

THE NEW COVENANT OF
HEBREWS 8



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THE NEW COVENANT OF HEBREWS 8:7-13

The analysis of Hebrews requires the understanding of certain characteristics that are quite distinctive. To begin with its elevated Greek style is probably the most difficult to grasp in all of the New Testament. The title “To [the] Hebrews,” is traceable to the end of the second century and obviously indicates that Jewish Christians were being addressed by a Jewish author, whose identity is not certainly known. These believers were in need of a corrected appreciation of the New Covenant having been so inculcated with Old Covenant teaching. This means that it is important to understand the Hebrew mindset that is inherent in this epistle. Then there is the manner in which Old Testament quotations appear to be related to the author’s teaching. Concerning this difficulty, John Owen warns us: “There is not any thing in this Epistle that is attended with more difficulty than the *citation of the testimonies out of the Old Testament* that are made use of in it.”¹ This being the case, we should tread carefully in such instances, and not presume that the illustrative use in Hebrews of an Old Testament passage invalidates its original intent and establishes some new fixed New Testament hermeneutical principle.

A. The New Covenant established, Hebrews 8:1-13.

Since both the One who offers and the Offering are the same, Jesus Christ the High Priest is first introduced in vs. 1-6 as He who will be “cut” according to the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34, vs. 7-13. Reference to the New “Covenant/ Testament [διαθήκη, *diathēkē*]” is made seven times in the New Testament (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24). The qualifying “New” is *καινός*, *kainos*, with the exception of *νέος*, *neos* (Heb. 12:24). It is twice called a “better,” *κρείσσων*, *kreissōn*, covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). Carl Hoch, Jr. further explains: “Only one New Testament passage uses the terminology “old covenant” (II Cor. 3:14). The Book of Hebrews does use the word “covenant” in connection with the old covenant, but never with the adjective ‘old.’ The writer calls the old covenant the “first” covenant (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18).”²

1. By a superior high priesthood, vs. 1-6.

The enlightened Jewishness of the author cannot be restrained, even though he has made the earthly/heavenly contrast many times before. Once again there is contrast between what transpires “in the heavens,” v. 1, and “on earth,” vs. 4-5. It should be noted that the revealed Hebrew categories of “priesthood,” “tabernacle,” “sanctuary,” “law,” “sacrifice,” and “covenant,” have not been done

¹ John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, I, p. 106.

² Carl Hoch, Jr., *All Things New*, p. 92.

away with; they have simply been raised to an eternal and heavenly perspective in contrast with that which is temporal and earthly.

- a. This high priest is seated in the heavens, vs. 1-2.

Here the distinctive, elevated, exalted location of Jesus Christ as high priest is emphasized. This is the dominant theme of Hebrews, namely that Jesus Christ is better in terms of who He is, where He is, and what He has accomplished. The Law, 7:28, as embodied in Moses and Aaron, is inferior in terms of who Moses and Aaron are, where the Law was established, and what it accomplished.

- b. This high priest officiates in the heavens, vs. 3-5.

While the high priesthood of Jesus Christ has a lineage, via Melchizedek and the tribe of Judah, that is both infinitely superior and radically different, 7:13-17, yet for the sake of the author's addressees who have been steeped in the lineage of Moses, Aaron, and Levi, contrast continues to be made so that separation from the weak elements of the past is understood as a vital, inevitable, practical necessity. But further, we are being led from the realm of priestly office to priestly accomplishment, from Jesus Christ's high priestly position to His high priestly cutting of a second, better, irrevocable, everlasting covenant through His blood.

- c. This high priest mediates a better covenant, v. 6.

"But now He [God] has obtained a more excellent/distinctively surpassing [διαφορώτερος, diaphorōteros, cf. 1:4] religious ministry/ sacred service, inasmuch as the covenant mediation/arbitration/go between [μεσίτης, mesitēs] is better, which has been legally enacted [perfect of νομοθετέω, nomotheteō, cf. Rom. 9:4]³ on better promises." Here is the lead-in to the subsequent emphasis on the second/new covenant. A better or transcendently superior ministry, even as heaven transcends earth, even as Christ's mediation transcends that of Moses, vs. 1-5, also incorporates a "better covenant" with regard to the first covenant, based upon "better promises" with regard to the conditionality, the blessings and cursings, especially in an earthly sense, promised to God's people under Moses. The specifics of these "better promises," which regulate covenant fixity, are now detailed in a prime

³ David Stern refers here to the enactment of Torah, though more appropriate would be "new Torah enactment," *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp. 687-89.

example found in Jeremiah 31, a post-Mosaic revelation, even as was Psalm 110:4.

Again, how was the second covenant to be better than the first? It certainly was not with regard to a better plan of salvation, or the incorporation of much more grace than law. We should remember that since the Fall, sinners have always been saved by grace through faith in a holy and merciful God. Rather it was as Calvin explains:

[I]t is certain that the fathers who lived under the Law had the same hope of eternal life set before them as we have, as they had the grace of adoption in common with us, then faith must have rested on the same promises. But the comparison made by the Apostle refers to the form rather than to the substance; for though God promised to them the same salvation which he at this day promises to us, yet neither the manner or the character of the revelation is the same or equal to what we enjoy.⁴

This distinction may be likened to a bride's hope in a photograph of her bridegroom that he has provided and her eventual marriage to her beloved. From an engagement promise and ring to fulfillment, the plan is the same. The photograph has a relatively weak and limited role compared to the better relationship that the actual wedding ceremony will inaugurate; it is a lifeless representation, it encourages hope, but it is vastly inferior to the eventual union based upon a better, final promise and vows signified by a wedding ring. So the second covenant, representing progress of revelation in history, declares what God has consummately done in such a better fashion, in these "last days," in comparison with what "He spoke long ago" (1:1-2).

1. By a superior promise, vs. 7-13.

To the Jewish mind, the mere suggestion of a second covenant is a radical truth to embrace; it suggests the necessity of a new Moses, a new Torah, a new priesthood. The preceding exposition has frankly unmasked the inherent weaknesses of the first Moses, the first Torah, the first priesthood, and the first gathering of the people of God. However, the recently explained, vast superiority of Jesus' Christ's priesthood over that of Aaron has also paved the way for even clearer explanation of a necessary second covenant, but especially as it is plainly revealed in the post-Mosaic revelation of Jeremiah 31.

⁴ Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 185.

- a. It is necessitated by an inferior promise, v. 7.

“For if that first [covenant] was blameless/faultless [ἁμαρτηρῶς, amemptos, cf. 7:18, though this was not the case], there would have been no place/necessity to seek a second [covenant, cf. 7:11; Gal. 3:21].” The “first covenant” here is the Mosaic covenant in its totality, not merely the civil and ceremonial aspects (Exod. 19:5; 34:27-28; Deut. 4:13), to which bilateral agreement Israel agreed (Exod. 19:8; 24:3), and witnessed through “the blood of the covenant” (Exod. 24:4-8; Jer. 34:18). The fault or blame here concerns, not intrinsic fault, but mainly the Law’s inability to effect change in the children of Israel, its lack of dynamic (Rom. 8:3-4). As Hughes explains: “The ‘fault’ of the old covenant lay, not in its essence, which, as we have said, presented God’s standard of righteousness and was propounded as an instrument of life to those who should keep it, but in its inability to justify and renew those who failed to keep it, namely the totality of fallen mankind.”⁵ The misunderstanding here of the purpose of the Law, in the form of a Jewish Galatianism (cf. Luke 18:11-12; Gal. 3:1-3), the synergism of faith and works, simply magnified the sin of self-righteousness. However, should Israel have rightly understood the main purpose of the Law (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19), in no way would this have invalidated the need of the gospel initiated by the second covenant. A right understanding of the Law within Israel would have resulted in the Jews calling for gospel mercy. Here, misunderstanding of purpose by the Jews, regarding the Law’s divinely ordained design, nevertheless resulted in sin becoming even more prominent.

- b. It is revealed by Jeremiah, vs. 8-12.

We need to remember, once again, that the Jewish author of Hebrews is addressing Jewish Christians who well know Jeremiah 31:31-34, which passage from the Old Testament is the largest such unit employed in the New Testament. Not for a moment does he redefine and broaden the focus of this passage here for the sake of Gentile inclusion and perception, though he does enlarge our understanding by means of gospel spectacles, 9:11-16; 10:14-18, 29; 12:24; 13:20. At this juncture, it is probably well to appreciate also the words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples when they participated in the Passover supper: “This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). Undoubtedly the Son of God was establishing Himself as the ground of the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34, and the band of Jews gathered around Him would have instantly made the connection, though of course their understanding remained dim until post-

⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, pp. 297-98.

resurrection instruction by Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The context of Jeremiah 31 is important. Here the rebellious, sinful people of God are on the brink of disaster, that is the sudden intervention of God's judgment. Following the promise that Judah would be captive in Babylon for seventy years (25:8-11; cf. Isa. 10:5-34), and that the captives were to submit to this temporary residence (29:4-7), there also follows the promise of the judgment of Babylon (25:12-14) and the eventual restoration of the exiles back to Jerusalem (29:10-14; 30:1-3, 18-22). The language here first appears to describe that immediate exilic return which was initiated under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah (537-445 B.C.), yet the subsequent description of 31:1-26 seems to transport us to a far more comprehensive, blissful and settled return from even "the remote parts of the earth," v. 8, than hitherto experienced. Furthermore, the introduction of a "new covenant" similarly describes a far more glorious future economy than that which spanned the return from Babylon to the savage subjection of the Hasmonean dynasty that resulted from the Roman conquest of Israel and profanation of the Temple by Pompey in 63 B.C. The mention of both "the house of Israel," separately exiled to Assyria in 722 B.C., and "the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), indeed all of vs. 31-34, plainly indicate a far more distant, inclusive, and glorious horizon.

- (1) The New Covenant promised (Jeremiah 31:31), v. 8.

"For in finding fault [with the first covenant] He says [in Jeremiah 31:31-34] to them [the Israelites]⁶ 'Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, I will bring to completion/establish on the House of Israel and on the House of Judah, a new covenant.'" ⁷ For Jeremiah, the expression "days are coming" is always related to the return of scattered Israel to "the land" (23:7-8; 30:3; 31:27-28, 38) and the reign of Christ in a New covenant relationship with Israel in the land (Jer. 23:5; 31:31). Two crucial matters are raised here that have vast ramifications.

The first matter concerns the meaning of the phrases, "the House of Israel" and "the House of Judah." One view is described by O. Palmer Robertson:

⁶ This translation, contrary to the NIV, that so much better relates to the preceding verse, uses the quite well supported $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ rather than $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$. Surely the "finding fault" concerns the first covenant rather than the Israelites. So Brown, Farrar, Hughes.

⁷ This quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34, by the author, does not exactly follow the Massoretic Hebrew text or the Septuagint, and for this reason it may well be based upon memory.

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Part of the solution to the problem of the identification of “Israel” involves recognizing that the term has more than one use in Scripture. . . .

However, one significant usage of the term that may be helpful for the question of Jeremiah’s prophecy should be noted. Old Covenant Israel may be regarded as a typological representation of the elect people of God. This assertion does not intend to suggest that Israel functioned merely in a typological role. But from an old covenant perspective, one significant aspect of Israel’s existence was the nation’s typological representation of the chosen of Yahveh.

The old covenant “serpent of brass” typologically anticipated the new covenant Christ cursed on the cross. The old covenant tabernacle typologically anticipated the new covenant reality of the chosen people of God.

When Jeremiah specifically indicates that the new covenant will be made “with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel,” this perspective must be kept in mind. If the new covenant people of God are the actualized realization of a typological form, and the new covenant now is in effect, those constituting the people of God in the present circumstances must be recognized as the “Israel of God.” As a unified people, the participants of the new covenant today are “Israel.”⁸

This covenantal interpretation, being essentially as old as Augustine, is supercessionist. In other words, any thought of literal national Israel and literal Judah here ought to be superseded by the idea that this verse now speaks of the people of God under the New Covenant, that is the church as the spiritual Israel. It is significant that Robertson conspicuously makes no mention of the fact that the overwhelming usage of the terms “Israel” and “Judah” is with regard to literal “Israel” and literal “Judah.” For instance this holds true even in Romans where Ἰσραήλ, *Israēl*, Ἰσραηλίτης, *Israēlitēs*, are used thirteen times, and never once with regard to any people or person other than those who physically descended from Jacob. Hence, concerning the analogous use of the serpent of brass and the tabernacle, the New Testament makes no such analogy with regard to Israel, notwithstanding the only refuge

⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ Of The Covenants*, pp. 288-89. Also refer to this author’s *The Israel Of God* which, in a classic supercessionist manner, declares: “Rather than understanding predictions about the ‘return’ of ‘Israel’ to the ‘land’ in terms of a geopolitical re-establishment of the state of Israel, these prophecies are more properly interpreted as finding consummate fulfillment of the ‘restoration of all things’ that will accompany the resurrection of believers at the return of Christ (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:22-23),” p. 194.

being taken in Galatians 6:16.⁹ Thus J. C. Ryle rejects this spiritualizing hermeneutic as follows.

The word "Israel" is used nearly seven hundred times in the Bible. I can only discover three senses in which it is used. First, it is one of the names of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes; a name specially given to him by God. Secondly, it is a name given to the ten tribes which separated from Judah and Benjamin in the days of Rehoboam, and became a distinct kingdom. This kingdom is often called Israel in contradistinction to the kingdom of Judah. Thirdly and lastly, it is a name given to the whole Jewish nation, to all members of the twelve tribes which sprung from Jacob, and were brought out of Egypt into the land of Canaan. This is by far the most common signification of the word in the Bible. It is the only signification in which I can find the word "Israel" used throughout the whole New Testament. It is the same in which the word is used in the text which I am considering this day [Jer. 31:10]. That Israel, which God has scattered and will yet gather again, is the whole Jewish nation.

Now, why do I dwell upon this point? To some readers it may appear mere waste of time and words to say so much about it. The things I have been saying sound to them like truisms. That Israel means Israel is a matter on which they never felt a doubt. If this be the mind of many of you whose hands this address has fallen, I am thankful for it. But unhappily there are many Christians who do not see the subject with your eyes. For their sakes I must dwell on this point a little longer.

For many centuries there has prevailed in the Churches of Christ a strange, and to my mind, an unwarrantable mode of dealing with this word "Israel." It has been interpreted in many passages of the Psalms and Prophets, as if it meant nothing more than Christian believers. Have promises been held out to Israel? Men have been told continually that they are addressed to Gentile saints. Have glorious things been described as laid up in store for Israel? Men have been incessantly told that they describe the victories and triumphs of the gospel in Christian churches. The proofs of these things are too many to require quotation. No man can read the immense majority of commentaries and popular hymns without seeing this system of interpretation to which I now refer.¹⁰ Against that system I have long protested, and I hope I shall always protest as long as I live.

⁹ The continuative "and" καί, kai, is contextually and statistically preferable when compared with the ascensive "even." Most commonly the translation is, "and upon the Israel of God" (NASB), in which case Hebrew Christians retain a distinct identity, while the minority translation reads, "even upon the Israel of God" (NIV), in which case the church, comprising all of the people of God, is simply given a refined title, it being the spiritual Israel of God. However consider that in the New Testament of the KJV, "and" occurs approximately 9225 times (97%), while "even" occurs approximately 275 times (3%).

¹⁰ It hardly needs mentioning that these volumes are almost exclusively Gentile in authorship.

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I do not deny that Israel was a peculiar typical people, and that God's relations to Israel were meant to be a type of His relations to His believing people all over the world.

I would have it most distinctly understood that God's dealings with individual Jews and Gentiles are precisely one and the same. Without repentance, faith in Christ and holiness of heart, no individual Jew or Gentile shall ever be saved.

What I protest against is, the habit of allegorizing plain sayings of the Word of God concerning the future history of the *nation* of Israel, and explaining away the fullness of their contents in order to accommodate them to the Gentile Church. I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long train of evil consequences.¹¹

Hence the promise here specifically concerns the nations of Israel and Judah, eventually to be united (Ezek. 37:15-28).¹² This is confirmed by most of the related Old Testament references to an "everlasting covenant." Certainly the Hebrew Christian addressees of Hebrews would readily appreciate this truth, which also indicates a present reality for the nation of Israel.¹³ But if this is so, then how is it possible for the Gentiles to participate in this distinctive New Covenant blessing? By the incorporation of "[Gentile] wild olive branches" into "the rich root of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17), that is the Abrahamic Covenant. As Walter Kaiser explains: "The church is grafted into Israel, not Israel into the church. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 was made with 'the house of Judah and the house of Israel,' not with the church. It is not a covenant made with all humanity, but all humanity

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* pp. 106-107. The concluding comment here appears to allude to those centuries following Augustine in which Christian anti-Semitism was, and continues to be, a consequence of supercessionism. Also refer to the similar opinion of Horatius Bonar concerning the meaning of "Israel," *Prophetical Landmarks*, pp. 247-249; 256-258.

¹² Horatius Bonar confirms this when he writes: "[A]s this passage [Jer. 31:8, 31] asserts, that it was, in the first place, with the literal Israel that this new covenant was to be made, so we find it to have been. Messiah, when He came, "confirmed the covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:27). He confirmed His own ministry to the Jews." *Prophetical Landmarks*, p. 272.

¹³ In other words, if it is presupposed in the New Testament that the ancient nation of Israel has been superceded by the new spiritual Israel, comprised of all people of God within the Christian church, then it is necessary to import an inclusive meaning into Jeremiah 31:31. This methodology is especially evident in Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 222-23, 288-89, and *The Israel of God*, p. 189; also W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event*, p. 47, who fail to appreciate that the addressees of Hebrews, such as the "us" in 10:15, are Hebrew Christians.

may be grafted into it.”¹⁴ Hence Gentile Christians are warned: “Do not be arrogant toward the [humiliated, detached Jewish] branches; but if you are arrogant [in claiming to have superceded, more worthily, unbelieving national Israel], remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you” (Rom. 11:18).

The second matter concerns the meaning of the phrase, “a new covenant” (cf. Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24), which is also named in Hebrews as a “better covenant” (8:6), a “second” covenant (10:9), an “eternal covenant” (13:20; cf. Jer. 32:40). Is it an “essentially new” or “newer, renewed” covenant? The preceding context of 7:1-28, especially the absolute disjunction between Jesus Christ of Judah, as a priest after Melchizedek, and the Aaronic priesthood, would indicate that the New Covenant is essentially, fundamentally new when compared with the old Mosaic covenant.¹⁵ This is certainly affirmed here in v. 29. However, we must continue to remember, concerning the Abrahamic Covenant and indeed the adjunct Davidic Covenant, that the New Covenant is the ultimate fulfillment of the original promise. This point is upheld when we consider much of the Old Testament terminology regarding an “everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:7, 13; II Sam. 23:5; I Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10; Is. 55:3; 61:6-9; Jer. 32:36-41; 50:4-5; Ezek. 16:60-63; 37:24-28).

Here then is the ultimate, explicit challenge, not only to Judaism that sees the Mosaic covenant and Torah as having a supposed eternal existence, but also to those Christians who attempt to maintain a partnership between Moses and Jesus Christ. This is in spite of a most clear statement here that comes to a climax, v. 13, namely that the old covenant has become “obsolete,” and “is ready to disappear.” Here, at the same time, the superior glory of this New Covenant is inextricably bound to that restoration of glory which shall come to the nation of Israel in their promised land (Gen. 12:1-3; Jer. 31:23-25; 32:37-41).

(2) The Old Covenant broken (Jeremiah 31:32), v. 9.

“Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, on the day of my having taken them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt,

¹⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Evangelical Response,” *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, eds. Blaising and Bock, p. 361. Here Kaiser indicates his indebtedness to Daniel Gruber, *The Church and The Jews*, pp. 77-85, 99-104, 334-339. Also refer to David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 684.

¹⁵ Refer to the greater detail of Carl Hoch’s seven reasons giving support to this perspective. *All Things New*, pp. 105-107.

because they did not abide in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord.” The language continues to focus on national Israel and Judah, but especially their distinctive Mosaic legacy. Especially note Jeremiah’s recollection concerning Israel’s commitment to and yet violation of this bilateral covenant (7:23-26; 34:17-18; cf. Exod. 24:3-8), which the author now also recollects. Consequently, God abandoned His people, yet not forever. The features of weakness, shadowiness, and faultiness, previously mentioned (7:18; 8:5, 7), that characterized the old covenant, now lead us to the distinguishing strengths or categories of “newness” that are incorporated in the New Covenant, vs. 10-12.

- (3) The New Covenant defined (Jer. 31:33-34), vs. 10-12.

The contrasting unilateral nature of this covenant, its address to the heart of the human problem, its implementation through sole sovereign initiative, its fulfillment that is unconditionally certain, is as sure as the fixity of the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens; only if finite man can reach into and measure the infinite will Israel “cease to be a nation” and be required to give account for its sins (Jer. 31: 35-37).

- (a) It is God’s *inscription* on the hearts of Israel (Jer. 31:33), v. 10.

“For this covenant [is that] which I shall covenant with the house of Israel after those days, ‘says the LORD,’ [gratuitously/ graciously] placing My laws [νόμους μου, nomous mou]¹⁶ into their understanding/mind [διάνοια, dianoia], and I will inscribe [ἐπιγράψω, epigraphō] them on their hearts.” In other words, God will supernaturally invade the souls of His rebellious people according to His divine, merciful initiative. By this means, saving faith will be granted to Israel; the result will be the will to believe,

¹⁶ Does this simply mean that the Mosaic code, Torah, will be internalized as some suggest, such as Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue*, pp. 15-24; Walter Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 233; and Reconstructionists? David Stern comments that the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 has become Torah, cf. Heb. 8:6b, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp. 687-89. Given that this may be so, nevertheless would it not be more correct then to speak of “New Torah”? But this does not answer our original question. The “laws of God” here are not distinguished as “moral laws,” as Decalogue only. Hence, a new code of the righteousness of God must be intended. Further, as Moo explains, “[T]here are references in the prophets to a *tôrâ* that will be established in the last days and that probably does not refer to the Mosaic law as such (Isa. 2:3; 42:4; 51:4, 7; Mic. 4:2). This ‘Zion Torah,’ perhaps to be understood as a fresh publication of God’s will for His people, in continuity with but not identical to the ‘Sinai torah,’ may be what is envisaged in Jeremiah 31:33-34 and the Ezekiel texts.” Bahnsen, Kaiser Jr., Moo, Strickland, VanGemeren, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, p. 346.

to admire, to praise, to worship, to obey; there will be national regeneration (Ezek. 36:22-31) and national repentance (Zech. 12:10-14). As John Brown comments:

Others consider it [here] as a prediction referring to the new economy generally, and that the phrases, "house of Israel," and "house of Judah," are to be understood mystically of the true Israel, whether Jews or Gentiles. But it seems to me quite plain, that the words are a prophecy of that general conversion of the Jews to Christianity which we are warranted to look for from many Old Testament predictions, and from the express declaration of the Apostle, that a period is coming when "all Israel shall be saved" [Rom. 11:26]. It may indeed be said, How does the passage, in this view, answer the Apostle's object? The answer is easy. The covenant which in the last days of the Christian dispensation the Jews generally are to be brought under, is substantially the same covenant which, ratified in the blood of Jesus, has been, during the course of eighteen centuries, diffusing its blessings to an innumerable multitude of individuals, of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation.¹⁷

The law of the old covenant was misconstrued as a revelation that was wrongly presumed to have an intrinsic, sanctifying dynamic. Similarly there was a wrong presumption concerning man's supposed possession of an intrinsic, volitional ability that enabled him to obey this same law. Notice the right order here first of God's sovereign covenant commitment, "I will put My laws, . . . I

will write them, . . . I will be their God." Then, as a consequence, all will know Me," v. 11. The heart of legalism is a proud presumption, by polluted man, concerning confidence in nonexistent, moral human ability.

Of course the Gentiles will enter into this same regeneration, conversion, and justification according to that great gospel age in which the "wild olive branches" are engrafted into "the rich root of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17); this runs parallel with that period when "the fullness of the Gentiles" will come to pass (Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25). Following this will be the great Jewish ingathering (Rom. 11:15, 23-26): "This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (Rom. 11:27).

¹⁷ Brown, *Hebrews*, I, p. 372.

- (b) It is God's *revelation* of Himself to Israel (Jer. 31:34a), v. 11.

"And they will [definitely] not teach everyone, his fellow citizen, and everyone, his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord' [as in times past], because all will know Me from the least to the greatest of them [Isa. 54:13]." As Farrar explains, a further New Covenant distinctive "is that there shall be no *appropriation* of knowledge; no sacerdotal exclusiveness; no learned caste that shall monopolize the keys of knowledge, and lock out those who desire to enter in."¹⁸ In other words, there will be an anointed priesthood of all believers (I Pet. 2:9). Formerly, there had been an emphasis upon the efficacy of cerebral biblical education by means of an elite class of rabbis through synagogues, akin to a sterile church membership class. Pink adds:

During the Mosaic economy, and particularly in the last century before Christ, there was an external teaching of the Law, which the people trusted and rested in without any regard for God's teaching by the inward circumcision of the heart. Such teaching had degenerated into rival schools and sects, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes, etc., and they made void the word of God through their traditions (Mark 7:13). It was against such the last of Israel's prophets had announced: 'The Lord will cut off . . . the master and scholar out of the tabernacles of David' (Mal. 2:12).¹⁹

- (c) It is God's *revelation* of mercy to Israel (Jer. 31:34b), v. 12.

"Because I shall be merciful/propitious [ἵλεως, hileōs; cf. 2:17, by sacrificial satisfaction, akin to propitiation; Rom. 3:24-26] to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins I shall [definitely] remember no longer/ever again." In contrast with the Old Covenant, which was bilateral according to obedience or disobedience, the fundamental basis of the New Covenant is God's unilateral, merciful, effectual intent that triumphantly confronts the "unrighteousnesses" and "sins" of those sinners He has set His heart upon. Notwithstanding the absence of any comment here by Calvin, this verse conveys the supreme distinction between these two covenants (John 1:17; Heb. 1:1-2), which the Apostle Paul boldly preached to the Jews in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him [Jesus Christ]

¹⁸ Farrar, *Hebrews*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 457.

forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

c. It is surpassing, v. 13.

"In which He said, '[a] new [covenant],' He has made old/obsolete [παλαιόω, palaiōō] the former [πρῶτος, prōtos; covenant]; but in being made old it is also growing old [being] near to disappearance/abolition [ἀφανισμός, aphanismos]. Here now is the author's summation of the preceding quotation concerning what he has been focusing on from the beginning. Both covenants having been ordained of God, it is wholly His prerogative, according to the gracious movement and progressive plan of His will, to replace an inferior order with a superior order. We could say of a garment, "That which is by its very nature destined to become old/obsolete is presently becoming old to the point where it is about ready to be discarded." So the old covenant, "being made old [prone to failure/obsolescence]. . . is also [presently] growing old [to the point where it is about to be discarded]." Assuming that the Jerusalem temple is still standing and operative, then there is here, according to Jesus (Mark 13:2; cf. John 2:19) and Stephen (Acts 6:14), anticipation of the immanent destruction of Herod's temple and the whole sacrificial order. Greg Bahnsen illustrates the difficulty here of the Theonomist when he writes: "[T]he coming of Christ has brought a change of law regarding the priesthood (Heb. 7:12), and the administrative [as opposed to the moral] order of the old covenant is vanishing away (Heb. 8:13)."²⁰ However, where in the Bible do the terms "first [covenant]," v. 1, or "old [covenant]," v. 13, ever indicate the human designations of only civil and ceremonial law to the exclusion of the moral law? Furthermore, as Hoch, Jr. explains in the light of 7:12, "the new order belongs to a different law than the old order. To change Aaron is to change Aaron's system. If Aaron goes, the covenant that designates him as its high priest also goes."²¹ Hence it is the whole Sinaitic dispensation that has become superceded. It is "the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones [even the moral law so called], . . . the ministry of condemnation, . . . which fades away" (II Cor. 3:7, 9, 11). In accord with Galatians 3:24-25, this old covenant system has prepared the way over the centuries as "a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now [in the continuity of history] that faith [particularly its object] has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Rom. 7:1-4). Thus Owen concludes his comment on this verse: "All the glorious

²⁰ Bahnsen, Kaiser Jr., Moo, Strickland, VanGemeren, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, p. 104.

²¹ Hoch, Jr., *All Things New*, p. 123.

institutions of the law were at best but as stars in the firmament of the church, and therefore were all to disappear at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Τῷ Θεῷ δόξα [Tō Theō doxa], To God, [let there be] glory.”²²



²² Owen, *Hebrews*, IV, p. 177. In a posthumous treatise on *The Dominion Of Sin And Grace* based on Romans 6:14, published in 1688, Owen further provides four reasons why the Christian is not under law. “1. The law *giveth no strength against sin* unto them that are under it, but grace doth. . . . 2. The law *gives no liberty of any kind*; it gendereth unto bondage, and so cannot free us from any dominion. . . . 3. The law *doth not supply us with effectual motives and encouragements* to endeavor the ruin of the dominion of sin in a way of duty. . . . It works only by fear and dread, with threatenings and terrors of destruction. . . . 4. *Christ is not in the law*; he is not proposed in it, not communicated by it,—we are not made partakers of him thereby. This is the work of grace, of the gospel. . . He [Christ] alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is acted in the rule of sin.” *Works*, VII, pp. 542-51.