

# The Covenant in Hebrews 8 & 9

A Monumental Error in Interpretation; the subject here is the Priesthood NOT the New Covenant

By Frank Selch

**8:1** Κεφάλαιον δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις τοιοῦτον ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα, ὃς ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,  
**2** τῶν ἁγίων λειτουργός, καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, ἣν ἔπηξεν ὁ κύριος, καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος·  
**3** πᾶς γὰρ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς τὸ προσφέρειν δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας καθίσταται· ὅθεν ἀναγκαῖον ἔχειν τι καὶ τοῦτον ὃ προσενέγκῃ.  
**4** Εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν ἐπὶ γῆς, οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεὺς, ὄντων τῶν ἱερέων τῶν προσφερόντων κατὰ τὸν νόμον τὰ δῶρα,  
**5** οἵτινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων, καθὼς κεχηρμάτισται Μωϋσῆς μέλλων ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν σκηνήν, Ὅρα, γὰρ φησὶν, ποιήσεις πάντα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τὸν δειχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει.  
**6** Νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσῳ καὶ κρείττονος ἐστὶν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται.

**7** Εἰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ἐκείνη ἦν ἄμεμπτος, οὐκ ἂν δευτέρας ἐζητεῖτο τόπος.  
**8** Μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτοῖς λέγει, Ἰδοὺ, ἡμέραι ἔρχονται, λέγει κύριος, καὶ συντελέσω ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰουδα διαθήκην καινήν·  
**9** οὐ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην ἣν ἐποίησα τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου· ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου, καὶ γὰρ ἡμέλησα αὐτῶν, λέγει κύριος.  
**10** Ὅτι αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη ἦν διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκείνας, λέγει κύριος, διδοὺς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτούς· καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν.  
**11** Καὶ οὐ μὴ διδάξωσιν ἕκαστος τὸν πολίτην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, λέγων, Γνωθὶ τὸν κύριον· ὅτι πάντες εἰδήσουσίν με, ἀπὸ μικροῦ αὐτῶν ἕως μεγάλου αὐτῶν.

**12** Ὅτι ἴλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν, καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι.

**13** Ἐν τῷ λέγειν, Καινήν, πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην. Τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον, ἐγγυὲς ἀφανισμοῦ.

**9:1** Εἶχεν μὲν οὖν καὶ ἡ πρώτη δικαιώματα λατρείας, τό τε ἅγιον κοσμικόν.

**8:1** But it is a main point by those saying we have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty of the heavens.

**2** who is a servant/minister of the Holy Place and of the true tabernacle, which YHWH establishes, not man.

**3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices wherefore it is necessary to have which is also what he may bring.

**4** If therefore this is the practice on earth, and it is not a priest, being the one who offers according to law/torah the gifts.

**5** Anyone who does so is an example, even a shadow serving the heavenly sanctuary just as Moses being admonished and divinely instructed, “See,” he declares, “you do according to the pattern being shown to you on the mountain”, has worked to accomplish the tabernacle

**6** But now a more excellent service/ministry has come to pass. How much more prominent, higher in rank, preferable or better is a Covenant mediator who on better promises has enacted Torah.

**7** For if the first one (?) was blameless, or without fault, there was no need for a second to seek a place.

**8** for finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, a day is coming, says YHWH and I will accomplish upon the house of Israel and upon the house of Judah a new Covenant –

**9** not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took hold of their hand when I led them out of Egypt, because they did not abide in my covenant and I abandoned them, says YHWH.

**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 in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

**11** None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

**12** For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

**13** by saying *New/Unprecedented* He declares old the first, which by declaring also grows old and is in the process of vanishing away.

**9:1** Therefore by the first (?) He has also established a righteousness through laws, by sacred services - both holy

**The context of this segment is the priesthood and mediation – not the Covenants.**

and earthly.

**12:2** ἀφορῶντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν, ὃς, ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς, ὑπέμεινεν σταυρόν, αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας, ἐν δεξιᾷ τε τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ κεκάθικεν.<sup>1</sup>

**12:2** ...fixing our eyes onto the example/prince and perfecter of faith, Jesus, who instead of taking hold of the joy destined (for) him, not only despised shame and endured crucifixion; but (now) also has sat down in a place of authority at the throne of God (Ps.110:1; Dan.7:13-27)

---

<sup>1</sup> Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) (574). United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

# The Covenant in Hebrews 8 & 9

A Monumental Error in Interpretation; the subject here is the Priesthood NOT the New Covenant

By Frank Selch

---

The focal point of this commentary is the New Covenant. It is located in a very substantial discussion on sacrifice and mediation, which ranges from 6:1 to the end of chapter ten and a further reflection on it in 12:2 – although the word *covenant* is not mentioned in this verse. The foundation is laid by showing that the sacrifice of Jesus cannot be valued – it is simply priceless. To reject it is doom for him who does so (6:4-8). The seal on the discussion is in 12:2, which highlights the faith of this High Priest being juxtaposed with all the heroes of faith from Abel onwards.

The original (!) author of the text is highly particular in his explanation and comparison of the excellence of the priesthood of Melchizedek with that of Jesus (6:20 ff.). It is important for him to highlight the connection of the extraordinary nature of the Melchizedek priesthood with the New Covenant priesthood of the risen and ascended Messiah – for him, the two are intricately intertwined (v.1-3). However, it is not a priesthood established by Torah, i.e. Law, but by oath (6:16-18; 7:20-22). The New Covenant needs a different type of priesthood, one which offers sacrifices of obedience that have been tested to the point of shedding blood.

This focus on the significance of the New High Priest begins in chapter 6:13 and continues through to chapter 10— receiving a final seal in 12:2. Therefore, when the translators arbitrarily insert the word *covenant* in 8:7 and 13; as well as in 9:1, it is entirely out of context— it is an unwarranted and misleading distortion of the topic. It is especially significant, since the word *Covenant* (*διαθηκη*) does not appear in ANY of the Greek texts, nor in the Latin Vulgate from which those verses are translated. Therefore, if an insertion is warranted, in order to improve the clarity of the text, it ought to be the word *priesthood*, since it is the topic – not only of this section, but of more than five chapters. The insertion of 'Covenant' at those points totally deflects the reader from the real issue and introduces a very serious theological problem, viz. the replacement of Israel by the Christian Church. If we then go the last verse in our study, viz.12:2 a further, and extremely serious issue is introduced, namely the total abrogation of the significance of Abraham's faith. As the translation stands in English, it must appear that faith originated with Jesus if we accept the word commonly used here, viz *author*. The word for author is sometimes also rendered *originator*. This creates a significant conundrum since Paul points to the Abrahamic Covenant as the basis of the New Covenant and the patriarch is upheld as the model of faith throughout the New Testament. Furthermore, the God of Israel is identified as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **If the translation of 12:2 is allowed to stand in its current form, then there is no question that the New Testament actually endorses the view that the Christian faith reigns supreme over everything else – including the faith of Abraham.**

Let us firstly deal with the word Covenant. Whilst the author of *Hebrews* is entitled to introduce as many issues as he chooses, it is surprising that he would not have made any attempt at resolving the problem of the replacing the Mosaic Covenant. There should be no doubt that it would have created a massive storm among Jewish followers of Jesus. History records that this claim did arise in the early days among some of the Gentiles followers of Jesus. Consequently, the Jewish sages gathered at Jamnia to devise strategies to counter that problem and many subsequent anathemas by Rabbis have their roots in the distortions emphasized here. But that was a long time before content of the NT was formed into a formal canon.

Surely, for the author of *Hebrews* to claim the abrogation of the Sinaitic Covenant would warrant a more in-depth commentary than just a few invented, 'throw-away lines'! What renders these insertions particularly

## The context of this segment is the priesthood and mediation – not the Covenants.

serious, is the fact, that they make Jesus responsible for abolishing the Mosaic Covenant, which is the usual target of commentators and expositors. Since most Jewish people, as well as the vast majority of Christians, do not read Greek, they are not able to verify, or disprove the text in the vernacular and are thus bound to accept whatever translation they choose to trust as Scripture.

8:7 The word covenant is inserted here in all the prominent vernacular versions to modify the word *first* and then introduces this notion of replacement, yet **it does not exist** in this verse in any of the published Greek texts or the Vulgate. We have the lead-word '*first*' linked with Covenant, which could never apply to the Mosaic Covenant, since it was NOT the first Covenant the Most High made with the Children of Israel. Although the Noahic Covenant is – strictly speaking - the first covenant the Creator made with the human race, the Abramic Covenant is the first '*redemptive*' covenant and definitely the FIRST with the Children of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Is it possible that either the author or (a later) editor was ignorant of the various Covenants the almighty made part from Sinai?

Furthermore, if we take the words of Jesus into consideration, in relation to the Commandments, a massive conflict results that cannot be brushed aside with clever theological wordage. Jesus points out that "*not one word, yodh or tittle*" will pass away from the Torah. If this is so, then the author of Hebrews is blatantly contradicting Jesus if the established translations are accepted as correct.

A careful study of the available texts shows that all translators followed the same pattern set by the Authorized KJV by inserting the word Covenant, where it actually means *priesthood*. It is the first priesthood, with whom the Most High found fault and it must be understood that the writer of Hebrews is not merely looking at the written Torah, but at the outworking of the Oral Law, which had been in force since the Babylonian Exile and even strengthened after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 and of Jerusalem in 135 C.E. Even in the writings of Paul, the Greek word *nomos* (commonly rendered as law) needs to be translated in several places as **Oral Law** or **Traditions of the Fathers** if one is to arrive at a truthful interpretation.

The subject of the discussion in this section of Hebrews is therefore a comparison of a now heavenly priesthood with a corrupt and faulty, earthly one. The section 8:3-6 is a parenthesis, which is answered in v.7; viz. '*if the first, (or earthly priesthood), was without fault, there would be no point in establishing a heavenly one!*' How could anyone say that the Commandments were faulty, or that they would vanish away, when they contain the moral code for the entire human race? Nor can we say that the vanishing pertains only to a part of the Covenant, because, if we persist in using the term - since nothing else is specified by the translators – it is a blanket declaration that the *first covenant* is faulty and vanishing away! The logic of these words is inconsistent, because if we allow them to stand we are actually declaring a cessation of the 'Abramic' Covenant, which Paul regards as the foundation of the New Covenant (c/f. 6:13-18) – not *just* Sinai!

**8:6** is a difficult verse for the Greek-thinker as he is tempted to focus now on the New Covenant rather than what has gone before. However, it is important to remember that a Covenant is only the facilitator; it is the legal framework in which everything happens. The author has already established that the priesthood of Jesus is like that of Melchizedek, which is also a better ministry just as the New Covenant is based on greater (rather than better!) promises. The concept, or institution of a mediatorial priesthood is as much part of the new Covenant, as it is part of the Mosaic Covenant. The promises are, that there is

---

<sup>2</sup> Dispensationalist, and others, claim the existence of earlier Covenants, e.g. Adamic and Edenic Covenants, but their theory is not sustained by Biblical evidence since the term Covenant does not occur in the Hebrew text until Gen 6:18, besides the fact that Biblical Covenants ALWAYS involve the shedding of blood. The killing of animals for Adam & Eve's clothing does not constitute a Covenant since there are neither conditions nor promises attached.

## The context of this segment is the priesthood and mediation – not the Covenants.

now no more need for animals to be sacrificed to atone for human sin and that there is also now an open door into the Commonwealth of Israel for Gentiles – into a reborn Israel, the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> It is the old priesthood that is regarded by the writer *to be vanishing away*— not the whole Mosaic Covenant.

**8:7** Based on the Greek text, the word *πρωτος* - first, must be the qualifier for *λειτουργίας* (service or ministry), i.e. the priesthood and NOT for covenant. In v.6 as the word *διαθήκη* – covenant, is part of a parenthesis, viz. *'How much more prominent, higher in rank, preferable or better is a mediator of a covenant on better, or greater, promises having been ordained to be Torah.'* The word *covenant* in the English translations does not exist in this verse in any of the Greek texts nor in the Latin Vulgate and its insertion opens a Pandora's box of problems as outlined elsewhere.

**8:8** *'...finding fault with **them**'* removes the ambiguity, since this statement, being in the plural demands a plural subject, which is the succession of high priests, or the priesthood per se – not Covenant, which is singular!

**8:13** *'In that He says new, He has made the first (priesthood) obsolete...'* The letter must have been written prior to the destruction of the temple due its many references to sacrifices which are useless since they cannot remove sin. The word *'first'*, therefore, cannot be a reference to the written Torah of Sinai, due to the implication of suggesting that the Commandments are growing obsolete and *'are ready to vanish away...'* Therefore, the only other possibility are portions of the Oral Law, or traditions, which had also been under frequent attack by Jesus during his lifetime on earth.

**9:1** *'Therefore, even the first (priesthood) had divine services that were established by Torah to serve The Sacred and the earthly.* The text continues comparing the old priesthood with its animal sacrifices that could not remove sin and guilt. Not one more word is said, in the remainder of the Epistle, concerning the abolition of any previous Covenant.

For this reason we MUST draw the conclusion that the insertion of Covenant in the places mentioned above is an (extremely serious) error by the translators. The Covenant of Sinai is of such significance to the entire human race, not just Israel, that its abrogation would surely deserve more explanation than the pure assumption applied by the translators of ALL versions. If the translators had suggested that the death of Jesus merely signaled the end of the Levitical priesthood, with all of its attendant services, it would still be acceptable— for it refers only to a portion of the Sinaitic Covenant; and could therefore be treated as an amendment without too much difficulty. Rabbinic Judaism found itself confronted with precisely THAT issue when the temple was destroyed. How would they now obtain atonement on Yom Kippur for the nation? An acceptable way to amend the ceremonial law had to be found— which was forgiveness through repentance. However, the clear statement, in ALL major English translations of the New Testament, is made that the New Covenant has put an end to the First Covenant, which most understand (or at least assume) **to be the Mosaic Covenant or Torah!**

**12:2** this verse too presents us with a considerable conflict. According to all standard translations we find here the phrase *'author and perfecter of faith'*.<sup>4</sup> This expression is supported by the Latin Vulgate and one would assume that it is therefore correct. However! What the translators did not take into account is the fact that the New Covenant is based on the faith of Abraham who is called a friend of God— because of his faith. Abraham did not hesitate to offer his only begotten son as a burnt offering at God's command and it was counted unto him for righteousness evermore. What the translators are saying that there was no faith until Jesus, thus denying Abraham's example for faith for all humanity and basis for all the

---

<sup>3</sup> See my article on obedience

<sup>4</sup> All major translations, except the NASB (1995 Update) render this text as *'perfecter of our faith'* – thus implying a new work of God initiated in and through Jesus.

**The context of this segment is the priesthood and mediation – not the Covenants.**

promises to Israel. Although the Vulgate has fixed the term author, it is the Greek text which undergirds the Latin text and must therefore be regarded as a higher authority. The Greek offers several possibilities for translation. I believe that acceptable renderings could be *prince of faith* or *leader in faith*, for it is certain that Jesus is the only human being who ever laid down his life in the hope of receiving it back because of his obedience to God. Although **Jesus is NOT the author of faith**, his faith in the promise of his father to raise him from the dead, makes him truly a prince of faith, which he perfected through his obedience unto his own death.

**A final thought:**

The issue outlined in this brief commentary is extremely serious and lies chiefly in this:

- 1) What faces us here is a falsification of the most serious kind, **as it has misled** and is misleading countless numbers of people who read that text, into believing that the Christian message here is true and that it has superseded the Covenant of Sinai. It is an extremely serious accusation to make against the Almighty, that He, the All Knowing One, was incapable of making a Covenant with Israel that was free from faults. The text, however, clearly states that **He found fault with the priests** (viz. *them*)!
- 2) The seriousness of the statement concerning the New Covenant is underscored by the fact that it is made in the NT of the Bible – not just in a Commentary. The authority it carries through this is enormous!
- 3) The Bible is routinely challenged concerning its veracity by people from all walks of life and religious back-ground; and here we are faced with deliberate falsifications and mistranslations in the NT.
- 4) How much contempt for the Jewish people has been bred by these passages over their reliance on the Covenant the Most High made with Moses as their salvation. To this day, the faith of the Jewish People is in the Covenant with Abraham to keep them – NOT the Mosaic Law; the observance of the latter to varying degrees is seen as an obligation, out of gratitude and as a sacred duty. Even Jesus used the Commandments as a means of bringing conviction to the sinner (c/f. Lk.18:18-24).

If I am correct with my claims, then the consequences are immeasurable.

Copyright 2007