

ABSTRACT

‘FOR COUNSEL SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE WISE’?
JEREMIAH’S CRITICISM OF WISDOM AND THE SAGES IN THE
NEW COVENANT PROPHECY (JEREMIAH 31:30–33 [31–34])

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The prophecy in Jer 31:30–33 (31–34) predicts a new covenant between the people of Israel and YHWH, one designed in such a way as to prevent its violation, thereby averting any future destruction. But what exactly is new in this covenant? This issue is approached from a fresh angle in this article, which examines the affinities between this prophecy and those that preceded it in Jeremiah’s career, with a particular focus on the connection between the Book of Jeremiah and the Wisdom tradition.

The analysis suggests that the new covenant prophecy employs motifs found in those of Jeremiah’s doom prophecies that bear affinities to the Wisdom tradition, and that it calls for the rectification of the situations that they describe. These earlier prophecies of doom present the inhabitants of Judah and their leaders as possessing wisdom, but claim that this wisdom has had severe consequences: ignorance of God, evil conduct, and greed. By contrast, the new covenant prophecy expropriates both teaching and learning from the exclusive domain of the Sages. In the future, Jeremiah claims, the people as a whole will come to know YHWH, since he will instill his Torah directly in their hearts, thus eliminating the need for human learning. An examination of the connections between the prophecies reveals a gradual progression that reaches its peak in the prophecy of the new covenant.

The final section examines the relationship between the new covenant prophecy and concepts expressed in Deuteronomy, and suggests a conflict between the Jeremian and the Deuteronomic conceptions of the role of human wisdom in achieving knowledge of YHWH.