

## End of the Old Covenant

## Lesson 18

In Deuteronomy, when God affirms the Old Covenant with the second generation of Israelites, God foresees the day when they will forsake the Old Covenant and He will cast them outside of His kingdom and send them into captivity. Loyally, God also promises that, if they will turn their hearts back to Him, He will gather them out of the foreign lands and reestablish them in the Promised Land. Most significant in all of this is that the end of the Old Covenant heralds the promise of the New Covenant.

According to the terms of the Old Covenant, if the Israelites break the Covenant, they will be taken captive by a foreign nation (Deu 29:25-28). God sends prophets to warn them: "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to the law which I commanded your fathers. . . . Nevertheless they would not listen. . . . And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He had made with their fathers" (2Ki 17:13-15). After three hundred years of human kings, and two hundred of these years spent following wicked kings, God says, "[the Israelites] have \_\_\_\_\_ My covenant which I made with their fathers" (Jer 11:10).

In 722 BC, the northern nation of Israel is judged according to God's Covenant and is taken captive by the Assyrians and scattered throughout their empire. God names Hosea's three children to illustrate His judgment on Israel: 1) Jezreel: God will "scatter [the Israelites] as seed," 2) Lo-Ruhamah: the Israelites will "not have My compassion," and 3) Lo-Ammi: the Israelites will "not be My people/family" (Hos 1:4-10).

Judah does not heed the warning of God's punishment on northern Israel, so she also becomes unfaithful and breaks God's Covenant. Of Judah God says:

Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also (Jer 3:8).

In 605 BC God gives Judah and Jerusalem into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army (Jer 21:1-10). Further deportations occur in 597 BC and 585 BC. Jeremiah prophesies that after the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem, "Everyone will say to his neighbor, 'Why has the LORD done this to this great city?' Then they will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods'" (Jer 22:8-9).

God describes a day when the Old Covenant will be completely forgotten:

"Then it shall come to pass . . . in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore" (Jer 3:17).

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt'" (Jer 23:7).

God's relationship with His people is like the relationship of a \_\_\_\_\_ and wife (Isa 54:5). As God promises the New Covenant, He reminds His people that He has been a good husband but they have broken His covenant:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the LORD (Jer 31:31-32).

*"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.* – Exodus 19:4-6

*They have . . . refused to hear My words and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.*

– Jeremiah 11:10

*Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,*

*"You only have I known of the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."* – Amos 3:1-2

*Surely, as a treacherous wife departs from her husband,*

*So have you dealt treacherously with Me.* – Jeremiah 3:20

*They have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them.*

– Jeremiah 9:13-14

*For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of Hosts is His name; And your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel;*

*He is called the God of the whole earth.*

*For the Lord has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit,*

*Like a youthful wife when you were refused.* – Isaiah 54:5-6

*“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord God. . . . “But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by.”*

– Ezekiel 16:8-15

*Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary?*

– Ezekiel 8:6

*Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were rehoused in Babylon. And after they were rehoused in Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel.*

– Matthew 1:11-12\*

*And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*

– Jeremiah 25:11

*“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.*

*And the LORD, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight.*

*Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts.*

– Malachi 3:1

The prophet Ezekiel is a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. Ezekiel also describes the harlotry of Judah and how she has broken her covenant with God (Eze 16). Ezekiel describes the momentous departure of God, the husband, from His wife, Judah. In the vision given to Ezekiel, the divine Husband leaves His house (the Temple in Jerusalem); Judah, the treacherous wife, is then “rehoused” in Babylon.

Just before God departs from His house, He asks this question: “Do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My \_\_\_\_\_?” (Eze 8:6). The blame for God’s departure is placed squarely on the harlotry of His wife. God then exits from the Holy of Holies and goes out to the threshold of the Temple (Eze 9:3). After God warns of judgment, saying, “I will recompense their deeds on their own heads” (Eze 9:10), He passes over the Temple’s threshold and moves out into the courtyard (Eze 10:4-5). From there God and His accompanying cherubim proceed to the East Gate of the Temple (Eze 10:18-19). Finally, God goes out the East Gate of the Temple and is last seen moving east from the city above the Mount of Olives (Eze 11:23).

After His departure, God no longer lives in His Temple among His covenant people. His departure from His house marks the end of the Kingdom of God (thus the kingdom needs restoration by the Messiah, cf. Lk 19:11; Ac 1:6). God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to His people: “As I have done, so shall it be done to them: they shall be rehoused” (Eze 12:11, LXX). Even as God has left His house, unfaithful Judah will be carried away into captivity and “rehoused” in Babylon (Mt 1:11, 12, 17; cf. LXX: 2Ki 24:16; 1Ch 5:22; Eze 12:11; Oba 20).

After three deportations of Judah to Babylon, Jerusalem (Judah’s house) is left desolate: “And this whole land shall be a \_\_\_\_\_ and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jer 25:11). Daniel understands Jeremiah’s prophecy and prays that God would be merciful and would begin counting the seventy years of desolation with the year he had been taken as a captive to Babylon (Dan 9:2). In 537 BC, King Cyrus the Persian (aka Darius the Mede) makes a decree releasing the Jews so that they can return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (2Ch 36:22-23; Eze 1:1-4). (After the Babylonian captivity they are called “Jews” instead of “Israelites.”)

Alas, the Old Covenant has ended, but God has promised to give the New Covenant (when the Messiah comes “to tell [them] all things,” Jn 4:25). Until then, Jews who want to please God continue to obey the only Covenant they know, the Old Covenant. The Kingdom of God has ended; God does not return to live in the Temple and no longer dwells among His chosen people who have broken His Covenant. God has promised concerning the Messiah: “I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6; cf 49:8). The Jews are waiting for the coming Messiah who will fulfill God’s promises and are looking for the “prophet like Moses,” who will be a lawgiver (Deu 18:15-19) and hand down God’s New Covenant.

- 
1. What will happen if the Israelites break the Old Covenant (Deu 29:25-28)?
  2. How does God describe His covenant relationship with His people?
  3. What are the stages of God’s departure from the Temple?
  4. What does the “rehousing” of the Jews describe (Eze 12:11)?