

The Book of Hebrews

Part 21: The Kainos Covenant (Heb. 7:22 – 8:13)

I. The High Priest of a New Covenant

Last time we talked about the order of Aaron versus the order of Melchizedek, one representing the law and the other grace. This time we will look at the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant. This is a different facet of the same diamond of revelation in Hebrews, a revelation that serves as an on-ramp to true rest and joy.

In our discussions on Melchizedek, we skipped over an important line about “covenant.” This is the first time this word shows up in the letter.

**22 So all of this magnifies the truth that we have a superior covenant with God than what they experienced, for Jesus himself is its guarantor!
(Hebrews 7:22 TPT)**

We cannot talk about the Old Testament and the story of God without understanding this concept. In fact, the words “testament” and “covenant” go together. The scriptures are split between two kinds of covenants. It is a double-edged sword of law and grace, letter and spirit, death and life.

**6 (He) made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
(2 Corinthians 3:6)**

Just like the order of Aaron spoke to the overall religious ways of humanity, the Old Covenant speaks of the same thing. Everyone must make the shift from the way of the Old Covenant—which is the way of law, letter, and death—to the way of the New.

Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant. The author has been building to all along, and explicitly says so in chapter 8:

**1 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ... 6 now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.
(Hebrews 8:1 & 6)**

We’ve taken time to understand the role of the High Priest and the “order” of the whole priesthood. Now we will look at this all-important idea of a covenant.

II. Genesis 15: The Mystery of Covenant

In Genesis 14 we were given groundbreaking revelation into the character of Melchizedek and the story of the Gospel hidden in Abraham's war with the kings of darkness. When we turn to the next chapter, we understand even more of the beautiful truth pouring out of Hebrews 7 and 8.

In Genesis 15 we see the ancient practice of two parties entering into a covenant together. A covenant was an alliance or treaty between two parties. This could be two nations, two tribes, two leaders, or two people—as in a man and a woman in marriage. A covenant came with a promise from each party that they would fulfill certain expectations.

Typically, in a covenant there is a greater party who promises to protect and bless the weaker party. In return, the weaker party promised to fulfill certain duties.

The word for “covenant” is formed from two root words—a Hebrew word for “cut” and “eat.”

People would *cut* a covenant. In ancient times (and still in some parts of the world today), sacrificial animals would be presented and killed. The bodies of these animals would be cut in two and placed across from each to form a kind of aisle to walk down.

When the agreements of the covenant were clear and settled, each party would walk through this bloody aisle. This act communicated that if one party broke their end of the agreement, then they would be killed in the same way. This was a serious and binding ceremony that carried just as much weight—and more—than a modern contract involving lawyers and judges.

Regarding the word “eat,” the parties would usually end the ceremony with a big meal. They would eat together at a table as a sign of their friendship and loyalty.

A covenant was a meal and a cutting. Already, we can see how this points to is called the “new covenant” which Jesus instituted with meal of communion right before he was cut, pierced, and killed on our behalf.

In Genesis 15, Abraham receives a great promise from God.

**5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.
(Genesis 15:5-6)**

This becomes one of the most important verses in scripture, heralding the reality of faith in God as the way we experience righteousness, forgiveness, and blessing. But there is much more to the story. Even though it says Abraham believes in the Lord, we still see him wavering in the next verse. This is because the story is not about Abraham's faith, but the faithfulness of God.

After this promise is made and Abraham “believes,” he goes on to ask God for a guarantee. Abraham lived in a world where if one party made a big promise, you wouldn’t just take their word for it, you would ask for a guarantee. This often came via a covenant ceremony which would seal the deal on the promise.

Thus, God tells Abraham to prepare sacrificial animals to “cut a covenant” between them. In this scene, God is entering into our fallen system. Just like he would be fully incarnated in the world through Jesus, God was already “incarnating” himself into a world built on fear and distrust.

God did not initiate this bloody idea of sacrifice and covenant. *We* made up covenants because we needed surefire ways to gain protection and establish relationships in a fallen, divided, *babbling* world. Covenants, with their serious threats of punishment, enabled people to co-exist in the midst of suspicion and selfishness.

God entered this mess, but it was not to affirm our systems; it was to destroy them from the inside out. We see a glimmer of this in the surprising statement God makes through Jeremiah:

**22 For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.
(Jeremiah 7:22)**

It was like God was saying: *Yes, I submitted to your ways and gave some direction about these things, but that was me being like a surgeon putting my hands into the disease in order to remove it from the sick body of humanity.*

Amazingly, this is what we see God’s first covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. We see the ultimate plan of God shine through.

In the story, Abraham does as he’s told. He lays out the sacrificial animals and he knows that this means somehow God will walk through the aisle. God is going to make a covenant promise with him.

But Abraham would also quickly recognize that he has gotten himself into a serious situation because he is the other party and that means he must walk through the aisle as well. As it goes with any covenant, Abraham has things he must do on his end.

This must have been terrifying for Abraham because in dealing with a perfect God, this means he would be required to live a righteous life. And by entering this covenant, this means he would be punished with death if he broke his end of the deal.

Abraham still cuts the animals in two and prepares the ceremony, but before he can move forward with it, a “deep sleep” falls upon him:

**12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.
(Genesis 15:12)**

Abraham is essentially *immobilized*. He is put to rest, literally.

We find a revelation here of his inability (and our inability) to fulfill his end of the deal and thus secure the promises on God's end. He—and we—are unable to guarantee our worthiness in the “covenant relationship.”

It's interesting this occurs as the sun was *going down*. The setting sun is a prophetic image in creation signifying the death of the Son of God—the One who went into the ground, going dark and out of sight like the sun dipping into the western sky, but only to rise faithfully like the dawn in his resurrection. The sun is a daily herald of the Gospel.

As Abraham is put to rest, he is unable to walk through the covenant aisle. Instead, he enters a kind of dream state but is still able to see what is happening. He looks at the aisle and suddenly sees something strange happening.

**17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces (of cut animals).
(Genesis 15:17)**

Abraham sees two objects going through the aisle. First, he sees a furnace. As an object marked by fire, this is a clear symbol of God, the one who is called a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). Abraham is seeing a prophetic image of God himself walking through the aisle to confirm his end of the covenant.

God comes down and by this act he says, *I am going to fulfill my end of the covenant. I guarantee you today that I will bless you and bestow upon you all my promises of an expanding family... And if I do not do this, may I be cut apart like these animals.*

But then something else happens that blows away all expectations. Before Abraham could get up and walk through the aisle himself, a second symbol of fire appears. In this incredible and mysterious scene, we see God himself walk through the aisle *twice!*

In other words, God is communicating something unbelievable:

I will fulfill my end of the agreement—and I will fulfill your end of the agreement!

And if you break your promise, if you are unfaithful to me, I will suffer the consequences. I will let myself be torn apart... If you break your end of the agreement, you can cut me down and tear me apart like these poor sacrificial animals who constantly bear the weight of your ceaseless guilt and shame.

As the sun sets, the light of the Gospel breaks through to Abraham.

And remember, this happens right on the heels of Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness, appearing to Abraham in the last chapter with bread and wine!

God was speaking something that would not come to light fully for 2000 years later with the appearing of Jesus. In this scene, God was sending a message to the world that even though he was entering into our mess, he was not coming to affirm our covenants and contracts and sacrifices. He was coming to end them.

This would come in the form of what would be called the “New Covenant.”

III. Humanity’s Problem Revealed at Sinai

The “Old Covenant” is typically associated with Moses. After Abraham’s family grew and became known as the nation of Israel, they entered into another covenant with God where they did “walk through the aisle” so to speak. This happened at a place called Mount Sinai.

There, Israel met with God and entered a covenant. They agreed to do certain things to secure his blessing. God promised to bless and protect them, but they had to keep a certain standard of living. This standard was summarized in ten statements known as the Ten Commandments and then kept in a sacred box called the Ark of the Covenant. If the people obeyed that standard, the God of the Ark would arise and bless them. If not, they would be torn to pieces.

Was God suddenly going back on what he did with Abraham? Or is something deeper going on?

In Genesis 15, God gives Abraham this firm guarantee of his love and promise, as well as his willingness to take on the consequences of our own sin. But something tragic occurs in the very next verse...

**1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.
(Genesis 16:1-2)**

In the covenant that just occurred, God promised Abraham a child, but since this does not materialize right away, he and Sarah devise their own plan to help God out.

To put it bluntly, they don’t trust God to fulfill his word. They still live in the mindset of the world around them. They live with fear and hopelessness and so they feel they have to take matters into their own hands.

Abraham goes on to have a child with Hagar who becomes a thorn in the flesh of the family for countless generations.

- Yet in God's unbelievable sovereign grace, he still loves the child Ishmael and promises to bless him and protect his mother in the story.

This decision itself (not the child and his progeny) is the problem. It shows Abraham's unbelief, which is ironic since he is known as the man of faith. But again, this story is not about his faith, but God's faithfulness.

God *still* fulfills his promise like he said he would. He covers Abraham's weakness. He gives Abraham and Sarah a son by the supernatural power of the Spirit. Through this son, Isaac, God blesses Abraham's family and the rest of the world.

But the story with Hagar is revealing this deeper problem. Abraham and all the world around him does not trust God. We don't trust each other—which is why we have bloody covenants—and we don't trust God either. Therefore, we devised all kinds of schemes—priestly systems with covenants and sacrifices and all kinds of ways to secure blessing and forgiveness.

This is still in operation when we get to Moses and the covenant at Sinai. The Sinai covenant of Moses (connected to Moses's brother Aaron and the other Levites), which is now known as the "Old Covenant," becomes a picture of our slavery to fear and our self-will in trying scheme and earn our way into God's blessings. (See **Galatians 4:22-26**)

Even though God enters into this agreement, he still has his original plan to blow it up . . . which will happen through the coming of a "New Covenant."

IV. What Was Hidden For Generations

In Hebrews 8 we come to the celebration of the New Covenant. In the Greek language in which Hebrews was written, there are two words for "new." ***Neos*** and ***kainos***.

Neos means new in respect to time. It means there was an old thing and now there is a new and fresh thing. *Kainos* does not mean new in respect to time; it means something new that is of a totally different nature and quality.

- If I get a *neos* car, I would get the new model of the same vehicle. There may be upgrades and features, but it would essentially be the same type of experience. However, if I have an old truck and I buy a car that can fly and do all kinds of remarkable things, that would warrant me saying, "I got a *kainos* car!" It would be a totally different experience.

God promised to introduce a *kainos* covenant. In other words, this is not at all like the covenants that came before. This is something of a totally different nature.

And according to Hebrews 8:6, this New Covenant is much “better” than what came before, meaning more excellent, more advantageous, and nobler. Jesus is called “the mediator of a *better* covenant.” The New Covenant is indeed the best thing to hit the planet. It’s the most glorious, intoxicating reality imaginable. It is *better* than all our religious ways and striving. To discover it, is to discover true rest for the soul.

After establishing Jesus as the High Priest of this covenant, the writer adds fuel to the fire by reminding his Jewish readers of an important prophecy from Jeremiah. Hidden right within the Old Covenant, were these words heralding the New:

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says,

**"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord,
When I will effect a new covenant
With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;
9 Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
On the day when I took them by the hand
To lead them out of the land of Egypt;
For they did not continue in my covenant,
And I did not care for them, says the Lord.**

**10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
After those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws into their minds,
And I will write them on their hearts.
And I will be their God,
And they shall be my people.**

**11 "And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen,
And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
For all will know me,
From the least to the greatest of them.**

**12 "For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more."**

**13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.
(Hebrews 8:7-13)**

In this *kainos* covenant we find the law is not something we have to fulfill. It’s something inside of us. It’s a reality of the Spirit and of God’s image burning within us as his children. Jesus would restore that. In this New Covenant is also the promise that *all will know him*. People will not need a priest or an outside mediator because they will be restored to this original identity.

This is the plan God had all along. This is what he foretold in Genesis 15 with Abraham and the two images of fire where God declared he would make this happen in spite of our unfaithfulness.

In this New Covenant—this totally *new kind* of peace treaty—God was also saying there is free and total mercy toward your unfaithfulness. *I do not even remember your sins*, he says! This is a sheer gift that he and Jesus—the Father and the Son—the Furnace and the Torch—give to us together. The Father fulfills his part of the promise and Jesus fulfills and reveals our part.

Our call is to just be in awe of it . . . to receive it . . . to believe in it . . . In other words, to come back to the place of trust in a good Father.

God was always for us. He was never holding our sins against us... This New Covenant is the same thing that the apostle Paul described as “the mystery hidden for generations.” It was something that was always true but not revealed until the coming of Christ (as expressed in Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:6-9, & Titus 1:1-3).

From day one, God was not a punisher. He is the Love that keeps no record of wrongs. As the apostle John wrote, there is no punishment in perfect love. Our sins punish us. The enemy punishes us. We punish ourselves. God is not a punisher. He is a Savior and a Father who would come into the world not to condemn it but to rescue it and heal it (John 3:16-17).

He did this first by entering our fallen system in the Old Testament where it appeared as though he was in on the punishment system. But like Jesus bearing our sin on the cross, God was bearing with our evil as he entered our ancient tribal ways of sacrifice and punishment.

We can see this right in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve transgressed and broke relationship with God (and thus needed some form of peace treaty). God did not come to punish them. Instead, he searched for them and went on to clothe them with animal skins.

From day one, he was showing them the issue of separation was not on his end—it was on ours. But he was committed to covering us nonetheless. He was committed to providing the sacrifice we felt we needed out of our own guilt.

Then, all along the way, God sent prophets to tell the people there was something bigger and better coming. A totally new kind of treaty and alliance that would be based on the truth of his grace and his faithfulness.

God was planning to end our broken way of fear and self-perseveration we fell into it. He would do this by walking down the covenant aisle we asked for and set up. He would allow himself to be crucified. This would all manifest when the true “sun” set—when Christ died on the cross. Where Jesus would be revealed not just as our God, but as our Bridegroom who will lay down his friends.

We established priests and sacrifices and covenants to secure favor and blessing from heaven. God knew this was path we would take, and he promised to end it by becoming the Priest and the Sacrifice and the Covenant itself (Isaiah 42:6).

Thus, Jesus is our High Priest, our sacrifice, and the “guarantor” of a *kainos* covenant.

May we be put into a deep sleep like Abraham to behold the glory of God cutting the covenant with himself on our behalf. May our eyes be enlightened to see the mystery hidden from all time, the eternal love of our Father, and our redemption as his true as sons and daughters made in his perfect image and likeness!

Follow-up Encounter:

*Celebrate communion! As you do, ask God for dreams and visions that communicate the message of this **kainos** covenant. Ask that you would see like Abraham the goodness of God that outweighs and supersedes all your scheming and striving.*