

Is the Mosaic Covenant Obsolete?

Psalm 119 Ministries

Hebrews 8

⁽⁶⁾ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than . . . **the old** (*does not exist in the Original Greek*) . . . as the covenant he mediates is better, . . . since it is enacted on better promises.

The original text for verse six can be best rendered as; “But not He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant.” Thus, the translators have added ‘**old**’ to the translated text. So, to say that this passage is even talking about ‘**the old covenant**’ is inaccurate. (R.L. Watson, Forgotten Covenant (Port Orchard, WA: Ark House Press, 2021), 239-240)

⁽⁷⁾ For if that first . . . **covenant** (*does not exist in the Original Greek*) . . . had been faultless, there would not have been no occasion to look for a second (*Hebrews 7:11, “Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need would there have been for another priest to arise . . .”*).

And when we read these verses, in context, without the added words, it becomes apparent the author of Hebrews wasn’t even trying to compare the totality of the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant . . . after discussing the superiority of Christ’s High Priestly ministry into the Heavenly Places over those who minister in the Temple in verses 1-5, the author has said that Christ has a greater **ministry**. This is the context. What this means is that when the author continues, he is saying that because of the faultiness of the first **ministry**, a second superior **ministry** (Christ’s) was needed. The ministry of the priests who served in the Tabernacle and Temple was sufficient for its earthly and temporal purpose, however, it did nothing for humanity’s sinful condition. Indeed, it was never intended to do so (*but rather for Restored Fellowship with God and man*). (R.L. Watson, Forgotten Covenant (Port Orchard, WA: Ark House Press, 2021), 240)

A grammatical consideration: 1. The grammar of Hebrews 8:6-7 also suggests that the comparison is between priesthoods; 2. The main sentence is verse 6 is, ‘But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent . . .’; 3. The rest of the verse, about him mediating a better covenant enacted on better promises, is subordinate to his main point: Christ’s ministry in heaven is more excellent than the Levitical ministry on earth; 4. Then verse 7 follows up, “*For if that first had been faultless . . .*” If that first what had been faultless? Remember, the word “**covenant**” does not appear in the Greek in verse 7; 5. In Greek, there is no noun after “first,” so we must determine what the author is referring to from the context and sentence structure; 6. When we track the main clause in the previous verse – that is, when we recognize that the author’s main point in verse 6 is about Messiah’s ministry being more excellent – it makes the most sense to day, “that first ministry” instead of “that first covenant”; 7. The fault is not with the covenant but with the Levitical ministry.

⁽⁸⁾ For he finds fault with **them** (*the fault is with “them”, the Levitical priests/ministry, not “it”, the covenant; the priests are human, they have weaknesses, they sin, and grow old and die (Hebrews 5:2; 7:22-23, 28; 9:7); . . . Only the sinless and immortal heavenly High Priest can accomplish this (Hebrews 7:11, Jesus Like Melchizedek –¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood – and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood – why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek (both the King and High Priest of Jerusalem, back in the day of Abraham), not in the order of Aaron?: Only the Messiah can inaugurate the New Covenant, make complete atonement for sin, and enable the Torah to be written on the hearts of God’s people in accordance with the New Covenant promises.)*) when he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ⁽⁹⁾ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

⁽¹⁰⁾ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put **MY LAWS into their minds**, and **write them on their hearts** (Jeremiah 31:33; Deuteronomy 6:6, “*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart*”; Deuteronomy 11:18), and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

⁽¹¹⁾ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each on his brother, saying, ‘*Know the Lord*,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

⁽¹²⁾ For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.’ (Jeremiah 31:34)

⁽¹³⁾ In speaking of a new . . . **covenant** (*does not exist in the Original Greek*) . . . he makes the first one . . . **wear-out** (*obsolete – Hebrews 1:11, “. . . they will all wear out (obsolete) like a garment.”*). And what is become . . . **wear-out** (*obsolete*) . . . and growing . . . old . . . is ready to vanish away.

Now that we see that the author is comparing the earthly and heavenly priesthoods, and not the Mosaic and New covenants, we can understand what he means in verse 13:

In speaking of a new (**covenant**), he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Now, this insertion of ‘**covenant**’ is not completely dishonest since the context of quoting Jeremiah 31 means it was a reference to the New Covenant. **But why was it left out here?** It seems that by leaving it out, the author of Hebrews was reinforcing that what was in view here was a comparison of ministries, not covenants. Thus, here, as in verse 7, ‘the first’ that was faulty and becoming obsolete is the earthly priestly ministry, and not the Law, nor the Mosaic Covenant, with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. (R.L. Watson, Forgotten Covenant (Port Orchard, WA: Ark House Press, 2021), 242)

Historical context: 1. The priesthood had become corrupt; 2. The book of Hebrew’s was written some 10-years after the destruction of the Temple, and therefore the priesthood was truly fading away; not fully functioning at their full capacity with the Temple having been destroyed some 10-years earlier.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the public sacrifices were completely terminated. However, some of the private sacrifices were, for a short period, still offered on a limited scale. With the possible exception of Gamaliel II, no rabbi is known to have offered any sacrifice after 70 CE. However, the termination of the sacrificial cult was not an inevitable consequence of the destruction of the Temple as shown in the light of past precedent. (Alexander Guttman, “The End of the Sacrificial Jewish Cult” HUCA 38 (1967), 147)

Message of Hebrews 8:13:

- The author of Hebrews is writing to encourage his readers to stay faithful to the Messiah (Hebrews 10:32-34, “³²But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”)
- He is trying to reassure them that, even if the Temple is destroyed and the priesthood can’t function the way it was intended, it’s okay.
- We have a High Priest serving in the heavenly tabernacle! The earthly priesthood is a shadow of the heavenly reality!
- So regardless of what happens with the earthly Temple and priesthood, the Messiah’s heavenly High Priesthood endures forever.
- **The Message of the Church Today is the same, leaders and churches and ministries may fade away, but we are not to put our identity in earthly things, but rather in the Messiah’s Heavenly Priesthood, according to the Order to Melchizedek.**

All these Covenant are “Everlasting”

See Genesis 9:16; 17:3-7, 13, 19; Exodus 31:16; Leviticus 24:82; Samuel 23:5; 1 Chronicles 16:14-18; Psalm 105:8-10

The Torah is not different in the New Covenant; what is different in the New Covenant is the people’s response to the Torah.

“Why do they need a new covenant? The reason is clear. Not because there was something wrong with the Sinai covenant. Simply “because they broke my covenant.” The problem was with the people . . . the covenant hasn’t changed. It involves the same partners and the same law. The difference is that God will enable every Israelite to internalize it. Yahweh said earlier that “*Judah’s sin is engraved with an iron tool . . . on the tablets of their hearts (their failure to be faithful to it),*”

Jeremiah 17:1. Their sin occupies the center of their thinking, feeling, and decision making. When the covenant is renewed, their center of gravity will be the Torah instead: It will be written on their hearts. (Carmen Imes, Bearing God’s name: Why Sinai Still Matters (InterVarsity Press, 2019), 128-129)

The New Covenant is built upon the previous covenants . . . The New Covenant directly reinforced the promises of the Mosaic Covenant.