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Walking Through Persecution

There is only one way to heaven and only one way to the Father, which is through salvation in Jesus Christ. That's a simple message that we can understand, but that wasn't always the case. Before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God had established a pathway to know Him, but it was only for the Jewish people and not for the rest of the world. God needed them to help bring Jesus so that the savior could be glorified and then create a pathway for the entire world to be born again into the Father. To help Him, there was a covenant created between the Jewish people and God the Father. We call this the Old Testament, and it was in place only for the time it took to legally bring Jesus and have Him become the Lamb of God.

Once He was glorified, the Old Covenant was no longer necessary and no longer gave anyone access to the Father. We can read in Hebrews 8:13, *"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."* Once Jesus was glorified, the Old Covenant's sole purpose was now complete, and it became obsolete. The word obsolete means that it has fulfilled its purpose and is now no longer useful. This does not mean that the Old Testament isn't powerful or isn't the Word of God, but only that it no longer is a pathway into God.

There is a new pathway, and it is the only way to God, and that is salvation through Jesus. God the Father created a New Covenant between Him and Jesus, and it was sealed once and for all by the blood of the Lamb of God. We do not have a covenant with God, but we are born into His Family because of it. All of this information is fairly common to us now, but to the new converts who found salvation out of Judaism, it might have been difficult to grasp. They were born into a religious culture where they were taught how to walk with God under a covenant that made them special and unique to the rest of the world for generation after generation.

It was all useless in establishing a relationship with God because its purpose and objective of bringing a savior was completed with Christ. The Hebrews were torn between the path they had been raised in and this New Testament path of Jesus only. It became especially difficult when persecution became part of the consequences of following Jesus. The Jewish culture around them had resisted Jesus as the savior and came hard against any type of Christianity. Before he was saved and renamed Paul, Saul had approved of the stoning to death of Stephen because of his faith. It reads in Acts 8:1-3, *"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."*

Family would turn against each other in the name of God, with parents disowning their children for turning to Christ. At one point, the government even began to arrest Christians from

their homes and use them as entertainment as they would be fed to the lions. All of this torture and torment for following Jesus and leaving Judaism's tradition was coming against the early church. Christianity was being outlawed, but the old Jewish temples were still open and allowed. For the converted Hebrews, there was an option presented to them in which they could have God without the persecutions.

They could go back to the way they grew up as children, reestablish a relationship with the Father, and instantly the trouble would stop. All they had to do was to return to the temple and renounce Christ, and they would be embraced once again by everyone around them. It would be a sin for them to go back under the old covenant and attempt to find a relationship with God because that path was no longer there.

This is the sin it talks about in Hebrews 10:26-31, *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

The writer of Hebrews was trying to rescue this group of persecuted believers from running back to an old covenant relationship that could not get them to heaven. There is only one way to the Father, and that is by salvation through Jesus. It is impossible to find heaven any other way. In our life, we may face tests and trials as many Christians around the world are martyred for their faith even today. However, our choice is always the same. Jesus is all we have and all we need in all situations because we have the strength to stand firm in His truth in whatever we go through.

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