etc. But other manuscripts have a dative at this point, αὐτοῖς: **Ⲣ**⁴⁶, **Ⲛ**^c, B, D^c, **Ⲙ**, etc. If the text has a dative, it could be understood and translated in one of two ways. It could express the same meaning as the accusative by taking the dative as the direct object of μεμφόμενος, or it could be understood as the indirect object of λέγει, thus, “finding fault, he said *to them*.” Since μέμφομαι can be used with either an accusative or dative as the direct object,⁵¹ there is no firm grammatical criteria on which to judge the variant. External evidence must therefore be determinative. Though the presence of the majority text reading causes some critics to judge otherwise,⁵² the early evidence of **Ⲣ**⁴⁶, **Ⲛ**^c, B would seem persuasive for the adoption of the dative.

If we then read the dative αὐτοῖς as the indirect object of λέγει (“he said to them”), we would make better sense of the author’s argument,⁵³ since there has been no previous mention of “them” in the context. The discussion up to this point has revolved around Jesus and the old covenant priests; it has not addressed Israel, per se, as the accusative

⁴⁸ Compton, “Examination of the New Covenant,” 223.

⁴⁹ That it is *God* who finds fault is not explicit in the text; there is no separate subject for the verb λέγει, thus, “he says.” To supply “God” as the subject (as, e.g., NIV, NET, NRSV, ISV) is justifiable from the context since the quotation introduced explicitly says that it is the Lord who speaks (λέγει κύριος, v. 8b).

⁵⁰ Joslin’s dissertation arguing for a renewed covenant never mentions this crucial textual issue (“Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews,” 228–29 is his discussion of vv. 7–8).

⁵¹ BDAG, s.v., μέμφομαι, 629, “*find fault with, blame* w. acc. τινά someone ... and τὶ [sic] someth..., or w. dat. τινί someone” (citing synchronic examples of each).

⁵² Metzger’s *Textual Commentary* comments that it was “observing the direction in which the scribal corrections moved” that caused a majority of the committee to prefer the accusative (Heb 8:8, ad loc). This seems to imply that the stream of evidence terminating in the majority text is to be shunned. Although I do not think that a majority text position is correct, that is not to say that the majority text does not often preserve the original reading along with the earliest manuscripts. (I would not consider it very probable that the majority text *alone* preserved the original text in any given instance, but that is not the case here.)

⁵³ This is an argument based on internal evidence, but a “softer” one that is more subjective than an explicit grammatical relationship.

translation would imply.⁵⁴ I would conclude that the dative αὐτοῖς is most probably original and that in this context it makes best sense to take it as the indirect object of λέγει.⁵⁵ With what or whom God found fault, is made clear by two items in the context. First we have just been told in v. 7 that God has judged the first covenant to be faulty (ἄμεμπτος)—and v. 8 is introduced with γάρ explaining that very statement.⁵⁶ The “fault” (μεμφόμενος) of v. 8a is the same as the fault (ἄμεμπτος) of v. 7.⁵⁷ Second, this connection is reinforced by the nature of the following statement (on which see below).⁵⁸

The Prophecy of the New Covenant, 8:8b–12

The author then cites Jer 31:31–34 (= Heb 8:8b–12),⁵⁹ which can only be understood in this context to be a reference to that second covenant of which Jesus is the mediator, which replaced the earlier, faulty, first covenant. The primary purpose of the quotation at this

⁵⁴ The same objection might be posed against the dative since it, too, introduces a new subject, but here it is less awkward if taken as the indirect object of λέγει, since that verb is more commonly used with a previously unidentified referent which is subsequently identified in the context (e.g., Mark 5:39*). That is, verbs of speaking are more flexible than more specialized terms such as μέφομαι. To state that God has found fault with “them”—without any indication as to who they are—results in a clumsy statement. (*The expression λέγει + αὐτοῖς is very common in Matthew, Mark, and John, but elsewhere in the NT only twice in Luke. In narrative genre, and especially in dialog, the antecedent is usually explicit and obvious, but not always. For another instance of λέγει + αὐτοῖς without an explicit antecedent, see perhaps Barnabas 10:2. For the exact word order, αὐτοῖς λέγει, see Mark 3:53; 9:19. More commonly these words are reversed.)

⁵⁵ B. F. Westcott says that this conclusion “appears to be very unlikely” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2d ed. [Macmillan, 1892; reprint, Eerdmans, 1970], 220), but he gives no reason for this conclusion.

⁵⁶ Contra the argument of Steven K. Stanley (“A New Covenant Hermeneutic: The Use of Scripture in Hebrews 8–10” [PhD diss, U/Sheffield, 1994], 91) that the “Jeremiah text does not find fault with the first covenant, but with the people.” In agreement with my conclusions, see Thielman, *The Law and the NT*, 124.

⁵⁷ “μεμφόμενος in v. 8 restates ‘more precisely’ what was said in v. 7” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 412, summarizing Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, Sources Bibliques [Paris, 1977], ad loc).

⁵⁸ Two other explanations might be proffered. That the pronoun (αὐτοῖς or αὐτούς) might refer to the priests in the preceding context (vv. 3–6) runs afoul of the γάρ of v. 8a linking ἄμεμπτος and μέφομαι (see above). Or that it might refer to Israel in the following verses given the reference to her unfaithfulness (v. 9) and wickedness (v. 12) has the same γάρ problem and also misses the point of the quotation which focuses primarily on the covenant; Israel’s disobedience, though mentioned, is secondary.

⁵⁹ The quotation is essentially the same as the LXX of Jeremiah, though there are a few relatively insignificant differences, all of which are simple synonym substitutions; none of the sentence structure or word order is changed. There are six such substitutions from LXX > Hebrews (verse numbers following are from Jer 31): φησὶν > λέγει (bis, vv. 31, 32), διαθήσομαι > συντελέσω (v. 31), διεθέμην > ἐποίησα (v. 32), διδούς > δώσω > διδούς (v. 33), and γράψω > ἐπιγράψω (v. 33). It is doubtful that any particular significance should be attached to these variations.

point in the argument is to validate the claim that the older covenant was faulty.⁶⁰ To do so, the author relies upon two factors (v. 8): first, God promises that in the future he would “establish” (συντελέσω)⁶¹ a covenant, and second, the covenant is described as “new” (καινός). If God speaks of a future covenant that is new, this reflects his judgment that the older covenant is somehow deficient, else it would not need to be replaced.⁶² It is not the people with whom God found fault (as the accusative *v.l.* αὐτούς would imply), but the old covenant itself (contra Delitzsch⁶³). The quotation substantiating this claim says very little about the failures of Israel (and that only peripherally)⁶⁴; the focus is on the covenant, validating contextually the choice of the dative *v.l.* αὐτοῖς as the indirect object of λέγει.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ “In this setting, the citation of Jer 31:31–34 serves the fundamentally negative purpose of exposing the defective nature of the old covenant” (William Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, 47 [Dallas: Word, 1991], 1:208).

⁶¹ It is possible to translate συντελέω as “I will bring ... to accomplishment” (BDAG, s.v. συντελέω, 975.2), but BDAG’s preference is the simpler, “I will establish” (ibid.). Other meanings of συντελέω, such as “bring to an end” (ibid., 975.1), “to exhaust, give out” (ibid., 975.3), or “come to an end” (ibid., 975.4) are not feasible in this context.

⁶² Neal Cushman phrases it neatly, “His point is simple: new things supplant old things” (“The Church in Hebrews 8? An Exegetical Treatment of New Covenant Characteristics in Hebrews 8” [unpublished PhD paper, Baptist Bible Seminary, 2005], 13).

⁶³ Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:38.

⁶⁴ Even in the original Jer 31 context the point is not Israel’s failures but God’s gracious restoration: “I will come to give rest to Israel” (v. 2); “I will build you again” (v. 4); “I will gather them” (v. 8); “they will return” (v. 16); “when I bring them back” (v. 23); “I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (v. 27), etc., to cite but a few such notes. The original causes for the captivity are mentioned, but they are not the focus of the passage. Hughes concurs with this judgment regarding the context, suggesting that it “is ill suited to the declaration cited from Jeremiah, which is one of promise to the people rather than of finding fault with them” (*Hebrews*, 298).

⁶⁵ Richard Hayes concurs with this judgment, suggesting that the textual variant αὐτοῖς “agrees better with the framing argument,” citing the connection noted between vv. 7 and 8, as well as the comment in v. 13 (“Here We Have No Lasting City: New Covenantalism in Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, et al., 151–73 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 160). See also (though tentatively), Antonio Portalatín, *Temporal Oppositions as Hermeneutical Categories in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, European University Studies 23: Theology, 833 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006), 60, esp. n226. For a relatively brief, but careful and technical defense of this reading, see Johannes Wolmarans, “The Text and Translation of Hebrews 8.8,” *ZNW* 75 (1984): 139–44. One unique contribution of Wolmarans’ article is an analysis of the context in terms of technical, symbolic logic, from which he defends the conclusion that “FA Λ KA → GBA” (142), i.e., “If the old covenant is imperfect and if the old covenant is destined to disappear, then the new covenant replaces the old covenant” (141 n4; see also 142–43 which works this out in detail).

The Obsolescence of the First Covenant, 8:13

Our writer reiterates in v. 13 his conclusion regarding the old covenant following the quotation of Jer 31. By calling⁶⁶ the covenant described in Jer 31 “new,” God has declared “the first” (τὴν πρώτην) to be obsolete or abrogated (πεπαλαίωκεν).⁶⁷ As in the older, classical use of this term, it “becomes inoperative because it is no longer relevant to the changed circumstances.”⁶⁸ Its koine use can be seen in an exhausted treasury (i.e., the money has all been spent; Luke 12:33), or a worn out garment (Heb 1:11).⁶⁹ Once again the contrast between new and obsolete makes it evident that this is not a renewal of the old covenant, but a total replacement. The first covenant, which is now, says the author of Hebrews, obsolete and aging (τὸ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον), is near to disappearing altogether (ἐγγυὸς ἀφανισμοῦ).⁷⁰

Ever since the new covenant was established in the blood of Jesus Christ, the old covenant has had only a seeming existence and validity in the mind of Israel: it belongs

⁶⁶ The use of ἐν τῷ with the infinitive (ἐν τῷ λέγειν) is causal (A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. [Nashville: Broadman, 1923], 1073). This is usually expressed in English as “by calling” rather than “because he called,” but the point is the same—and the first makes for better English in this instance.

⁶⁷ The perfect of παλαιόω does not refer to a previous declaration of obsolescence (as traditional definitions of the perfect might suggest). The stative aspect refers not to an action, but to a state, in this instance referencing the person responsible for the state (i.e., God). This, of course, *implies* a previous action by God, but the focus is on the resultant state. See further, K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek*, SBG 5 (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), §3.4.5; idem, “On the Perfect and Other Aspects in New Testament Greek,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 296–97; Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, SBG 1, 2d ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 273–81, or more briefly, idem, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (JSOT Press, 1994), 21–22, 39–41; also Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect*, SBG 10 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 232–33 n.109. This is acknowledged in older grammars sensitive to such issues; e.g., Robertson, *Grammar*, 895, who lists Heb 8:13 as an “extensive Present Perfect = a completed state.” Portalatín has the right intuition as to the significance of this statement (if a slightly mixed grammatical explanation): “This divine action is not only a formal declaration of what is the wearing affect of time, but also implies a divine causality. God made old the First Covenant, and as a divine action, it is definitive, as the stative aspect of the verb παλαιόω indicates” (*Temporal Oppositions*, 57).

⁶⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 177 n.67.

⁶⁹ Worn out clothes are also described by παλαιόω in Deut 29:4; Josh 8:5, 13; Neh 9:21; Ps 101:27; Isa 50:9; and 51:6—about a third of its uses in the LXX.

⁷⁰ The word ἀφανισμός refers to “the impossibility of seeing something because of its destruction or disappearance” (Portalatín, *Temporal Oppositions*, 58).

henceforth to a dead and buried past.... The temple service ... is only a bed of state, on which a lifeless corpse is lying.⁷¹

Yes, there were still remnants of the old system evident. There was still a temple functioning in Jerusalem under the care of Levitical priests who continued to offer sacrifices, but they were now essentially caretakers, but even that role would soon end.⁷²

Hebrews 9

Deficiencies of the First Covenant, 9:1–10

The contrast between the first, obsolete covenant and the new covenant of which Jesus is the mediator continues into chapters 9 and 10. The worship system of the first covenant (9:1–7)⁷³ was comprised of “external regulations imposed until the time of the new order” (δικαιώματα σαρκὸς μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως ἐπικείμενα, v. 10). The temporal expression, μέχρι καιροῦ, once more underlines the fact that “the first” [covenant] (ἡ πρώτη) was intended to be a temporary provision. The “new order” represents in English the NT hapax διορθώσεως, “the setting straight or restoring of what is out of line.”⁷⁴ Once the time of the new order arrives, then the older arrangement becomes obsolete. The time of that arrival is indicated in the following verse.

Superiority⁷⁵ of the New Covenant, 9:11–15

The “new order” (διορθώσεως, v. 10) is explained in v. 11 as “the good things that are already here” (τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν, v. 11)⁷⁶ of which Jesus is the high priest. After

⁷¹ Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:45–46. In another memorable illustration Delitzsch comments that “the swaddling-clothes of the law were not forthwith burnt at the appearance of the gospel, but to resume them when once thrown out was perfectly out of the question”! (ibid., 2:74 n.1).

⁷² We might see this statement fulfilled in the destruction of the temple in AD 70, particularly if ἀφανισμός has the “transferred sense *destruction*” (BDAG, 155) rather than the unmarked meaning “the condition of being no longer visible” (ibid.). It cannot be determined if this was in the view of the author of Hebrews or not, but his anticipation of such an event is not necessary since his comment is very general. We need not insist that he understood how or when the remnants of the old covenant would finally pass from view. It is possible that he had Jesus’ “temple prophecy” in view (Matt 24:2 and ||s), but I do not know any way to validate that possibility.

⁷³ The description of the Levitical system in 9:1–10 is drawn entirely from the Pentateuchal account of the tabernacle; it does not reflect any first-hand knowledge of the first-century, Herodian temple.

⁷⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 325 n.75. The translation “new order” as appears in Hughes and in some modern translations (e.g., NIV, NET) may be credited to Bruce (*Hebrews*, 197 n.66).

⁷⁵ The “superiority” of the new covenant is reflected in expressions such as “how much more” (πόσω μᾶλλον), v. 14.

describing his high priestly work (11–14), the writer concludes that “for this reason Christ is the mediator of the new covenant” (διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἔστιν, v. 15).⁷⁷ The time reference is present: Jesus is presently the mediator of this covenant. Although this might be explained as his current status as mediator of a covenant not yet in force, the introductory διὰ τοῦτο would argue to the contrary. This statement explains the preceding paragraph which focused on the present high priestly session of Jesus which enables *us*, i.e., Christians, to have a cleansed conscience and to serve God.⁷⁸ Likewise the purpose (ὄπως) of his role as new covenant mediator is that the ones who are called⁷⁹ might receive the promised eternal inheritance.⁸⁰

Enactment of the New Covenant, 9:16–28

The discussion in the second half of chapter 9 is tangential to the subject of the new covenant. Since v. 15 has just referenced death in relation to the covenant, the writer now deals with the reason why Jesus had to die to become the mediator of the covenant. Since it is not directly related to the primary concern of this essay, it will be passed by.⁸¹

⁷⁶ This assumes that the NA text is correct in reading the aorist middle participle γενομένων (Ⲣ⁴⁶, B, D, etc.) rather than the present active participle μελλόντων (as found in Ⲡ, A, Ⲙ, etc.). The aorist tense in itself does not require a past reference, but the following description in vv. 11–14 explains these things as related to Jesus’ cross work and subsequent ascension and entry into the heavenly tabernacle. As such the contextually-established time reference justifies the translation “already here” (NIV), or “have come” (ESV, HCSB, NRSV). (Both NASB and NET translate with a future reference, presumably on the basis of the *v.l.* μελλόντων, the lexis of which indicates future time.)

⁷⁷ I have deliberately used the definite article “the” in translating διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης. Although this phrase *could* be translated “mediator of a new covenant” or even “a new covenant mediator,” in this context that seems highly unlikely. Not only has *the* new covenant been under discussion for several chapters, but διαθήκης καινῆς could be treated as a monadic noun (apart from any explicit, exegetical evidence for more than one) as could μεσίτης. Also Colwell’s rule suggests that definite predicate nominatives are generally anarthrous when they precede the linking verb, which is the case with μεσίτης here (E. C. Colwell, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *JBL* 52 [1933]: 12–21). Since the noun (μεσίτης) is anarthrous, any modifiers (such as διαθήκης καινῆς) will, of course, likewise be anarthrous.

⁷⁸ V. 14 says that the blood of Jesus καθαριεῖ τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν (cleanses *our* conscience). This is also true if the *v.l.* ὑμῶν (Ⲡ D² Ⲙ) is accepted since both refer to Christians. The NIV’s “we” in the following phrase (“so that we may serve”) is supplied for English style; it is an infinitival construction.

⁷⁹ The expression οἱ κεκλημένοι is not used elsewhere in Hebrews, but it probably is to be understood in the Pauline sense as equivalent to Christians, i.e., those called by God to salvation, as e.g., 1 Cor 7:22, ὁ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεῖς.

⁸⁰ The genitive phrase τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν ... τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας is exegetical (AKA, genitive of apposition): the promise which consists of the eternal inheritance (Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:231 n.o.).

⁸¹ This is a hotly debated section. The crux relates to whether the references to διαθήκη in vv. 16–17 are still to “covenant” (as is otherwise the case throughout the book and the NT), or whether these few instances

Hebrews 10

Establishment of the Second Covenant, 10:1–18

The law (ὁ νόμος) was only “a shadow of the good things which were coming” (10:1).⁸² This is, of course, a retrospective statement; the law was not viewed as a shadow (σκιά) during the time of its hegemony, though God had planned for a change of covenantal governance from the beginning.⁸³ The signs of inadequacy were inherent from the beginning: why else was it necessary to extend the repeated cycle of sacrifice year after year (κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν ταῖς αὐταῖς θυσίαις ἃς προσφέρουσιν εἰς τὸ διηνεκές, v. 1)?⁸⁴ Whether any OT believer ever asked such a question we are not told. Yet because the law did not enable perfection (οὐδέποτε δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι, v. 1), did not finally cleanse (ἅπαξ

shift the reference of διαθήκη to “will” (as in “last will and testament”). Most commentators and English translations reflect the second view, but a strong case can be made that even these two verses continue the consistent use of διαθήκη = “covenant.” That is not obvious from the translations, but it is a viable, and perhaps the best way to understand the text. The best defenses of this view are to be found in Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:229, 231, 242–43, and especially J. J. Hughes, “Hebrews ix 15ff. and Galatians iii 15ff: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” *NovT* 21 (1979): 27–96 (Heb 9 is discussed on 27–66). See also Appendix B, “The Use of Διαθήκη in the New Testament,” in Compton, “New Covenant in the Old and New Testaments,” 294–305; he tentatively concludes for “covenant” rather than “will.” A recent article by Scott W. Hahn also argues for “covenant,” though with an interesting variation worth considering: “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 416–36. One’s conclusion does not directly affect the question of the church’s relationship to the new covenant, though it will significantly affect how one explains the core of Heb 9.

⁸² They are now here according to 9:11, “the good things that are already here” (τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν). V. 1 is often translated with present reference, but it makes much better sense of the context and the argument if it is understood as a description of past realities. I would translate (adapting NIV): “The law was only a shadow of the good things that *were* coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it *could* never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who *drew* near to worship.”

⁸³ Thielman’s summary is helpful. “God had designed the first covenant to become obsolete upon the introduction of the new covenant.... The figure of the shadow reveals that God’s purpose for the law was never frustrated: it was intended to provide a faint, temporary outline of the real redemptive work of Christ—‘the good things to come’ (10:1). Although it could not accomplish God’s ultimate redemptive purposes of purifying the consciences of his people and forgiving their sin, the Mosaic law could outline the sacrificial structure by which Jesus would eventually complete this task. Its fault, therefore, lay not in its inability to accomplish the purposes for which it was designed, but in its provisional and transitory nature” (*The Law and the NT*, 125–26).

⁸⁴ Hughes makes a similar point: “the logic of the situation under the earlier system, with its endless repetition from generation to generation of a multiplicity of sacrifices, cried out for the provision of the one perfect sacrifice which would meet once and forever the requirements of the human predicament” (*Hebrews*, 365).

κεκαθαρισμένους, v. 2) the worshippers, and did not free them from consciousness of sin (συνείδησιν ἁμαρτιῶν, v. 2), the annual reminder of sins (ἀνάμνησις ἁμαρτιῶν κατ' ἐνιαυτόν, v. 3)—probably a reference to the Day of Atonement—remained in force.

It has been argued (most extensively by Joslin⁸⁵) that the descriptive term σκιά (“shadow”) applies only to some parts of the law, not the law as a whole. This is based on the wording σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος...: “For the law, *having* a shadow....” The law, it is said, was not a shadow since it continues in force, though renewed and modified. The only thing that was a shadow in the law was the sacrificial system. This, however, is overly simplistic and too mechanical an understanding of the meaning of ἔχω which assumes that if the English gloss “having” makes sense, then it has the same meaning in Greek. For this conclusion to be valid, ἔχω would have to mean “to possess a component part,”⁸⁶ but Joslin’s primary argument to this effect, the parallel in 7:3, suggests a different understanding of ἔχω. In 7:3, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, the participle ἔχων does not refer to a component, but to a *distinctive characteristic*, thus, Jesus “is not characterized by beginning of days or end of life.”⁸⁷ If this is a valid parallel to the use of ἔχων in 10:1 (and I think it is), then the author of Hebrews argues that “the law is characterized by shadow.” The NIV is entirely justified, then, in translating as, “the law is only a shadow.”

Because the law was a shadow,⁸⁸ there was a deficiency in the law: it was not able to perfect the worshippers. The main statement of 10:1 is that ὁ νόμος ... οὐδέποτε δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι (“the law ... was never able to perfect the ones who draw near”). To address this deficiency,⁸⁹ Christ came into the world (v. 5) to do the Father’s will (v. 9). Based on this claim, the author concludes that “the first”⁹⁰ has been set aside to

⁸⁵ “Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews,” 296–308, though only 296 proposes any sort of argument for his conclusion; 297–308 only work out the implications of this *assuming* that the initial conclusion is correct.

⁸⁶ This meaning of ἔχω is used in Hebrews, e.g., 11:10; 13:10. See BDAG, s.v. ἔχω, 421.

⁸⁷ Cf. BDAG, s.v. ἔχω, 421.7.a.β. A related use is found in 6:9 (which BDAG lists at 422.11.a), ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, “having salvation” (ESV) = “characteristic of salvation” (cf. NIV, NASB, “things that accompany ...”; “relating to...” (NET); “connected with...” (HCSB); “belong to...” (NRSV). If nothing else, this diversity of English translation demonstrates that ἔχω is not a simple word!

⁸⁸ The participle ἔχων is probably causal: “because the law was characterized by shadow.” The NIV has shifted the causal link to the next clause as a result of simplifying for English purposes the syntax of a complex sentence: “The law is only a shadow.... *For this reason* it can never ... make perfect....”

⁸⁹ This was not the only reason he came, but it is certainly a central focus in our thinking and the reason most closely connected with the argument of the writer of Hebrews at this point in his homily.

⁹⁰ The reference to “the first” (τὸ πρῶτον) in v. 9 is not parallel to “first” in v. 8 (NIV: “first he said...”). Not only are these different words (v. 8, ἀνώτερον), but the statement of v. 8a has not been set aside; it is as true today as under the aegis of the old covenant.

establish the second. In the immediate context he is discussing the quotation from Psalm 40 (cited in vv. 5–7) which contrasts the OT sacrifices with Messiah’s obedience.⁹¹ The summary statement in v. 8, listing four types of offerings, is explicitly linked to the requirements of the law (κατὰ νόμον). These legal provisions are explicitly contrasted (ἀνώτερον λέγων ... τότε εἴρηκεν, vv. 8–9) with Jesus’ obedience.⁹²

Then comes the “first ... second” contrast. Verse 9b serves as a summary statement, suggesting the significance of the quotation in vv. 5–7, highlighted in the paired extracts in vv. 8–9a. To what does the author refer? There are at least three options. One possibility is to leave the “first ... second” of v. 9b as a general statement: “He does away with the first arrangement in order to confirm the validity of the second.”⁹³ A second possibility is that the neuter τὸ πρῶτον ... τὸ δεύτερον finds its antecedent in the neuter τὸ θέλημα in v. 9a and the conceptual parallel preceding it.⁹⁴ That is, “the second” is God’s will done by Jesus (τὸ θέλημα, v. 9a) and “the first” is what God did not desire (οὐκ ἠθέλησας, v. 5b).⁹⁵ The third possibility is to understand this as a specific reference to the first and second covenants. The reference would then be to the setting aside of the first *covenant* (ἀναιρεῖ τὸ πρῶτον, v. 9) for the purpose of establishing the second *covenant* (ἵνα τὸ δεύτερον στήσῃ, v. 9).⁹⁶ The author has repeatedly used the terms *the first* and *the second* in reference to the old

⁹¹ Though some English translations supply “Christ,” it is only “he” in the text. That the writer understands Psalm 40 to refer to Messiah is not, however, in doubt, so the more explicit statement in, e.g., ESV, NRSV, or NIV, is acceptable.

⁹² The connection between the sacrifices with which God was not pleased and Jesus’ obedience is that the sacrifices were apparently those done only ritually and externally and not as “heart obedience.”

⁹³ Lane’s translation (*Hebrews*, 2:254).

⁹⁴ Thanks are due Brian Shealey, one of my PhD students, for pointing out this possibility.

⁹⁵ Although the second view is attractive in that it provides an explicit (though partial) antecedent in the context, I find it unpersuasive in two regards. First, the terms are reversed. Had the author intended this association, we might have expected the reverse order: he establishes the second in order to set aside the first. Were this a chiasm, the terms would be in the correct order, but the members are not parallel. The first is a long conceptual description/quotation, the second a specific term. Second, “first” and “second” are not used this way elsewhere in the book, i.e., to refer to specific statements in the context. These terms have been used primarily to identify the old and new covenants. There are only three other instances. In 7:2 πρῶτος is used as part of an explicit contrasting construction, πρῶτον μὲν ... ἔπειτα δέ; in 9:2–8 πρῶτος is used with δεύτερος to contrast the two rooms of the tabernacle; and in 9:28 δεύτερος is used as part of a temporal expression, ἐκ δευτέρου (a second time). There is always an explicit referent given. Only the repeated use of πρῶτος alone to refer to the first covenant and an earlier explicit πρῶτος/δευτέρος contrasting both old and new covenants (8:7) enables the writer to assume that an otherwise unspecified use of πρῶτος/δευτέρος would be understood to refer to the same thing.

⁹⁶ This is not a commonly held position so far as I can determine. Advocates whom I have noted include Roger Omanson, “A Superior Covenant: Hebrews 8:1–10:18,” *RevExp* 82 (1985): 369 (though without argument or discussion); Ernst Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk: eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief*, 2d ed.,

and new covenants (8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18)⁹⁷ along with other oblique rubrics,⁹⁸ so this would not be a surprising way to express the idea.

The third alternative is very attractive in terms of the argument of the book at this point. A possible complication, however, is the author's use of the neuter, τὸ πρῶτον ... τὸ δεύτερον.⁹⁹ In the previous oblique references to the two correlative covenants, the usage has been feminine to agree with διαθήκη (e.g., ἡ πρώτη, 8:7).¹⁰⁰ In some such cases this is the obvious way to phrase it since διαθήκη occurs in near proximity; e.g., the instance in 8:7 is bracketed by occurrences of διαθήκη in vv. 6 and 8. Here, however, the nearest related terms are νόμον (v. 8, masculine) and the various elements of the law, θυσίας καὶ προσφορὰς καὶ ὀλοκαυτώματα (two feminine and a neuter, v. 8a). It is possible that the author uses the neuter to encompass all these items.¹⁰¹ Since this section was introduced with the description of the law (ὁ νόμος) as a shadow with an inherent inability to perfect the worshippers (10:1), a statement that the law (here phrased as the first covenant) is set aside is contextually appropriate.

The actions related to these two entities are also similar to actions applied to the old and new covenants earlier. In 7:18–19 the old covenant is set aside (ἀθέτησις) and the new covenant is introduced (ἐπεισαγωγή).¹⁰² This appears to be parallel to the statement of

Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 33, ET, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, transl. R. Harrisville and I. Sandberg (Augsburg, 1984; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 57; and probably (his comments are not explicit, but appear to assume this) Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Wed. G van Soest, 1961), 125–29.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., 8:7, Εἰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ... ἂν δευτέρα.

⁹⁸ In addition to the “first” references listed above, see also, “the former regulation” (προαγούσης ἐντολῆς, 7:18); “a better hope” (κρείττονος ἐλπίδος, 7:19); “a better covenant” (κρείττονος διαθήκης, 7:22); an anarthrous νόμου (7:11), or simply “new” (καινὴν, 8:13). There are also explicit terms used such as ὁ νόμος (7:28; 10:1); διαθήκη καινὴ (8:8; 9:15); and τῆ πρώτη διαθήκη (9:15).

⁹⁹ “The ordinal numerals ‘first’ (πρῶτον) and ‘second’ (δεύτερον) are neuter here; no particular substantive is understood with them. ‘The first’ is the old sacrificial system; ‘the second’ is our Lord’s perfect self-dedication to do the will of God” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 235 n.48). This explanation results in an unmatched pair. Interestingly, Bruce explains “the second” in terms of the new covenant in the body of the commentary.

¹⁰⁰ See also 8:13, τὴν πρώτην; 9:1, ἡ πρώτη; and 9:18, ἡ πρώτη.

¹⁰¹ Kistemaker suggests that in this text the “neuter expresses the collective idea of totality” (“Psalm Citations,” 128).

¹⁰² The two covenants were there described as the former regulation (προαγούσης ἐντολῆς) and the better hope (κρείττονος ἐλπίδος), respectively.

10:9b in which the first is set aside (ἀναίρει/ἀναίρέω) and the second is established (στήση/ἵστημι).¹⁰³

I would tentatively conclude that even with the neuter τὸ πρῶτον ... τὸ δεύτερον, the writer does intend his readers to understand this as a specific reference to the first and second covenants. But even if it were only a general reference as Lane’s translation implies or a reference to God’s will, the result is not a great deal different since the content of the referents in either of the first two options is essentially the content of the two covenants: “the first arrangement” (as Lane phrases it) refers to matters at the heart of the first covenant—the sacrificial system—and the “second arrangement” refers to Jesus’ sacrificial death which, as the immediately following verses clarify (see below), was the basis for the new covenant. Or, taking the second option, that which God willed was Jesus’ willing obedience to offer himself as a sacrifice to establish the new covenant, and what God did not will at this stage in the progress of redemptive history was the continuation of the sacrificial system—the old covenant.¹⁰⁴

As Lane explains,

The content of τὸ πρῶτον, “the first,” is defined by the structural link between the law and the cultic sacrifices established in v 8b. The old cult and the law upon which it was based are set aside on the strength of an event in which there was concentrated all the efficacy of a life fully submitted to the will of God. The content of τὸ δεύτερον, “the second,” which is placed in antithesis to “the first arrangement,” is defined by the will of God as realized through Jesus. In v 10 the mode of that realization is specified as “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Thus the second clause in v 9b contains

¹⁰³ That the author uses a wide range of synonyms for similar entities and actions is not at all surprising. This essay has already shown the fluid nature of terms related to the new covenant. As one of the more literary writers in the NT, the author of Hebrews makes greater use of the stylistic options and vocabulary of Greek than do most other NT writers. After discussing a particularly difficult portion of this passage (Heb 7:20–22) as an illustration of the impossibility of word-for-word translation, Moisés Silva comments that “it is not surprising that my illustration comes from the letter to the Hebrews.... The author of Hebrews makes greater use of the stylistic resources of Greek than other New Testament writers” (“Are Translators Traitors? Some Personal Reflections,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, ed. G. Scorgie, M. Strauss, and S. Voth, 37–50 [Zondervan, 2003], 40).

¹⁰⁴ Stanley acknowledges the connection with the old and new covenants, though he considers it an implication of his view rather than as a direct reference (“New Covenant Hermeneutic,” 174–75). Morrison also notes the close association even though he opts for a less direct statement: “In context, ‘the first’ is the first part of the quote—the sacrifices—but by implication, it also involves the law as a whole. In its stead, Christ has established ‘the second’—in context, doing the will of God, but by implication, the new covenant and new priesthood, effective access to the presence of God, and eternal salvation” (“Rhetorical Function of the Covenant Motif in the Argument of Hebrews,” 80).

a condensed reference to all the efficacy of the saving action of Christ in conformity to the will of God.

On this reading of the text, what has been set aside are the repeated sacrifices and the law which prescribed them.... The fulfillment of Ps 40:6–8 inaugurates the new arrangement. The quotation from the psalm and the event of Christ confirm that the old religious order has been abolished definitively. In the design of God, the two redemptive arrangements are irreconcilable; the one excludes the other.¹⁰⁵

If this is a valid assessment of the text (and I think it is), then in light of the larger argument of chapters 7–10, it appears quite certain that we are talking about the first and second covenants, whether we explain it more generally or more specifically. This is indeed an “epochal change that introduces a radically new situation.”¹⁰⁶ This is not a *renewal* of the old covenant—the setting aside and the establishment (ἀναιρέω, ἵστημι) are explicitly contrasted.¹⁰⁷ The negative term, ἀναιρέω, means “to take away, abolish, set aside.”¹⁰⁸ This is perhaps “the strongest negative statement the author has made or will make about the OT cultus”¹⁰⁹—or, as I would prefer to say, about the old covenant. The positive, ἵστημι, is “to put into force, establish,” often with legal or covenantal overtones.¹¹⁰ The first covenant comes to an end; the second takes its place.

¹⁰⁵ Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:264–65.

¹⁰⁶ Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:265.

¹⁰⁷ BDAG, s.v. ἀναιρέω, 64.1, notes that ἀναιρέω is “opp[osite] στήσαι.”

¹⁰⁸ The meaning of ἀναιρέω as “to take away, abolish, set aside” is attested a number of places in koine texts. TGad 5:3, ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἐκβάλλει τὸ μῖσος, ἢ ταπεινῶσις ἀναιρεῖ τὸ μῖσος (righteousness casts out hatred, humility abolishes envy); note the parallel of ἀναιρέω and ἐκβάλλει. In reference to Polycarp’s cremated remains: MPol 18:2, οὕτως τε ἡμεῖς ὕστερον ἀνελόμενοι τὰ τιμιώτερα λίθων ... ἀπεθέμεθα ὅπου καὶ ἀκόλουθον ἦν (and so later on we took away his bones ... and deposited them in a suitable place). [“Bones” for λίθων is unusual and not cited as a gloss in BDAG, LN, LEH, Thayer, or in either “Little” or “Middle” Liddell, but it is Lightfoot’s translation and makes good sense here.] In reference to God, 1 Clem 21:9 says that ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστίν, καὶ ὅταν θέλη ἀνελεῖ αὐτήν (his breath is in us and when he desires he will take it away). Most NT uses have the transferred sense of “to kill” (i.e., to take away by killing), but Heb 10:9 cannot mean that, nor can it mean “to take up for oneself” (since it is often used in reference to “taking” children, it can be loosely translated, “to adopt”). On these other uses, see BDAG, s.v. ἀναιρέω, 64.

¹⁰⁹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 504. I would prefer to say “old covenant” rather than “OT cultus,” but the point is the same either way.

¹¹⁰ Lane comments that “the semantic value of στήσις reflects the usage of the LXX, where the word ἱστάναι receives an intensification and a characteristic juridical aspect. It is a preferred word in the LXX for expressing the creative activity of God in the establishing of a covenant or the giving of an unconditional promise. It denotes ‘to establish, to remain valid’ (e.g., Num 30:5, 6, 8, 12, 15; 1 Macc 13:38; 14:18, 24 LXX). See especially Num 30:12–16, where the paired verbs ἱστάναι, ‘to confirm,’ and περιαιρεῖν, ‘to invalidate, to annul,’ offer a close semantic parallel to the formulation in Heb 10:9b” (*Hebrews*, 2:256 n.t). The discussion in

The significance of this discussion is laid out in vv. 15–18. The author is making two points. First, he is shifting the discussion from OT believers (who were the focus of vv. 1–14, being contrasted with Jesus’ obedience) to NT believers. Second, he is arguing that the new covenant text of Jer 31 is relevant to this discussion.

In the first regard, he begins by noting that “now the Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this” (v. 15). This statement is introduced by δέ, implying development from the previous section.¹¹¹ The γάρ in 15b explains how it is that the Spirit testifies: he does so by “saying” (τὸ εἰρηκέναι), the content of which is Jer 31:33. As constituent members of “those who are being made holy” (v. 14), the Spirit speaks to “us.” Most immediately this refers to the author and the Roman house church who were the recipients of this letter (i.e., this is an inclusive ἡμῶν). If, however, these things can be said of them, then these descriptions and explanations also relate to NT believers generally.¹¹²

He then quotes once again from Jer 31:33–34. It is a two-step quotation. “For after saying” (μετὰ γὰρ τὸ εἰρηκέναι, v. 15b) introduces Jer 31:33 both to identify the passage in view and to tie the argument directly to the new covenant. The second step is introduced with the καί at the beginning of v. 17 (“after saying ... then [he says]”),¹¹³ following which he quotes from Jer 31:34. It is this statement that is the primary focus¹¹⁴: “Their sins and lawlessness I will remember no more.” The forgiveness anticipated in Jeremiah’s prophecy of the coming new covenant has been provided through the obedience of Jesus in his crosswork. In other words, the discussion of 10:1–14 is an explanation of what Jeremiah recorded centuries earlier. The basis on which we are “made perfect forever” (v. 14) is the new covenant. So that the point is not missed, following the second part of the quotation

Num 30 relates to vows taken by a young, unmarried woman or by a wife. Their vows may be either established (ἴστημι, vv. 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15) or cancelled (περαιορέω, vv. 13, 14, 16) by the father or husband.

¹¹¹ Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2009 pre-publication pdf draft ed.), 21.

¹¹² That is, there is nothing distinctive about the *Christian* audience in Rome which suggests that this is something limited in reference to the Romans Christians and the author of Hebrews. The fact that many of these Christians were ethnic Jews is not relevant for they are addressed as Christians, not as Jews per se.

¹¹³ The καί at the beginning of v. 17 does not function as part of the quotation, but is paired with μετὰ in v. 15. (The LXX text introduces this statement in Jer 31:34 with ὅτι, not καί.)

¹¹⁴ That the focus is on the second part of the quotation may be seen in the use of μετὰ γὰρ τὸ εἰρηκέναι (“for after saying”) to introduce the first part. To translate this phrase as, “First he says” (NIV), though in one sense true in that this is the first of a sequence, does not make the subordination implied by μετὰ evident to the English reader.

(v. 17), the writer summarizes again, “where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any offering for sin” (v. 18).¹¹⁵

Sanctification by the Second Covenant, 10:19–39

The author of Hebrews concludes his discussion of the new covenant with another warning passage. He exhorts his readers to draw near (προσερχώμεθα, v. 22), i.e., to God. This has been a recurrent theme in Hebrews (e.g., 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, προσέρχομαι; and 7:19 with ἐγγίζω) and is closely related to other concepts that have formed the contrast between the old and new covenants: perfection (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1, 14), a clear conscience (9:9, 14; 10:2, 22), sanctification (9:13; 10:10, 14), and forgiveness (9:22; 10:18).

It is possible to draw near to God because Jesus’ cross work (the blood of Jesus, 10:19) has opened “a new and living way” (ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν, v. 20). Although it may seem adequate to explain this access simply by reference to the cross, it must be noted that this paragraph is introduced with the conjunction οὖν (v. 19), explicitly connecting these exhortations and reminders with what has gone before—and that is the quotation of Jer 31. In other words, the writer bases his exhortation to draw near on the provisions of forgiveness in the new covenant.

That this new way by which we draw near to God is related to the category of covenant is clearer if we realize that the verb traditionally translated “opened” in v. 20 is ἐγκαινίζω—“to inaugurate.”¹¹⁶ This is the same word that was used in 9:18 to describe the inauguration of the *old* covenant.¹¹⁷ It would appear that this new way which has been “opened” *for us* (ἡμῖν) is the new covenant inaugurated by the sacrifice of Jesus (ἐν τῷ

¹¹⁵ It is not a viable explanation to set aside this contextual argument by appeal to analogy. Although an analogical use of the OT is certainly valid in some passages, there must be exegetical (i.e., linguistic and/or contextual) support for doing so; it cannot be invoked simply to avoid theological, system-driven problems. In this instance I think the argument is so explicit that there can be no question but that the writer of Hebrews is deliberately and directly connecting Jesus’ priestly sacrifice, the new covenant, and the NT believer’s forgiveness.

¹¹⁶ BDAG, s.v. ἐγκαινίζω, 272.2, “to bring about the beginning of someth., with implication that it is newly established, *ratify, inaugurate, dedicate* (w. solemn rites ...)” The discussion of the implementation of the new covenant has been needlessly complicated by artificial distinctions between terms such as “ratify,” “inaugurate,” “institute,” and “fulfill.”

¹¹⁷ Stanley correctly observes that the use of ἐγκαινίζω “affirms ... that our author considers the sacrifice of Christ as playing the role of inaugurating the NC [new covenant], and therefore as standing in a typological relationship to those inaugural sacrifices offered at the inception of the OC [old covenant]. Just as those inaugural sacrifices under Moses put in motion the covenantal system under which the Levitical priests served in the wilderness tabernacle, Christ’s sacrifice put in motion a new covenantal system” (“New Covenant Hermeneutic,” 189–90).

αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, v. 19),¹¹⁸ qualifying him to be and establishing him as our high priest (ιερέα μέγαν, v. 21), which enables us to draw near to God (προσερχώμεθα, v. 22).

The negative counterpart to the exhortation to draw near (v. 22) is the actual warning which begins in v. 26: “For if we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.” The warning against “trampling the Son of God under foot” (v. 29a) is paralleled with treating “as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him” (v. 29b). In the context of Heb 7–10 this can be nothing other than the blood of the new covenant¹¹⁹—and that clearly and directly used as the basis for an exhortation to Christians.

Conclusion

Heb 7–10 presents a unified argument which discusses the new covenant throughout. There is no distinction of multiple new covenants here. The author of Hebrews discusses this new covenant strictly in relation to the church. He says nothing about a future covenant for Israel (though he certainly does not deny that).¹²⁰ It is this new covenant that is the basis on which Christians draw near to God, on which their mediatorial high priest presently ministers on their behalf.¹²¹ Indeed, as can be seen in the following table, only

¹¹⁸ Jesus’ cross work is also referenced and illustrated in v. 20 with reference to the curtain which separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle—here said to be a type of Jesus’ physical body (διὰ τοῦ καταπέτασματος, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ).

¹¹⁹ This statement echoes Jesus’ words, “this is my blood of the covenant” (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης, Matt 26:28), or in their Lukan form, “this cup is the new covenant made possible by my blood” (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου, Luke 22:20).

¹²⁰ “Hebrews never answers the question of the complete or final fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy, which expects the establishment of the NC to be with Israel proper. What is clear is that Hebrews sees its Jewish readers, above all else, as followers of Christ” (Stanley, “New Covenant Hermeneutic,” 104). *I do not contend that the church fulfills any aspect of the new covenant promises given to Israel in Jer 31* (and related OT passages). I do, however, believe that the church has an intimate connection with the new covenant.

¹²¹ Compton observes that “there is a direct and necessary relationship between the new covenant and Christ’s role as high priest, just as there was between the old or Mosaic covenant and the Levitical priests. In other words, just as the Mosaic covenant was the basis upon which the Levitical priesthood operated, so also the new covenant is the basis upon which the priesthood of Christ operates (“Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” 31). Ellingworth’s comment is that “Christ’s high-priestly ministry is the heart of the new covenant” (*Hebrews*, 413). Stanley agrees that “mediating a better covenant is at the heart of Jesus’ superior priestly service” (“New Covenant Hermeneutic, 80). Likewise George Milligan: “The Epistle thus resolves itself largely into a comparison between the two Covenants, or..., into a comparison of their respective priesthoods” (*The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [T. & T. Clark, 1899; reprint, Minneapolis: James Family, 1978], 71).

once in all of Heb 7–10 does the author mention the new covenant without juxtaposing explicit reference to Jesus’ priestly ministry and his crosswork.¹²²

| New Covenant | Jesus’ priestly ministry and his crosswork |
|---|---|
| 7:19, 22, a better hope ... a better covenant | 7:17, 20, you are a priest forever ... oath ... became priest with an oath |
| 8:6, the covenant of which he is mediator ... that first [covenant] | 8:6, the ministry Jesus has received [= ministry of high priest, vv. 14] |
| 8:13, new [covenant] | — |
| 9:10, 11, the new order ... the good things that are already here | 9:11, 12, When Christ came as high priest ... he entered the Most Holy Place |
| 9:15, διὰ τοῦτο [11–14, high priest] Christ is the mediator of a new covenant | 9:[11–14] & 14, 15, blood of Christ ... offered himself ... now that he has died as a ransom |
| 10:9, to establish the second [covenant] | 10:10, 11, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ ... when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins |
| 10:16, the covenant | 10:17–19, Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus |
| 10:29, the covenant | 10:29, the blood of the covenant that sanctified him |

It is also this second covenant that has replaced the first covenant in administering the relationship of God’s people to their Lord. The new order of things, the good things which have come, refers to the present relationship of believers to God.

The terminology used by the author of Hebrews to describe (some aspect of) the implementation of a covenant (either old or new) may be summarized in the following list.¹²³

| | | | |
|------|---------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| 7:11 | νενομοθέτηται | νομοθετέω | law was given [OC]* |
| 7:19 | ἐπεισαγωγή | ἐπεισαγωγή | introduced |
| 7:22 | γέγονεν ἔγγυος | ἔγγυος | became the guarantee |
| 8:6 | τέτυχεν λειτουργίας | τυγχάνω | ministry he has received |

¹²² I first noted this correlation from Ellingworth’s comment that, “the new covenant is rarely if ever mentioned without a reference, usually explicit..., to the work of Christ. The concept of the new covenant is co-ordinate ... with that of Christ’s priesthood, and serves to show that it is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a total re-ordering by God of his dealings with his people” (*Hebrews*, 409).

¹²³ The English terminology in the last column reflects the wording of the NIV.

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 8:6; 9:15 | διαθήκης μεσίτης | μεσίτης | covenant of which he is mediator |
| 8:6 | νενομοθέτηται | νομοθετέω | founded [NC]* |
| 8:7 | ἐζητεῖτο τόπος | ζητέω | place has been sought |
| 8:8 | συντελέσω ... διαθήκην καινήν | συντελέω | I will make a new covenant |
| 8:10 | ἢ διαθήκη, ἢν διαθήσομαι | διατίθημι | the covenant I will make |
| 9:10 | δικαιώματα ... ἐπικείμενα | ἐπίκειμαι | regulations applying |
| 9:16, 17 | τοῦ διαθεμένου; ὁ διαθέμενος | διατίθημι | [the testator] |
| 9:18 | ἐγκεκαίνισται | ἐγκαινίζω | put into effect [OC]† |
| 10:9 | στήση | ἵστημι | to establish |
| 10:20 | ἐνεκαίνισεν | ἐγκαινίζω | opened [NC]† |

As is characteristic of the author of Hebrews (see n.103), the terminology is very flexible; there is not a single term used repeatedly. The two that occur twice (see * and † above) are interesting in that they are paired with both old and new covenants. Since the old covenant is “given” (*νομοθετέω, 7:11 = Exod 19–24) at Sinai, this term apparently marks the time at which the covenant is both promulgated and placed into effect. Likewise the new covenant is said to be “founded” (*νομοθετέω, 8:6) on better promises (i.e., better than the old covenant) and this is an explanation of the covenant which Jesus presently mediates in his high priestly ministry (8:1–6). The parallel use of terms would suggest that the new covenant is as much in force during the time of Jesus’ high priestly ministry as the old covenant was as of Exod 24. The same parallel can be drawn in 9:18 and 10:20 with the use of the term †ἐγκαινίζω. The old covenant being “put into effect” with a blood sacrifice (9:18) probably has reference to the ceremony of Exod 24. If, then, the new and living way of 10:20 also refers to the new covenant (as I have argued above), it is also presently “opened,” i.e., “put into effect.” Both *νομοθετέω and †ἐγκαινίζω appear to refer to the same “implementation aspect” of a covenant. Likewise ἐπεισαγωγή (7:19) and ἵστημι (10:9), when related to a covenant, seem to have similar reference. This diverse, overlapping terminology may not be as neat and tidy as we might like,¹²⁴ but it is the way Hebrews phrases it—and that might not exactly match the vocabulary of other writers, whether biblical or modern.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ There is no biblical consistency in terminology that would enable us to establish tight English distinctions such as initiation (Upper Room), ratification (cross), and inauguration (kingdom) as some have suggested (e.g., Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena: Introductory Notes on Bible Study and Theological Method* [Exegetica, 2007; reprint, Ft. Worth: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009], 208).

¹²⁵ Of these terms, ἐγκαινίζω, νομοθετέω, and ἐπεισαγωγή occur only in Hebrews. I have not noted any other uses of the common ἵστημι in reference to a covenant in the NT (I have not combed other literature in

It is not, in my opinion, possible to postulate two new covenants without doing violence to the unified, four-chapter argument of Heb 7–10. Nor is it possible to divorce Christians from *some* relationship to the new covenant so described. Perhaps there is more than one way to explain this relationship, but related we must be if the evidence of Hebrews 7–10 is given due weight. We are not only related to Jesus as our high priest, but the text seems to demand that we are directly related to the new covenant itself for it is on this basis that we draw near to God. To conclude otherwise, if I may say so, is to intrude a predetermined system into the text *before* we allow the text to speak for itself.

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this regard). Both συντελέω (8:8) and διατίθημι (the verb form of the noun διαθήκη; 8:10; 10:16) come from the LXX in referring to the future “making” of the new covenant, but the author of Hebrews does not use LXX terminology in his own comments about the new covenant (though he does use διατίθημι of covenants in general in 9:16, 17). The Abrahamic covenant is described in terms of διατίθημι in Acts 3:25. In other NT references to covenants in general, these terms will be found: δίδωμι (Acts 7:8); γίνομαι (2 Cor 3:7); κυρώ (“to ratify” [BDAG, 579.1], “put in force, validate” [LN §76.18], Gal 3:15); and προκυρώ (“previously ratified,” Gal 3:17). Idioms include δεξιὰς δίδωμι (Gal 2:9). There is not a large vocabulary in this regard.

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