

Why Did God Make the New Covenant?

Why did God make the New Covenant? Was there something wrong with the Old Covenant with Moses? Was it for man's benefit? Is the New Covenant a clearer revelation or provides more freedom or equal rights to salvation? Does the New Covenant serve a new purpose?

The best approach to answers questions like this is to carefully read and observe the biblical text and see if the answer can be found. For example, to understand why the New Covenant is revealed now during this point in biblical history, a review of the Old Covenant is required. The Mosaic Covenant served several purposes but it's most helpful when understood within the context of the Abrahamic Covenant. One reason why Abraham was chosen for the covenant was God's foreknowledge that he would teach his descendants:

For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him. (Gen 18:19)

1. The Mosaic Law was God's means of fulfilling His promise to Abraham of making him "a great nation" (Gen 12:2). In teaching what sin was (Rom 7:7) and how to atone for it, the Law was intended to demonstrate the way of the Lord. Those who believed God was real, listened and obeyed (Ex 19:4-6), demonstrating that they had the faith of Abraham and was his descendant. Without a genuine faith in God, simple compliance of the Law did not justify a person and was insufficient for righteousness (Rom 4:13-17). In teaching how to atone for sin, to bring justice to God, the Law was intended to provide a means to restore the nation of Israel's relationship with God.

2. The Mosaic Covenant was God's means of fulfilling His promise of land to Abraham's descendants (Gen 15:17-21). The land was intended for those with the faith of Abraham, and in so doing as God's own possession among all the peoples of the earth, be a physical kingdom of priests and holy nation (Ex 19:5-6; Deut 28:1-14).

Since God reveals the New Covenant primarily through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is necessary to understand their salient circumstances and significance of delivering this prophecy.

Prophesizing approximately 627-582 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah served the Southern Kingdom under the Judahite kings of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, which was roughly the final 50 years of Judah. Although he avoids deportation, he witnesses the rise of Babylon, the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, the three deportations of thousands of Jews (605, 597, and 586 B.C.), and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (586 B.C.).

During the second deportation (597 B.C.), as a consequence of Jehoiakim's and Jehoiachin's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar takes approximately 10,000 captives including the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3; 2 Ki 24:8-20; 2 Chron 36:6-10). Ezekiel began his ministry as an exile in Babylon, and while speaking primarily to the exiled, he prophesies the coming destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.), because of their failure in being faithful to their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant.

With the Temple's destruction, the Jews could not atone for their sins. God made His promise of the unconditional New Covenant fully aware that the Jews were utterly unable to comply with the Law. God's view of the Jews' compliance to the Mosaic Covenant was akin to not having a Temple at all!!

And the nation of Israel was expelled from the Promised Land.

Against this background, Ezekiel prophesies of the New Covenant, and it is here that God explains why He is providing a new unconditional covenant.

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Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. When they came to the nations where they went, they **profaned** My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had **profaned** among the nations where they went.

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have **profaned** among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been **profaned** among the nations, which you have **profaned** in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezek 36:18-28)

A verb that is repeatedly used in this passage is "profane." By examining the Hebrew verbal root and its stem used here, the meaning of "profane" is understood as: "defile and pollute, as to dishonor and to treat as common." With this in mind, key passages of the above becomes very clear:

When they came to the nations where they went, they **profaned** My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had **profaned** among the nations where they went. (Ezek 36:20-21)

There are two significant observations that can be made here:

1. The nation of Israel profaned the name YHWH (I AM WHO I AM [equivalent to: I AM HE WHO EXISTS]). The nation of Israel treated God's name as a common god; in essence, God was equivalent to a dead pagan god.
2. God was concerned about this view of His Holy name. When the nation of Israel made a covenant with God in the land of Moab, God established them as the people of God who represented Him on earth.

"You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, that you may enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Deut 29:10-13)

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have **profaned** among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been **profaned** among the nations, which you have **profaned** in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. (Ezek 36:22-23)

There are three significant observations that can be made here as well.

1. God will clear His name, which has been misrepresented by the nation of Israel and made indistinguishable from pagan gods.

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2. God will make a New Covenant, not for the sake of the nation of Israel; but, to prove that He is Holy. By this act, the nations will know that God is not common and is not One who one dishonors or defiles; God is a living Being. The world will see this through His Son Jesus Christ (John 5:19-23; 14:7).

3. Jesus' name means "Yahweh is salvation." God does literally vindicates the holiness of His great name, and through the name of Jesus Christ, nations know that God is Lord.

Witnessing the defeat of the nation and experiencing expulsion from the land, Ezekiel makes his prophecy known. For their failure to keep their covenant commitments to the Law of Moses, Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed just as foretold earlier when the nation of Israel made their covenant in the land of Moab.

All the nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' Then men will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. Therefore, the anger of the Lord burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.' (Deut 29:24-28)

In the busyness of life and conflicts in priorities, it is well worth to reflect whether one is profaning the name of God.

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him **for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name**. "They will be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." So you will again **distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him**. (Mal 3:16-18)