

NEW COVENANT

(Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times)

The Old Testament prophets proclaim to Israel and Judah that they have broken the Mosaic Covenant (as represented by the books of Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and especially Deuteronomy). They plead with the people to repent, to turn away from idols, and to return to keeping the Mosaic Covenant. However, the people refuse, and as the prophets predict, the nations of Israel and Judah are destroyed, respectively, by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The presence of God departs from the Temple, signaling the end of the Mosaic Covenant.

All of this is prophesied in advance by the Old Testament prophets. Yet the prophets look beyond the broken Mosaic Covenant and the judgment to a future time of restoration and blessing. One of the central elements in the coming time of blessing that the prophets describe is the New Covenant. Because of the disobedience of Israel, the Old (Mosaic) Covenant had failed. Therefore, the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, point to a new time characterized by a new relationship with God—in essence, a New Covenant.

Isaiah 40-66 calls it a "new exodus" and connects it to the coming Servant of the LORD (Messiah) and the inclusion of the Gentiles. Ezekiel 34, 36-37 calls it a "covenant of peace" (34:25) and describes it as a time when God will cleanse them from all sin, create a new heart within them, and actually put his Spirit within them (37:25-27). However, it is Jeremiah who actually labels this coming new arrangement as the "new covenant." In Jeremiah 31:31-33, God declares that he will make a "new covenant" with Israel. This covenant will not be like the old one that Israel broke. In its place, God will put his law in their minds and in their hearts. All those within the covenant will know God, and once again his people will be in close relationship to him. This New Covenant, God declares, will be characterized by the forgiveness of sin.

The promised New Covenant is formally inaugurated by Jesus at the Last Supper when he states, "This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20, italics added); cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). Indeed, the change from the Old Testament (i.e., Old Covenant) to the New Testament (i.e., New Covenant) was brought about by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Although there are numerous places throughout the New Testament that connect Jesus to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic promises of something new and better, especially with implications of new covenant fulfillment, the clearest presentation of this theology is in Hebrews 7-10. Here Jesus is explicitly identified as the one who brings the "new" and better covenant to replace the old one, which is said to be "obsolete" and passing away (Heb. 8:13). The specific "new covenant" promise of Jeremiah 31 is quoted twice in Hebrews (Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16-17). This book underscores that the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant because it is based on better promises, has a better mediator (Christ), offers total and complete forgiveness, and is ratified by superior blood, the very blood of Christ.

