

Beyond the Shadows

When I presented this message, I started off standing behind our large rear projection screen so that all the congregation could see was my shadow. They could see me in a certain sense. They could see that someone was back there. They could see that it was a tall adult with a head and two arms and two legs. They could understand a little bit about me by observing my shadow.

But there is so much they could not see by just looking at my shadow. They could not see my color, or age, how I comb my hair, or whether I was smiling or frowning. Actually, you are very limited when all you see is a shadow.

When I moved out from behind the screen and the congregation was able to move beyond the shadows and see the real thing, communication took on a whole new dimension.

In this chapter we will consider what it means theologically to move beyond the shadows to the real thing.

As we have seen in our study thus far, the old covenant was a covenant based on law. The law was a tutor or teacher to lead us to Christ. It was an incomplete revelation of who God is. It pointed forward to Jesus - God's final word; his complete and best revelation; "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves." ([Hebrews 10:1](#))

"...a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." ([Colossians 2:17](#))

All that was written in the law and the prophets pointed forward to Jesus. He is the reality or substance to which all the shadows pointed. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus. I'd rather have Jesus than Moses! How about you? I'd rather have the reality than the shadow!

When the reality comes we don't need the shadow that pointed to it any more. That's what the writer to the Hebrews clearly says:

"By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." ([Hebrews 8:13](#))

The new covenant makes the old one obsolete. The new covenant is a better covenant, based on better promises. The shadows have lost their significance now that the reality has arrived. After making that pronouncement in [Hebrews 8:13](#), the writer to the Hebrews goes on to contrast the old and new covenants in [Hebrews chapter nine](#).

"Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant." ([Hebrews 9:1-4](#))

Here is a short description of the sanctuary, which was an integral part of the old covenant. Every aspect of the sanctuary and its services pointed forward to Jesus. He was represented by more than just the lamb on the altar:

- He was the lamp stand, the light of the world.
- He was the consecrated bread, the bread of life.
- He was the mediator between God and man represented by the priests and by the altar of incense.
- And he is the fulfillment of the law (which was kept in the ark).

The old covenant was written on stone tablets ("stone tablets of the covenant"). The new covenant is written on the minds of believers in Christ. The old covenant law was placed inside the ark within the temple. The new covenant law is placed inside our hearts within the temple of our bodies where the Holy Spirit dwells.

This passage in Hebrews goes on detailing the old covenant services and the ministry of the priests and then says:

"This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-- external regulations applying until the time of the new order." ([Hebrews 9:9-10](#))

Notice the word "until." The ceremonies and rituals of the old covenant were illustrations of what was coming in Jesus and they applied **until** the time of the new order.

We have seen that word "until" before in our covenant studies.

*"What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions **until** the Seed to whom the promise referred had come." ([Galatians 3:19](#))*

*"I tell you the truth, **until** heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law **until** everything is accomplished." ([Matthew 5:18](#))*

There was a definite "until" feature in the old covenant. Look at these texts side by side:

- "... the law... was added... **until** the Seed...had come." ([Galatians 3:19](#))

- "... not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law **until** everything is accomplished." ([Matthew 5:18](#))
- "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. ...external regulations applying **until** the time of the new order." ([Hebrews 10:1; 9:10](#))

Do you see a pattern here? The law applied **until** Christ came and fulfilled it and established a new covenant. After that it was "set aside." (Not the moral principles, of course - but the law as a covenant and means of righteousness was "set aside"). The substance had come; there was no need for the shadow. Notice how the writer to the Hebrews uses this phrase "set aside" to describe the old covenant now that the new has come:

"The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God... Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." ([Hebrews 7:18-19,22](#))

"Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second." ([Hebrews 10:9](#))

You can't live in the old covenant and the new at the same time. Jesus found it necessary to set aside the old in order to establish the new. And the new is far superior. In the new covenant we have Jesus instead of shadows. "Jesus has become the guarantee of a **better** covenant."

The word "better" is used over and over in the book of Hebrews. I think it is one of the writer's favorite words. The book of Hebrews was written to help Jewish Christians move into the new covenant. (It's called "Hebrews" because it was written to Hebrews, Jewish Christians).

The writer to the Hebrews recognized that the people he was writing to loved the old covenant and its services and rituals. It was deeply ingrained in their culture. Therefore he is very sensitive in his word choice. He repeatedly uses the word "better" to show how, even though the old covenant was good, the new covenant is **better!**

The new covenant is Jesus. Therefore it:

- Is a better revelation of God ([Hebrews 1:1-3](#))
- Is better than the angels ([Hebrews 1:3-14](#))
- Is worthy of greater honor than Moses ([Hebrews 3:3](#))
- Gives a better hope ([Hebrews 7:19](#))
- Has a better guarantee in Christ ([Hebrews 7:22](#))
- Has a superior ministry ([Hebrews 8:6](#))
- Has a better mediator in Christ ([Hebrews 8:6](#))
- Is founded on better promises ([Hebrews 8:6](#))
- Purifies by better sacrifices ([Hebrews 9:23](#))

- Promises a better country ([Hebrews 11:16](#))
- Promises a better resurrection ([Hebrews 11:35](#))
- Promises a better future ([Hebrews 11:40](#))
- Speaks with better blood ([Hebrews 12:24](#))

Jesus is God's final word -- better than anything that had come before. He is the reality to which all the shadows point. The appeal of the New Testament is for Christians to move beyond the shadows to be New Covenant Christians who embrace Christ alone as the basis of their security and right standing with God.

Now in order to fully appreciate the new covenant, let's outline some further contrasts and comparisons between the two covenants.

First, let's consider who the **covenant partners** were in each of the covenants.

In the old covenant the covenant partners were God and the people of Israel. God made promises to bless the Israelites if they were obedient and the people responded by promising to obey:

"Then [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.'"
([Exodus 24:7](#))

In the new covenant the covenant partners are the Father and Jesus. Jesus came and obeyed his father perfectly. Repeatedly he said things like this:

"My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
([John 4:34](#))

"I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." ([John 5:30](#))

"I have obeyed my Father's commands." ([John 15:10](#))

In a certain sense, Jesus was the new Israel because he came to obey where Israel had failed. As you read through the New Testament you will notice parallels in the life of Jesus with the experiences of Israel because Jesus came as the new and better covenant.

For example, Israel as a nation was called by God out of Egypt. After Jesus was born, his parents fled with him to Egypt to escape the evil Herod. This was for a purpose, according to Matthew:

"...And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" ([Matthew 2:15](#))

Numerous parallels could be shown.

Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea, then they entered the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus passed through the waters of baptism, then he immediately entered the wilderness for 40 days.

Moses delivered the law from a mountain. Jesus went on a mountain and presented a restatement of the law ([Matthew 5](#)). The Law had six major commandments dealing with relationships on the human level. Six times Jesus said: "You have heard, but I say" as he showed his authority over the old covenant and the superiority of his law of love.

Manna was given to the Israelites in the wilderness when they were without food. Jesus fed the 5,000 when they were without food and then told them that he was the heavenly bread, the manna that had come down from God ([John 6](#)).

In [John 8](#) a woman was brought to Jesus who had been caught in adultery. The accusers said: "The Law of Moses commanded us to stone her... what do you say?" How did Jesus respond? Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground. The only previous record of God writing with his finger was when he gave the law of the old covenant. Jesus wrote with his finger to show that he has all authority. People no longer need to look to Sinai for guidance, but to Him!

Moses took the Israelites toward the Promised Land, but he couldn't lead them in. Joshua did. The law cannot lead us into the Promised Land of eternal life - only Jesus can. (Joshua is the Hebrew form of Jesus).

There are so many parallels.

The New Testament writers saw Jesus passing over the history of Israel. He was faithful where Israel had been unfaithful. He became the faithful covenant partner of the new and better covenant.

Read this verse again:

"Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second." ([Hebrews 10:9](#))

In this verse, the Son says to the Father that he has come to do his will. They are the covenant partners in the new covenant. And because of this new basis of agreement, "He sets aside the first to establish the second."

That is why the new covenant is so glorious. New Covenant Christians rest in the security of Christ's perfect obedience. When we accept his offer and become his people - the new Israel of God ([Galatians 6:16](#)) - we participate by faith in what he has already accomplished for us. We stand perfect in him. He is a faithful covenant-keeper and --

"By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." ([Hebrews 10:14](#))

We are going to build a chart as we progress through this study.

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Covenant Partners	

God and Israel

The Father and Jesus

Next, let's consider the **words of the covenant** in the old and new covenant:

In the old covenant the words of the covenant were clearly the Ten Commandments.

"And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments." ([Exodus 34:28](#))

The basic words of the new covenant are repeated over and over throughout the New Testament - Love each other as Christ loved you. Here is how Jesus said it:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." ([John 13:34,35](#))

The concept of loving each other was not new. The old covenant contained that command. The part that was new was "as I have loved you." Now people have the model of what love is - in Jesus, God's best and final revelation. The moral principles of the old law remain but they are far exceeded in the new and full revelation of Jesus.

In the old covenant the people were set apart and distinct by how they ate, dressed, worshipped, etc. In the new covenant how are the people set apart and distinct? By how they love!

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Words of the Covenant	
Ten Commandments	Love as Christ Loved

What about the **book of the covenant**?

In the old covenant there was an expanded version of the basic Ten Commandments, which was known as the book of the law or the book of the covenant.

"Moses...told the people all the Lord's words and laws... then wrote down everything... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people..." ([Exodus 24:3,4,7](#))

The book of the covenant is the writings of Moses found in Exodus through Deuteronomy. It was also called the "book of the law."

In addition to expanding and applying the Ten Commandments, the Levitical Law had two other purposes:

- First, it had a symbolic purpose. The stipulations regulating offerings and sacrifices, Tabernacle worship and holy days, all consisted of types and symbols that pointed prophetically to the coming Messiah.

- Second, the law had a legislative purpose. It gave ancient Israel a government and constitution so she could survive as a distinct civilization and people. It was important for Israel to survive as a nation because through her God would send the Messiah to bless the world according to his promises given to Abraham.

Both of these purposes were fulfilled. The prophesied Messiah did come and accomplished his mission of redemption. Every type and symbol was fulfilled in him. And Israel did survive, just as God said she would, even in the face of great adversity.

Just as the old covenant had both the words of the covenant and the book of the covenant, so the new covenant has more than just the basic words or command -- to love each other as Christ loved us.

We have the Gospels, which demonstrate how Jesus loved, showing him in action; and the Epistles, the rest of the New Testament, which interpret the work of Christ and apply the law of Christ.

So the *New Testament* is the book of the covenant for new covenant Christians. That doesn't mean that the Old Testament is no longer valuable, it just means that the New Testament is a fuller revelation in the light of the cross. In fact "New Testament" means new will or new covenant. Its very name indicates that it is the book of the new covenant!

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Book of the Covenant	
Exodus to Deuteronomy	Gospels and Epistles

We turn now to the **signs** of the covenants. Every covenant has a sign. In ancient times the kings (or suzerains) often made covenants or treaties with their vassals.

In the middle of this century, George Mendenhall published some famous research showing how archaeological discoveries of documents from the ancient Hittite nation contained "suzerainty treaties" which followed a standard structure of other Near Eastern nations, including the Mosaic covenant found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is interesting to see the structural parallels between the law of the old covenant and the suzerainty treaties of that time. God has always gone to great lengths to meet people right where they are and communicate in a way that they can understand.

The structure of the ancient covenant treaties can be seen in the covenant given at Sinai.

Preamble

"I am the Lord your God..." ([Exodus 20:2](#))

Historical Prologue

"I... brought you out of the land of Egypt..." ([Exodus 20:2](#))

Stipulations and Sanctions

The Decalogue and all the expanded laws were given and prescribed punishments for disobedience. Blessing and curses were promised, depending on obedience or disobedience ([Deuteronomy 28](#)).

Oaths and Vows

It was necessary for there to be a ceremony of public commitment to the treaty with the swearing of oaths and vows. This happened as God and the people made promises at Sinai ([Exodus 24:3,7](#)).

Ratification

Covenants in the ancient world were made by a "cutting rite." Animals were sacrificed and blood was shed. This happened in connection with the covenants made with Noah, Abraham and Moses ([Genesis 8:20,21](#); [15:9-18](#); [Exodus 24:5-8](#); [Hebrews 9:18-22](#)).

Deposit

When the covenant was complete, copies of the Hittite suzerainty treaties were deposited in a public place for safekeeping. So God instructed Israel to place the tablets of stone in the Ark of the Covenant and keep it in the Tabernacle and later the Temple ([Exodus 40:1-3](#)).

Signs

The ancient covenants had signs and seals. The king's seal was stamped on the law and sometimes the people had to wear a certain sign (a tattoo or necklace) or observe certain rituals or celebrations as a sign of loyalty to the covenant.

And so it is with God's covenants; all his covenants contain a sign. In the everlasting covenant that God made with Noah and all the earth, the sign of his faithfulness was the RAINBOW.

"I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." ([Genesis 9:13](#))

When God made a covenant with Abraham, the sign of the covenant was circumcision.

"You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you." ([Genesis 17:11](#))

This sign of circumcision was extended into the Sinai covenant. It became regarded as the essential *entrance sign* into the covenant. A Jewish male became an official member of the covenant people only after he was circumcised as a rite of entrance. If a convert came into Judaism, he had to be circumcised. After circumcision, all of the laws of the covenant then were in force on the one who had been initiated.

That's the reason that circumcision became such a big debate among the early Christians. They were trying to figure out how much, if any, of the old covenant applied to the new Gentile Christians who were joining the church.

Some said that everything was still important; others said only parts of the old covenant were still valid; and still others said that it was all fulfilled in Christ and no longer binding.

So there was a lot of debate. It zeroed in on circumcision, because as Paul pointed out:

"Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law." (Galatians 5:3)

That was commonly understood. Circumcision was the entrance sign into the old covenant. If it was still valid, then the entire covenant was in force. If it was no longer necessary, then neither was the covenant of which it was the entry sign.

That's what was going on when the church met for the Jerusalem Council in [Acts 15](#):

"Some men... were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them." (Acts 15:1,2)

The early church had to face this issue head on. Is salvation by grace alone, or grace plus works? Are Christians under the old covenant as well as the new? So the leaders got together in Jerusalem to seek the Lord and come to an understanding:

"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.'" (Acts 15:5)

Notice that the issue was **not** just circumcision. Circumcision was just the entry sign that brought a person into the covenant, which required obedience to all of the law of Moses. That is why they debated whether or not the new converts must "be circumcised **and** required to obey the law of Moses."

The church leaders were led by the Holy Spirit to determine that circumcision and the law of Moses was no longer necessary in the new covenant. As a spokesman for the group, Peter spoke out in support of the new Gentile converts:

"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." (Acts 15:10,11)

Paul wrote much of the book of Galatians to address those who were trying to tack the old covenant onto the new. Concerning those who were insisting that circumcision still be practiced, Paul said:

"As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Galatians 5:12)

In case you didn't get the point, here is a straightforward translation of the Greek: **"Don't stop there, cut the whole thing off!"** The reason Paul used such strong language is that he didn't want people to be bound and enslaved by the old covenant!

The New Testament goes on to show that there is another entrance sign in the new covenant that has taken the place of circumcision. What is it? **Baptism**.

Baptism is the new entry sign or ceremony of the new covenant. Jesus told his disciples:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..." ([Matthew 28:19,20](#))

In the old covenant the people were first circumcised, and then they were taught the law with ongoing instruction. In the new covenant, baptism takes the place of circumcision as the entry sign and then believers are to be taught the teachings of Christ.

Notice how clearly this transference from circumcision to baptism in the new covenant is taught in [Colossians 2:11,12](#):

"In him you were also circumcised, in putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism..." ([Colossians 2:11,12](#))

Can you see clearly how baptism replaces circumcision in the new covenant as the entrance sign?

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Entrance Sign	
Circumcision	Baptism

Let's look at one more comparison. Not only was there a one time entrance sign into the old covenant, there was an ongoing **remembrance sign** of the old covenant as well. What was it? The **Sabbath**.

The very last words that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai, after giving him the Ten Commandments and all the other expanded laws, were these:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for generations to come... anyone who desecrates it must be put to death... whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death.'" ([Exodus 31:12-15](#))

Why would God give such a severe penalty for desecrating the Sabbath? The Sabbath was the ongoing remembrance sign of the covenant. To forget the Sabbath was to forget the covenant. To break the Sabbath was to break the covenant. It was the remembrance sign. In fact, the Sabbath was a visible expression of the covenant and therefore it was the summation of the covenant. That's why it is called a covenant.

"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites..." (Exodus 31:16,17)

Because the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant, God closed up his giving of the whole law with those words. The very next verse says:

"When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." (Exodus 31:18)

Because the Sabbath was the remembrance sign of the covenant, throughout the Old Testament keeping the Sabbath is equated with faithfulness to the covenant and desecrating the Sabbath is equated with unfaithfulness to the covenant.

God said:

"All who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain..." (Isaiah 56:6,7)

Notice that keeping the Sabbath is evidence of holding fast to the covenant. The opposite is true as well.

"Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy. Yet the people of Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws-- although the man who obeys them will live by them-- and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and destroy them in the desert." (Ezekiel 20:10-13)

Because the Sabbath was the remembrance sign of the covenant, desecrating the Sabbath was equated with unfaithfulness to the whole law of the covenant.

So what is the new covenant remembrance sign? What is the continuing repeatable sign that the New Testament tells us to do in remembrance? The **Lord's Supper**.

"[Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:19,20)

" 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" (1 Corinthians 11:24,25)

Those verses clearly indicate that the remembrance sign or ceremony of the new covenant is The Lord's Supper.

Let me summarize what we have studied with the chart we have developed systematically through this study:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Covenant Partners	
God and Israel	The Father and Jesus
Words of the Covenant	
Ten Commandments	Love as Christ loved
Book of the covenant	
Exodus to Deuteronomy	Gospels and Epistles
Entrance Sign	
Circumcision	Baptism
Remembrance Sign	
Sabbath	The Lord's Supper

If you are reading this and you come from a sabbatarian background, no doubt some of you are wrestling right now with what this study means in regard to Sabbath worship.

Please hear me. It is okay to worship on Sabbath. But don't take something which was a sign of the old covenant and make it a salvation issue or point of contention or division with other Christians. The New Testament clearly forbids that.

Since different people had different convictions about this subject even in the early church, the New Testament writers continually appeal to people of various persuasions to not judge each other.

"One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind... stop passing judgment on one another." ([Romans 14:5,13](#))

In Colossians, in the same passage where Paul indicates that circumcision has been replaced with baptism as the entrance sign of the new covenant, and goes on to say that the written code, with its regulations, was nailed to the cross, he then says:

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." ([Colossians 2:16,17](#))

This order of annual, monthly, and weekly observances ("a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day") is repeated over and over in Scripture. This text is clearly talking about the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath (see [Hosea 2:11](#), [1 Chronicles 23:31](#), etc.)

Since different Christians come to different conclusions on the importance of the Sabbath and other old covenant observances, the apostle Paul said do not judge. Whatever view you take, make sure that you embrace the reality found in Christ and do not fix your eyes on the shadows.

We turn now to a study of the how the Sabbath takes on new meaning in the new covenant. In the covenant Jesus does not take away the underlying principle of the Sabbath. Instead, he fulfills it and makes it *better!*

[New Covenant Christians](#)

Next: [Resting in Christ's Finished Work](#)