

GOD'S OLD AND NEW COVENANTS**Hebrews 8:1–10:25; 13:20-21**

Memory Verse: *But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12 ESV).*

Background Helps:

This next to the last lesson in our curriculum of “God’s Covenant Story” brings us to one of the most important passages in the Bible on this major theme of “covenant.” In the letter to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit contrasts the old covenant (given at Mt. Sinai through Moses) and the new covenant (promised by the Old Testament prophets and established by Christ in the New Testament). In fact, in Hebrews 8:8-12 the writer quotes the promise of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31:31-34, the longest single Old Testament quotation found anywhere in the New Testament.

It appears that Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians (in Italy? 13:24) who, under the pressure of persecution, were being tempted to fall back into Judaism (10:32-39). He exhorts them to remain true to Christ, who is the fulfillment of the old covenant and the Mediator of a new and better covenant. Don’t revert to the old covenant! Reference is made to these two covenants throughout our readings from Hebrews 8:1–10:25, as well as in 7:22, 10:29, 12:24, and 13:20.

Hebrews 8:12 (quoting Jeremiah 31:34) indicates that the other promises of the new covenant (Heb. 8:10-11) are based on the promise of God’s removal of our sins. This forgiveness is based on the sacrifice of Christ. Throughout Hebrews 9 and 10, the author goes to great lengths to show us how the sacrifice of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, has dealt with our sins once-for-all and has ended the sacrificial system of the old covenant. See our memory verse, Hebrews 10:12.

Having shown the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice, the writer, at the key turning point of the epistle, delivers three powerful exhortations: (1) “Let us draw near [to God] in full assurance of faith” (v. 22); (2) “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (v. 23); and (3) “let us . . . stir up one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24). Notice the great triad of virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Lesson Helps:

A possible lesson aim: My students will learn about the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant (because of the sacrifice of Christ), so that they will practice a life of faith, hope, and love.

This lesson will give opportunity for teachers to briefly review (1) the Old Testament sacrificial system and (2) the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Here is where you can bring story elements into your lesson (especially for children).

Why not draw a two-column table on the board and, making your way down through the assigned chapters in Hebrews, contrast the old and new covenants? For example:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Earthly tabernacle	Heavenly tabernacle
Many priests	One priest
Many sacrifices	One sacrifice
Etc. (you complete the table)	

Finish your lesson with a look at Hebrews 10:19-25, and (just as the author does) exhort your students to draw near to God in faith, hold fast to their confession of hope, and stir one another up to love and good deeds.

Home Assignment:

 Read Hebrews 12:18-29; Revelation 19:11–22:5.

 Memorize Hebrews 112:28 ESV.