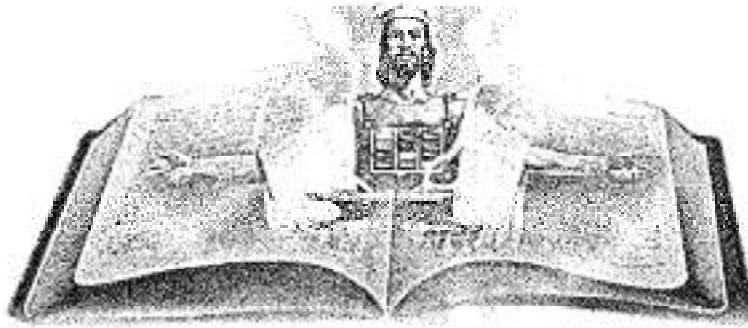


Jesus and the Covenant (Agreement)



SAB
PM

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 8 and 9.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘This is the covenant that I [God] will make with them [Israel] in the days to come, says the Lord: I will put my [God’s] laws in their [Israel’s] hearts and write them [God’s laws] on their minds.’ And then he [God] says, ‘I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer’ ” (Hebrews 10:16, 17, TEV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: One of the important topics in Hebrews is the new covenant. Jesus is the One who started the new covenant.

IN MODERN TIMES, WE DO BUSINESS WITH CONTRACTS. Hans signs a contract with the plumber to fix the faucet. The plumber receives his money, and Hans gets a new faucet. They both profit from the contract as equals. But the new covenant does not work quite like that. In the new covenant, God does not need us. We need Him. He gives us grace, mercy,¹ and forgiveness of sins. We offer nothing back because we have nothing. All we can do is accept God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness by faith. This faith is inspired by love. Love for God and faith in Him leads to heartfelt obedience.

This week we will take a closer, deeper look at the new covenant. We will study how the new covenant relates to Jesus and His ministry (work) in heaven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is the covenant in the Bible? Why was there a need for a new covenant? How does the covenant relate to Jesus’ heavenly ministry? What does the new covenant offer us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

¹mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

SUN COVENANTS (AGREEMENTS).

In ancient² Asia, covenants described the relationship between a ruling power and the people under that power. Sometimes a covenant also was made between people who were equals.

Among the pagan³ nations, these covenants often had the following parts: (1) preamble (introduction) introducing the ruler; (2) historical background describing past relationships between the contracting parties (people); (3) the requirements (rules) that outline the nature of the community that the covenant formed; (4) rules for keeping the covenant safe and rules for reading the covenant on a regular schedule; (5) lists of gods who saw the covenant being signed; (6) curses and blessings that came with the covenant.

The covenant in the Bible has many of these same parts.

Look up the following verses, which deal with different Old Testament covenants. Genesis 6:18; Genesis 9:11-13; Genesis 15:18; Exodus 19:5; Exodus 24:7, 8; Psalm 89:3, 4; Jeremiah 31:31-34. What things do the covenants share? What important message do these covenants have? What do these covenants teach us about the kind of relationship God wants with His people?

²ancient—very old.

³pagan—not worshipping the true God.



God gave Noah the rainbow as a sign of His covenant.

The covenant promises are very important. In Abraham's case, there is the promise that God always would be with His people; the promise that the Messiah (Savior) would be a blessing for all peoples; and the promise of land and of a great nation.

The covenant given to Moses was an expanded version of the earlier covenants. The covenant given to Moses was for all of Israel. After God saved the Israelites from Egypt, He offered them His covenant and promised to make them His treasured property, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

Why is the idea of a covenant so important to our understanding of what it means to have a relationship with God?

MON THE OLD COVENANT (AGREEMENT) AND THE NEW COVENANT.

The idea of the covenant in Hebrews

is introduced in Hebrews 8:6-13. What reason does Paul give for needing the new covenant?

The introduction of the covenant in Hebrews did not come out of nothing. Hebrews 1–7 explained Jesus' priesthood. Hebrews 8–10 tells us what Jesus did. But Paul had to show that Jesus is the true Priest, even though He was not a Levite. So in Hebrews 7, Paul points to the priesthood of Melchizedek.⁴ Melchizedek symbolized Jesus' priesthood. Paul also mentions Psalm 110, which predicted⁵ Jesus' priesthood. Paul did this to show that Jesus was a Levite through the order of Melchizedek. In Hebrews 8, he then related the promise of a new and better covenant. This covenant required a new and better priesthood and a *new and better sanctuary*. The new priesthood and new sanctuary refer to Jesus and His ministry (work) in heaven.

What words in Hebrews 13:20 and Hebrews 8:6 describe the new covenant? Why did Paul use these words?

There is a sharp difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. But in some ways the old covenant and the new covenant are the same. The partners in both covenants are the same: God and His people. In both cov-

enants, God starts the covenant because only He can save. In both covenants, there are promises and duties. And in both covenants, God is always with His people.

The important difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is that there is total forgiveness and assurance⁶ in the new covenant. The old covenant was full of symbols that were fulfilled in Jesus. In the new covenant, the law is now internalized (written in our heart). Through faith in Jesus, the believer obeys the law, now written in the heart. The new covenant is permanent (forever). It has been made legal with the blood of Jesus, not with the blood of animals.



In the new covenant, God writes His law in our hearts.

Finally in the old covenant, people found hope in the blood of a goat, lamb, or bull. We have so much more hope in the blood of Jesus. Read Hebrews 9:13, 14.

⁴Melchizedek—a priest-king in Abraham's time. Abraham paid his tithe to him (Genesis 14:17-20). Melchizedek is thought to be a symbol of Jesus as Priest-King.

⁵predicted—to have told what will happen in the future.

⁶assurance—the promise of hope and salvation.

Read carefully and prayerfully the quote from Jeremiah in Hebrews 8:8-12. Think about what God promises to do for us in the new covenant. Have you experienced these promises in your life? If not, why not? And what can you do to change?

TUE THE COVENANT (AGREEMENT) AND RELATED IDEAS.

How does the covenant relate to the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the sanctuary? Hebrews 9:11-15.

A sacrifice is mentioned in the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15). After God had saved Israel from Egypt, he offered them His covenant. The people answered: “ ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’ ” (Exodus 19:8; 24:7, RSV). God explained the promises and gave His law, which they were required to obey. Sacrifices were then offered, and the covenant was made legal by blood (Exodus 24:8). The covenant laws also included the establishment of the sanctuary, the priesthood, and the system of sacrifices (Exodus 25–31). In this way, covenant, sacrifice, priesthood, and sanctuary belong together. So a new, better covenant requires a new and better sacri-

ifice, a new and better priesthood, and a new and better sanctuary.

How does God’s law relate to the new covenant? Hebrews 8:10.

Hebrews 7:12 points out that the law needed to be changed. The law Hebrews 7:12 is talking about is the Mosaic law,⁷ because the context⁸ of Hebrews 7:12 is the earthly sanctuary service and its priesthood. The earthly sanctuary and its priesthood were symbols of what Jesus would do. “The Jewish Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things; it is only a faint [weak] outline of the good things to come. The same sacrifices are offered forever, year after year. How can the [Mosaic] Law, then, by means of the sacrifices make perfect the people who come to God?” (Hebrews 10:1, TEV). The Mosaic law was taken away after Jesus’ death, resurrection,⁹ and after He began His high-priestly ministry (work).

But the Ten Commandments are as good in the new covenant as in the old covenant. Under the new covenant, the Ten Commandment law is written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). It is not taken away (1 John 5:3). Jesus’ life and example and His perfect keeping of the Ten Commandments have honored the law in the new covenant. So the Ten Commandments are more than just cold

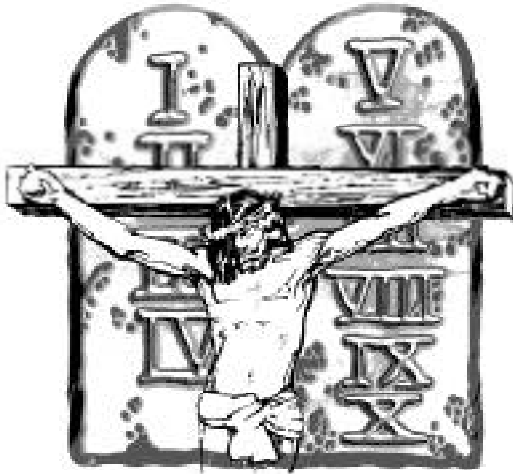
⁷Mosaic law—all the laws God gave to Moses about the sanctuary. For an example, read any chapter in Leviticus.

⁸context—setting of a verse; what the verses before and after a verse mean will determine what that verse means.

⁹resurrection—to come back to life after dying.

dead laws for people who kept them for the wrong reasons. In the book of Hebrews, God does not speak of a new law. He speaks of a new covenant, with the Ten Commandments and gospel at the center of the covenant.

Why are the Ten Commandments important to the new covenant? This new covenant points to the death of Jesus as our Substitute.¹⁰ Obedience to the Ten Commandments can never save us. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Ten Commandments for us. So why is keeping the Ten Commandments important in the life of a Christian?



Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law.

WED BENEFITS OF THE COVENANT (AGREEMENT).

Hebrews lists many good results

of the new covenant. What are these good results?

Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 9:26, 28; Hebrews 10:17, 18 _____

Hebrews 8:10; Hebrews 10:16 _____

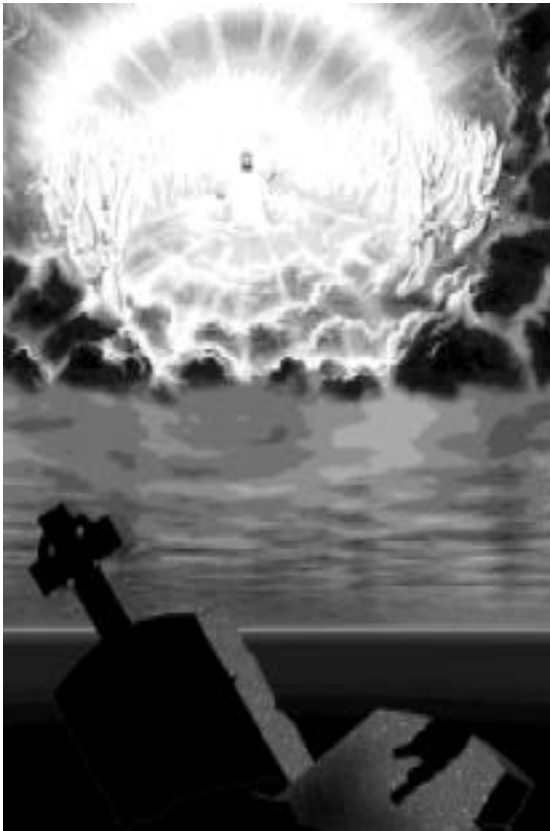
Hebrews 9:9, 14; Hebrews 10:2 _____

Hebrews 9:12, 15, 28 _____

Hebrews 10:10, 14 _____

Hebrews 10:19 _____

¹⁰substitute—someone who takes another person’s place. Jesus took our place on the cross.



One result of the new covenant is that Jesus will return for His people.

The new covenant has “better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). In the New Testament, the word *promise* is found more often in Hebrews than in any other book. What promises have we received in Hebrews?

The promises of the new covenant include the right to enter into God’s presence, a clear conscience,¹¹ salvation, and forgiveness of sins. One of the best promises is the final promise of Jeremiah 31:34: “I [God] will remember their sins no more.”

¹¹conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right.

¹²unrighteousness—not being holy.

¹³confess—to say you have sinned.

¹⁴dishonored—not honored.

How do you understand that sentence, “I will remember their sins no more”?

“The blessings of the new covenant are based on mercy in forgiving unrighteousness¹² and sins. . . . All people who humble their hearts and confess¹³ their sins, will find mercy, grace, and assurance (hope). In showing mercy to the sinner, has God stopped being just (fair)? Has He dishonored¹⁴ His holy law? Will He overlook breaking His law? God is true. He does not change. . . . In the new covenant, we are cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus (Letter 276, 1904).”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol 7, p. 931.

Read over what you wrote about the good results of the new covenant. Which results mean the most to you, and why? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.

THU JESUS AND THE COVENANT (AGREEMENT).

The most important part of the covenant is the Person who has made the covenant legal and who does His work according to the covenant. What is Jesus called as He relates to the covenant? Hebrew 7:22; Hebrews 9:15.

Jesus is the “surety” (guarantee) of the new covenant. Hebrews 7:22 joins priesthood and covenant together. Three times in Hebrews Jesus is called the Mediator¹⁵ of a better or new covenant (Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:24). While Hebrews 7 presents Jesus as Priest, Hebrews 8–10 points to Jesus as Sacrifice. So we can see the connection between sacrifice, covenant, and mediator.

What does “surety” mean when talking about a covenant? Hebrews 7:22.

“Surety,” or “guarantee,” does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. “Surety was common in legal papers in the sense of a pledge or a bail.¹⁶ . . . Since the covenant in the Bible is an agreement started by God, the surety (Jesus) guarantees that the covenant will be honored. . . . The mediator is a go-between. His job is to keep the partners of the covenant in fellowship with one another. God is one of the partners, and we are the other partner. But the covenant idea is still one-sided. Failure to obey is always on our side. Then the mediator’s (Jesus’) job is to work for our sake in God’s presence. But the mediator has also to act for God in front of us.”—Adapted from Guthrie, pp. 165, 166, 174.

We can be sure God always will keep

His covenant promises. We fall. We back out. We become weak. We become Laodicean.¹⁷ But Jesus guarantees that He will keep His part of the covenant.

Hebrews also wants to help readers who are troubled by a bad conscience and who are not sure of forgiveness and salvation. These people do not need a list of what is required of them. But they must understand what God has done for their salvation through Jesus.

The second part of Hebrews 10 warns against sinning stubbornly, or continuing to sin. To sin stubbornly, or continuously, is a sign of disobedience¹⁸ and a breaking of the covenant on our part. In Hebrews, Paul is trying to turn people from such a wild or careless way.

How many people do you know have “broken” the covenant? Those are the people who once knew and loved the Lord but have fallen away. What mistakes did they make? What can you learn from their mistakes so you do not make the same mistakes?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Study the idea of the covenant (agreement) in these verses: Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 1:72; Luke 22:20; Acts 3:25; Acts 7:8. John does not talk about the covenant. John, the writer of Revelation, mentions the ark of the covenant only (Revelation 11:19).

¹⁵Mediator—Jesus works to make peace between God and us. He is our Lawyer in the heavenly court.

¹⁶bail—guarantee needed to set a person free from jail until he or she is ready for trial.

¹⁷Laodicean—becoming lukewarm or weak in our belief in, and connection with, God. Read Revelation 3:14-19.

¹⁸disobedience—not obeying.

“God’s people are made righteous (holy) through the working of the [new] covenant, through Jesus’ righteousness (holiness). A covenant is an agreement between partners who agree to fulfill certain conditions (rules). In the same way, we enter into agreement with God to obey the conditions specified in the Bible. His actions show whether or not He respects these conditions. We gain everything by obeying the covenant-keeping God. God’s goodness is given to us and helps us to make use of His love and mercy. God’s covenant promises us His character will never change.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 932.

“The great law of love is shown in Eden, made known upon Sinai, and in the new covenant, written in the heart. The same law unites us to God’s will.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 329.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of worldly covenants do we become involved in? What can we learn from these covenants that could

help us understand God’s covenant?

2. Why does Hebrews talk so much about forgiveness? How do you understand the sanctuary, the blood of Jesus, and His work in heaven in relationship to the forgiveness of sin?
3. What is a mediator? How are priesthood and the work of a mediator related? In what situations have you enjoyed the help of a mediator?

SUMMARY: Paul has pointed out Jesus’ greatness over angels, Moses, and Aaron in Hebrews 1–7. Then he summarizes his discussion in Hebrews 8:1, 2 before turning to the covenant, the sanctuary, and the sacrifice. From Hebrews 8 onward, he focuses on what Jesus has done and is doing for us. The covenant permits us to have a special relationship with God and offers an answer to our deepest needs and problems. Here the great theme of “something better” appears. A new and better covenant requires a new and better priesthood, sanctuary, and mediator. God has given all these to us.