

Jeremiah

Chapter 31

The LORD Will Turn Mourning to Joy

“At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.” 2 Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, 3 the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. 5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. 6 For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’” 7 For thus says the LORD: “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. 10 “Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’ 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD.” 15 Thus says the LORD: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” 16 Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. 17 There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country. 18 I have heard Ephraim grieving, ‘You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the LORD my God. 19 For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.’ 20 Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the LORD. 21 “Set up road markers for yourself; make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. 22 How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encircles a man.” 23 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes: “‘The LORD bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!’

24 And Judah and all its cities shall dwell there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. 25 For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish.” 26 At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me. 27 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28 And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD. 29 In those days they shall no longer say: “‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ 30 But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

31:1–40 Continuing the theme of restoration begun in 30:1, Jeremiah records the words of the Lord to (1) all the people of God, v. 1 (prose); (2) the restored northern kingdom of Israel, vv. 2–22 (poetry); (3) the restored southern kingdom of Judah, vv. 23–26 (prose); and (4) Israel and Judah together, vv. 27–40 (prose prologue, vv. 27–30; poetic body, vv. 31–37; prose epilogue, vv. 38–40—each section beginning with the words “The days are coming”). (CSB)

31:1 The most basic summary of the relationship between God and Israel implied in the covenant at Sinai. (CSB)

all the clans of Israel. All 12 tribes. (CSB)

In this chapter God’s vision includes the rest of the Jews. He wants to reach them all. By including Israel, the Lord shows us that His outreach at the time of the Messiah would know no bounds. (PBC)

31:2 *people who survive the sword.* The righteous remnant, who will return from captivity. (CSB)

These are those who escaped the sword of Pharaoh by the Lord’s deliverance were objects of His merciful intervention against all enemies. (Kretzmann)

wilderness. The Arabian Desert, the antitype of the Sinai Desert through which Israel’s ancestors marched after the exodus. Return from exile is often pictured as or compared to release from Egyptian slavery at the time of the exodus. (CSB)

rest. This was when He was leading them forward to occupy the peaceful habitations of the Land of Promise. (Kretzmann)

Israel. The northern kingdom (see also vv. 4, 7, 9–10, 21). Other names for it are Samaria (v. 5), Ephraim (vv. 6, 9, 18, 20), Jacob (vv. 7, 11) and Rachel (v. 15). (CSB)

31:3 *I have loved with you with loving-kindness.* The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “Continue ... love” in Ps 36:10. (CSB)

He was giving them respite, preserving them from extinction. As He had done in delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt, so He intended to continue His mercy upon them. (Kretzmann)

faithfulness. Hus: “The whole holy catholic church always has had and now has Christ as its head, from whom it cannot fall away, for she is the bride knit to him, her head, by a love that never ends.... Therefore, always, from the very beginning, the bridegroom has been present with

the whole church by virtue of his divinity, who later was with the holy fathers by virtue of his humanity” (*The Church*, p 29). (TLSB)

31:4 *build*. This meant to be established for sound prosperity. (Kretzmann)

Virgin Israel. God promised to keep His chosen people inviolate for His holy purposes, but they were unfaithful. (TLSB)

tambourines. Used on joyful occasions (see Ps 68:25), especially following a military victory (see Ex 15:20 and note; Jdg 11:34)—in contrast to Judah’s experience during the exile (see Ps 137:1–3). (CSB)

dance. See v. 13; often a religious activity in ancient times (see 2Sa 6:14). (CSB)

merrymakers. The Hebrew for this word is translated “rejoicing” in 30:19. (CSB)

This was in agreement with the custom observed upon occasions of public rejoicings, but in holy joy, not in carnal mirth. (Kretzmann)

31:5 *Samaria*. Conquered in 722–721 B.C. (see 2Ki 17:24), it would someday be resettled by God’s people. (CSB)

plant and enjoy the fruit. See Dt 28:30; Isa 62:8–9; 65:21–22. Since the law stipulated that the fruit of a tree could not be eaten until the fifth year after planting it (see Lev 19:23–25), a return to normalcy is envisioned here. (CSB)

31:6 *watchmen ... hill country of Ephraim*. For example, in later times watchmen were stationed in appropriate locations to observe and give notice of the appearance of various phases of the moon to fix the times of the most important feasts (see Dt 16:16). (CSB)

Ephraim ... to Zion. In the days of Jeroboam I, the people of the northern kingdom had been required to worship at northern shrines (see 1Ki 12:26–30). In the future, however, they would worship the Lord only in Jerusalem (cf. Jn 4:20). (CSB)

go up. The verb is often used of journeys to Jerusalem (see, e.g., Ezr 1:3; 7:7; Isa 2:3), whose elevation is above the surrounding countryside. (CSB)

31:7 *chief of the nations*. See Dt 26:19; Am 6:1. Israel was the greatest nation not because of intrinsic merit but because of divine grace and appointment (see Dt 7:6–8; 2Sa 7:23–24). (CSB)

Israel owed its preeminence solely to its choice by the Lord to be His instrument in blessing all nations. This undeserved distinction accounts for similar titles of honor (cf vv 9, 20). (TLSB)

save. The Hebrew for this word is the basis of “Hosanna,” the cry of the people of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. (CSB)

31:8 *from the north*. The direction traveled to Assyria and Babylon. (TLSB)

farthest parts of the earth. See 6:22; 25:32. (CSB)

This meant from its most remote boundaries. (Kretzmann)

blind ... lame. This included the poorest and the least important, the very outcasts of society. Matt. 22, 9; Luke 14, 21-23. (Kretzmann)

None are left behind. (TLSB)

31:9 *with weeping.* Contrast Ps 126:5–6; Isa 55:12. (CSB)

They come with tears of mingled joy and penitence, on account of the unmerited grace of God in accepting them into His kingdom. (Kretzmann)

I am father to Israel. All of His spiritual children being included in these terms.

firstborn son. Once again God embraces the apostates of the northern tribes, calling Ephraim “my firstborn son.” He restores this son of Joseph who had received the inheritance of the firstborn when Jacob in his old age blessed the sons of Joseph (Gen 47). (PBC)

31:10 *coastlands far away.* Remote areas to the west of Israel (see 2:10; 25:22 and note; 47:4; Ps 72:10; Isa 41:1, 5; 42:10, 12; 49:1). (CSB)

God wants his Word of Good News to be shared everywhere. The “coastlands” represent the most remote regions of the world.

scattered Israel ... keep him like as a shepherd. Even when his people forsake him and follow other gods, God is faithful and will always keep his promises.

This is one of the Lord's favorite pictures to describe His loving care for His people. (Kretzmann)

31:11 *redeem.* As the Lord had redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery (see Ex 6:6; 15:13; Dt 7:8; 9:26), so now he would redeem their descendants from Babylonian exile. (CSB)

God had already rescued them from Egypt. Now he is ready to ransom them again. God is constantly redeeming us in our baptism. When God's people turned in repentance, he was quick to reach out to them. He does the same with us.

from ... those stronger for him. See Ps 35:10. (CSB)

He is liberating His people from the hands of all tyrants. (Kretzmann)

31:12 *height of Zion.* The healing of the breach between the Northern Kingdom (Israel, Ephraim, Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was to reestablish joint worship on the heights of Zion. The restored unity of faith also foreshadowed the common bonds of fellowship, by which God would link all believers with one another in a communion of saints, redeemed from the bondage of sin by His Son (John 10:16). (TLSB)

goodness of the LORD. Primarily material blessings (see v. 14; Hos 3:5). (CSB)

grain ... new wine ... oil. Besides spiritual blessing they will receive many material blessings as well. That is how God still work today.

like a watered garden. Cf. the “living water” Jesus gives in Jn 4:10, 14. (CSB)

languish no more. They will be enjoying, rather, all the riches of God's grace. (Kretzmann)

31:13 *young women* – The young women went out in processions with rhythmic movements. (Kretzmann)

young...old – They would give expression to their joy. (Kretzmann)

joy...comfort – This is a spiritual peace because they once more belong to him and are his people.

31:14 *feast the soul.* From a restored prosperity, the people would be able to supply the sustenance of the priests as required by the Law (cf Lv 7:34). (TLSB)

abundance. Either (1) a synonym for God's bounty (see Ps 36:8; 63:5; Isa 55:2) or (2) a reference to the special portions of the sacrificial animal reserved for the priests (see Lev 7:31–36). (CSB)

Thus the Messianic promise concerning rest and peace, Matt. 11,28, was brought out even in the Old Testament, for He gave His blessings in rich measure even at that time. (Kretzmann)

31:15–17 All this demands faith in God's promises. There was nothing on the contemporary scene even to suggest such a reversal of history. For if Rachel, ancestor of Benjamin and some northern tribes, were still alive, she would be heard weeping for those slain, dragged into captivity and gone for good. However, the Lord would also tell her to dry her tears, for her offspring would return. (TLSB)

31:15 Quoted in Mt 2:18, where Herod's orders to kill all the male infants "in Bethlehem and its vicinity" (Mt 2:16) are stated to be a fulfillment of this passage. (CSB)

Ramah. Located about five miles north of Jerusalem, it was one of the towns through which Jerusalem's people passed on their way to exile in Babylonia (see 40:1; cf. Isa 10:29; Hos 5:8). (CSB)

There are several Ramahs (Hbr "height"; general expression). Jeremiah refers to Ramah in Benjamin, a tribe born from Rachel, who was absorbed by Judah and passed with the Judeans into exile. This Ramah is c 10 mi N of Jerusalem and is on a road running from Bethlehem through Jerusalem up to Ramah. Rachel was buried along this road (Gn 35:19) after giving birth to Benjamin and naming him Ben-oni, "son of my troubles" (hence Jeremiah's reference to weeping). Rachel died while bearing a child at Ramah when she and her husband, Jacob, were on their way to Bethlehem (Gn 35:16; 1Sm 10:2). (TLSB)

Rachel. Jacob's favorite wife (see Ge 29:30) and the grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh (see Ge 30:22–24; 48:1–2), the two most prominent and powerful tribes in the northern kingdom. The name is used here to personify that kingdom. (CSB)

weeping for her children – This is over the loss of her descendants to a ruthless conqueror (Babylon). She will shed bitter tears again when the mothers of Bethlehem lament the death of their infant sons killed by Herod (Mt 2:17-18). In sum, Rachel literally wept at Bethlehem over Benjamin (Gn 35), her daughters – Benjaminites – weep over the exile as they join the Judeans marching away (Jer 31). (TLSB)

31:16 *a reward for your for your work.* Echoed in 2Ch 15:7. Here the work is the bearing and raising of children. (CSB)

Her labors in rearing sons will not be in vain, for a remnant will survive and come back to their own country. (TLSB)

31:17 *children shall come back.* Cf. Hos 11:10–11. (CSB)

This will be on the basis of a sincere repentance. (Kretzmann)

31:18–19 *bring back...restore.* The same Hebrew root underlies all three words. (CSB)

“Our election to eternal life is founded not on our godliness or virtue, but on Christ’s merit alone and His Father’s gracious will...When His children depart from obedience and stumble, He has called them to repentance again through the Word, and the Holy Spirit wants by the Word to be effective in them for conversion. When they turn to Him (Jer 31:18-19) again in true repentance by a right faith, He will always show His old paternal heart to all who tremble at His Word and from their heart turn again to Him” (FC SD XI 75). (TLSB)

31:18 *like an untrained uly calf.* The same figure of speech is used in Hos 4:16; 10:11. (CSB)

Resisting the discipline of bearing a yoke. (TLSB)

They were unused to the restraint of the yoke and of harness; cp. Hos. 10, 11. (Kretzmann)

bring me back ... restored. Hbr verb is repeated which frequently denotes a turning back to the Lord in repentance (3:12, 14, 22). Now chastened and ashamed, they implore the Lord that they be restored to fellowship with Him. Restoration, whether physical or spiritual, is possible only if the Lord brings it about. (TLSB)

31:19 *struck my thigh.* A gesture of mourning and grief (see Eze 21:12). Similar expressions are found in other ancient literature, such as the Babylonian *Descent of Ishtar*, verse 21; Homer, *Iliad*, 15.397–398; 16.125; *Odyssey*, 13.198–199. (CSB)

“The entire notion that a person is righteous is mere hypocrisy before God. We must acknowledge that our heart is, by nature, destitute of fear, love, and confidence in God” (Ap II 33). (TLSB)

"For after my apostasy I felt sorrow," since God wrought repentance in the heart of the true Israelites among the children of Ephraim. (Kretzmann)

ashamed and confounded. See Isa 45:16. (CSB)

They were fully conscious of the disgrace attaching to the former behavior. (Kretzmann)

youth. Early history (see 2:2; 3:24–25; 22:21; 32:30; Isa 54:4; Eze 16:22). (CSB)

This was that attending the idolatry which had been practiced in the northern kingdom since the time when Jeroboam set up the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Upon this cry the Lord answers in a strain of coaxing appeal. (Kretzmann)

31:20 *darling child*. Cf. Isa 5:7. (CSB)

The Lord hears their penitent pleas and hold introspection with Himself. His readiness to treat them again as a dear son and a darling child in spite of their insolent waywardness is a mystery of love that defies rational explanation. (TLSB)

I will surely have mercy. See Hos 11:1–4, 8–9. (CSB)

842–43. Ambr: “Let us, then, submit ourselves to God, and not be subject to sin, and when we ponder the remembrance of our offences, let us blush as though at some disgrace, and not speak of them as a glory to us, as some boast of overcoming modesty, or putting down the feeling of justice. Let our conversion be such, that we who did not know God may now ourselves declare Him to others” (NPNF 2 10:350). (TLSB)

This is the Lord being astonished at Himself, as it were, on account of such tender feelings toward this reprobate child. (Kretzmann)

my heart yearns. See Isa 16:11. (CSB)

His inmost feelings being touched. (Kretzmann)

31:21 The departing exiles are advised to set up markers along their path to exile so that in due time they will be able to find their way back to Judah. (CSB)

He is about to summon the reclaimed “virgin Israel” to set out at once on the journey to her own cities. (TLSB)

guideposts. Tombstone-shaped markers (see 2Ki 23:17; Eze 39:15). (CSB)

Virgin Israel. God promised to keep His chosen people inviolate for His holy purposes, but they were unfaithful. (PBC)

31:22 *faithless daughter*. The people of Judah are apostate (see 3:14, 22). (CSB)

created a new thing. The things to be done by the servant of the Lord. (CSB)

These future events will come to pass as certainly as did the predictions of days of old. (Leupold)

a woman encircles a man. Embrace with tender and unfailing love (see Ps 32:7, 10; see also Ps 26:6). Judah would someday return to the Lord and love him without reservation. (CSB)

Or, “a woman embraces a man.” It certainly means the restoration of Israel will have unprecedented character. In order to overcome misgivings and unbelief, the Lord graciously lets Jeremiah repeat the promise of redemption in five more oracles (vv 23-40). (TLSB)

31:23 *I restore their fortunes*. This would be when His Church would once more be established. (Kretzmann)

The LORD bless you. See Ps 128:5; 134:3. (CSB)

This is where true righteousness would once more find its dwelling-place. (Kreztamnn)

habitation of righteousness. Jerusalem (cf. Isa 1:21, 26). (CSB)

holy hill. The temple hill (see Ps 2:6; 48:1–2; Isa 2:2–3; 11:9; 27:13; 66:20). (CSB)

31:24 *dwell there together...flocks* – This is a picture of being descriptive of the blessings which the Lord would pour out upon His people. (Kreztmann)

31:25 *satisfy...replenish* – This was refreshing the soul which panted after relief and satisfying the soul that was languishing for relief. Cf. Matt. 11, 28. The prophet closes this section with the remark. (Kreztamann)

31:26 *I awoke.* Jeremiah had evidently received the previous divine revelation (beginning in 30:3) in a dream (for similar examples see Da 10:9; Zec 4:1). (CSB)

The revelation accorded Jeremiah was like a pleasant dream. So Jacob “awoke from his sleep” in which he was granted a dream/vision (Gn 28:16). (TLSB)

Sleep...pleasant. See Prv 3:24 (CSB)

The glance into the future which had been vouchsafed him was so glorious that he kept it in his memory as a pleasant picture. To all true ministers of the Word it is a source of great satisfaction to find the Church returning to a condition of repentance and zeal for the Lord. (Kreztmann)

31:27-30 In his second oracle, he says the land of Israel and Judah will be repopulated and made prosperous, each citizen recognizing his individual responsibility in the community. (TLSB)

31:27 *sow.* See Eze 36:8–11. The same Hebrew root underlies both words. (CSB)

The human population and herds of animals will increase as if springing up from seed scattered over the land by the Lord. (TLSB)

This signified great spiritual blessings, as a field of exceeding fruitfulness. (Kreztmann)

Israel and ... Judah. North and south would again be united - (In the Messianic kingdom there will be no national or racial divisions (see Gal 3:26–29). (CSB)

31:28 *watched ... watch.* The Lord was regarding them with wakeful attention and in the promised restoration. (Kreztmann)

pluck up... break down ... overthrow, destroy ... build ... plant. The first two pairs of verbs are negative, stressing the fact that Jeremiah is to be first a prophet of doom, while the last pair is positive, indicating that he is also to be a prophet of restoration. The first verb (“uproot”) is the opposite of the last (“plant”), and fully half of the verbs (“tear down,” “destroy,” “overthrow”) are the opposite of “build.” (CSB)

Four verbs of destruction are used (in contrast with two verbs of construction) because destruction will dominate Jeremiah’s message to sinful Judah. Melancton says, “The voice of the Law condemning sins must constantly be set forth and taught in the church, and indeed it

would be a monstrous crime to conceal God's judgment and His voice which announces His wrath against sin." (PBC)

31:29 *The fathers ... set on edge.*† Repeated in Eze 18:2. This was apparently a popular proverb that originated in a misunderstanding of such passages as Ex 20:5 and Nu 14:18. In the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel many people felt that God's hand of judgment against them was due not to their own sins, but to the sins of their ancestors. (CSB)

If people wanted to claim to be victims of a miscarriage of justice, they quoted this proverb about children experiencing trouble for something their father had done. In the restoration to God's favor (32:38), the redeemed would no longer quote this saying or shrug off personal responsibility for their misdeed. (TLSB)

set on edge – Or, "become blunt," perhaps to the wincing of someone tasting something sour. (TLSB)

31:30 *everyone will die for his own sin.* See Dt 24:16; Eze 18:3, 20; 33:7–18. Although group or collective responsibility is an important concept, Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasize individual responsibility as both preparation and explanation for the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, which the people might have been tempted to blame on the sins of their forefathers. (CSB)

Chem: "In Christ a person does not bear the iniquity of the father, because it has been taken away" (*LTh* 1:301). (TLSB)

The New Covenant

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. **33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." **35** Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: **36** "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever." **37** Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD." **38** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. **39** And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. **40** The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

31:1–30 The Lord promises to restore His people to the Promised Land after the exile in Babylon. The exile is temporary, for God Himself will save the remnant and return them to their home. God could destroy them for their sin, but out of deep love and compassion He merely disciplines them with exile and even gives them the hope of return. Our Lord disciplines us for a time that we might walk by faith. In Christ, the discipline of God works for our benefit. • Dear Father, when our lives are dark with fear and uncertainty keep the light of Your love for us in Jesus Christ before our eyes. Amen. (TLSB)

31:31–34† The high point of Jeremiah’s prophecies, this passage is the longest sequence of OT verses to be quoted in its entirety in the NT (see note on Heb 8:8–12; see also Heb 10:16–17). Verse 31 contains the only OT use of the phrase “new covenant,” which (together with its NT echoes) has come down to us (via Latin) as “new testament.” (CSB)

In Jeremiah’s third oracle, the Lord will create also the kind of spiritual reconstruction necessary for the exiles to be His people and He their God. (TLSB)

These verses constitute one of the most important prophetic passages in all of Scripture, as testified by its quotation in its entirety in the NT, Heb 8:8-12. In fact, this passage is the primary reason we refer to the Scripture’s two sections as the OT and NT. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

“Declares the Lord” occurs four times in these four verses. Jeremiah is speaking with authority straight from God. Notice throughout that God takes the initiative: “I will make,” “I will put,” “I will be,” “I will forgive,” etc. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

31:31 *The days are coming.* Lit. “The days are coming” (as in vv. 27, 38), a phrase that often refers to the Messianic era. (CSB)

Time, a creation of God, is also his servant. The revelation of this “new covenant” will be perfectly timed to utilize the condition of Israel and meet the needs of his people. Paul teaches, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

make. Lit. “cut” (CSB)

new covenant.† As the old covenant was solemnized by the blood of sacrificial animals, so the new would be solemnized by the blood of Christ. See Lk 22:20. (CSB)

What God agreed to do to enable Israel and all sinners to become His people became a reality in that new covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus, the only mediator between God and man (cf 1Co 11:25). Irenaeus of Lyons: “One and the same householder produced both covenants, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who spake with both Abraham and Moses, and who has restored us anew to liberty, and has multiplied that grace which is from Himself” (ANF 1:472). See pp xlv–xlvi. (TLSB)

The concept of covenant is taken from the Hebrew *bāriṯh*. Debate exists over the origin of this word, whether from the root for “to bind,” or even “to determine.” The Greek offers additional insight in using *diathēkē*. As opposed to *sunthēkē*, indicating equality, *diathēkē* implies the promised disbursement of a property. It connotes a will or testament and reminds us of Jesus’

words, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

This text contains the only Old Testament reference to a new covenant. Jeremiah’s words gave rise to the familiar terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament.” The church father Tertullian first gave the name “New Testament” to the last twenty-seven books of the Bible. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The only places in the New Testament where this text is quoted are Heb 8:8–12 (quoting vv 31–34) and Heb 10:16–17 (quoting vv 33–34). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The new covenant is referred to in the following New Testament passages: Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25 (these four dealing with the Last Supper); Heb 9:15; 10:13; 12:24; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 11:27. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The “new covenant” (vv 31–32) is an unconditional covenant of divine commitment, also called a royal grant (See *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, p. 18). Jeremiah contrasts this covenant of pure grace with the Sinai covenant (Ex 19–24), a legal covenant involving human obligations—and thus conditional—which Israel broke. As Jeremiah spoke, rebellious Israel was about to be expelled from the promised land in fulfillment of the curse associated with breaking the covenant. But God speaks of a time when he will make an entirely different arrangement. This new covenant of divine commitment relates to other royal covenants, e.g., the Abrahamic (Gen 15:9-21), and the Davidic (2 Sam 7:5–16). These royal grants point to the radically new covenant brought into effect through the person and work of Jesus Christ which supersedes the Sinai covenant of human obligation mediated through Moses (Heb 8: 13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In the coming days, the covenant made at Sinai will be referred to as the “first” or “old” covenant. The new covenant does not violate the old, nor do its benefits differ in substance. But the new supersedes and fulfills the old. Like the old, the new will involve Torah (teaching or doctrine), forgiveness, and a covenant relationship between God and His people. The difference is that it will be written on His people’s hearts. The external demands of the Law will give way to the internal guidance of the Spirit. The rigid, burdensome commands will be replaced with the freedom, joy, and spontaneity of people who are new creations in Christ. The old creation groaned, but the new will sing for joy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

This new covenant is eschatological; it will be fully realized at Christ’s return when God’s people enter the new heavens and earth. True, it is now already in place due to Christ’s work. We already have forgiveness, the Spirit, and membership in the people of God. But we still have need of teachers – pastors, theologians, Bible study leaders. We still need confession and absolution. We are not always faithful to our covenant Lord and God. Our hearts and consciences yet have reason to accuse us. But the new covenant makes us heirs of the age when God’s promises will be fully implemented, when the old will be forgotten forever. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

The way of salvation in both covenants, the old and the new is the same. A person is saved by faith in Christ. The believer under the old covenant looked ahead to Christ as the fulfillment of all the types and pictures of the old covenant. The believer under the new covenant looks back to the accomplished work of Christ. Because the Lord understands human nature and its weakness for sinning, the Lord provided many ways under the old covenant for the believer to receive

forgiveness. Through many offerings and various sacrifices, the penitent was assured he had been reconciled with God. (PBC)

house of Israel ... house of Judah. The reunited people of God. (CSB)

31:32 *covenant I made with their fathers.* The covenant at Sinai eventually became known as the “old covenant” (2Co 3:14) or “first covenant” (Heb 8:7; 9:15, 18). (CSB)

Why was this new covenant necessary? Certainly not because God was initiating a new way of salvation. The Sinai (Mosaic) covenant definitely was based on the grace of God; in Ex 20:2 God says that his saving activity is the basis for the Ten Commandments. Yet in comparison with the new covenant, the old was weak (Heb 7:18–19, 8:7). Though the moral law embodied in the covenant is holy and good (Rom 7:12), it is not able to justify lawbreakers nor empower fulfillment. Israel broke the Mosaic covenant. God intended the Mosaic covenant to last only for the interim between the Abrahamic Covenant and its fulfillment in Christ (See Gal 3:6–29, and note that “law” in this text refers to the Sinai covenant). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

To portray our ingrained sin, Jeremiah asked, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (13:23). Human nature hasn’t changed much in the 2600 years since Jeremiah. People still rebel against leaders, live an immoral lifestyle, and worship other gods. But God has done something truly new: he has made available the forgiveness of sins through the vicarious work of Christ Jesus. As a result, God the Holy Spirit works in people’s hearts to change their lives. Those who believe Christ died for them now have the promise that the Holy Spirit lives within them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The old covenant pointed to Christ as its fulfillment. By its very nature, then, it was temporary and passing. Many of its activities, repeated animal sacrifices, for example, emphasized its transitory nature. The old covenant, announced at Mt. Sinai, also served to keep the Jewish people separate from the surrounding heathen, a unique nation, preserved intact by the regulations laid upon them by the old covenant. Their separation insured that they would remain a people until the promised Messiah would come. (PBC)

took them by the hand. See Hos 11:3–4. (CSB)

my covenant they broke. See 11:10. The people, not God, were responsible for violating his covenant. (CSB)

The old covenant imposed many rules upon the Jew, rules they found impossible to observe. Hence the old covenant certainly proved that no one could be saved by keeping it. For that reason the Lord says of their fathers, “They broke my covenant.” We would say: before the ink was dry they broke the covenant with the sin of the golden calf. (PBC)

I was their husband. Baal the Canaanite god of fertility was Yahweh’s chief competition. The sacred covenant union could be reestablished only by God’s forgiveness and mercy. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride, washed clean. God is merciful. He loves his people. He reinstates, forgives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

31:33-34 The basic meaning of *torah* “law” (v 33) is “instruction.” Therefore, the word actually refers to Gospel in the wide sense, not doctrinal Law as opposed to Gospel. This new covenant will be characterized by personal knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins. “Know” (v 34) denotes intimate personal knowledge, and here refers to saving faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The prophet Ezekiel said it this way: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek 36:26–27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

31:33 *house of Israel*. Here includes both Israel and Judah. (CSB)

Just: “The true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham ... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ” (ANF 1:200) (TLSB)

Even as Israel and Judah will be reunited, so Jew and Gentile will be one in Christ in the new covenant. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

put my law within them. Internally (see Dt 6:6; 11:18; 30:14; Eze 11:19; 18:31; 36:26–27), in contrast to setting it before them externally (see 9:13; Dt 4:8; 11:32). (CSB)

write it on their hearts. So that it effectively governs their lives, in contrast to the ineffectiveness of merely presenting it in writing, though inscribed on durable stone (see Ex 24:4; 31:18; 32:15–16; 34:28–29; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 9:9, 11; 10:4). (CSB)

God’s creative and transforming inscription of His will on the people was necessary because the root of their sin lay in their perverse and stubborn will to follow their own evil heart, as Jeremiah often pointed out (3:17; 4:4, 14; 5:23; 7:24). “Faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in hearts. It must also produce spiritual movements in hearts. The prophet Jeremiah shows what these movements are.... Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect aid from Him, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in times of suffering. We also begin to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements.... We have said above that renewal and beginning to fulfill the Law must exist in us.... If anyone should cast away love, even though he has great faith, he does not keep his faith. For he does not keep the Holy Spirit” (Ap V 4, 98). (TLSB)

This is the miracle of conversion. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23, 24). (PBC)

So that it completely governs their lives. The external demands of the Law will give way to the internal guidance of the Spirit. The rigid, burdensome commands will be replaced with the freedom, joy and spontaneity of people who are new creations in Christ. The old creations groaned but the new will sing for joy.

I will be ... my people. The “new” covenant does not abolish the “old” but supersedes it in the sense that through the new covenant the old is fulfilled and its purpose achieved. (CSB)

It is God's grace alone that makes us his people. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have become the children of God. The Father has adopted us for the sake of his Son. The human mediators of the old covenant (Moses, the priest, etc.) who stood between God and his people have given way to Jesus, the one mediator between God and man. Now God deals directly and individually with each of us, giving forgiveness and mercy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

31:34 *No longer ... teach his neighbor.* When the Lord has done his new work, there will no longer be among his people those who are ignorant of him and his will for human lives. True knowledge of the Lord will be shared by all—young and old, the peasant and the powerful. (CSB)

The promise is that through the proclamation about Christ those who hear and believe will know for themselves the salvation of God. (PBC)

Know. In the experiential, not the academic, sense. (CSB)

Not merely an intellectual knowledge but an acknowledgment of a sacred relationship. The new covenant creates a conviction of fellowship with God that is self-authenticating and available for all. (TLSB)

Some claim no one can truly know or understand God. Even the prophet testifies, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth; . . . his understanding is unsearchable” (Is 40:28–29). But God also declares, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” (Jer 33:3). God wants to reveal his will, his plan, his very self to us. Such knowledge is more than enough for our salvation but won't be fully realized until we are with him: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

I will forgive ... their sin. The glorious basis of the new covenant (see Heb 10:14–17). (CSB)

A primitive root; to *forgive*:—forgive, pardon, spare. (QV)

To forgive is only used of divine activity. The new covenant is not based on a sinless people, but on a forgiving God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

This phrase is not an indictment of God's omniscience, but a description of his mercy. For the sake of Christ, he will not recall our sins on the Day of Judgment. Revelation 20 describes the opening of books that recorded the deeds of the dead and declares there will be no punishment for those whose names are found in the Book of Life. Matthew 25 indicates the “sheep” do not have their sins remembered, but only hear recounted the deeds done in faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

31:35-37 In the fourth oracle, Jeremiah assures the reader that the revival of the chosen people cannot fail to materialize; the same God who set the universe in motion and keeps it from falling into chaos promises to sustain it. (TLSB)

31:35 *who stirs up ... is his name.* The same line is found in Isa 51:15 (see Ps 46:3; Isa 17:12). (CSB)

31:36† See 33:20–21, 25–26. Just as God’s creation order is established and secure, so also will he keep his covenant. (CSB)

His Church would be maintained so that the very portals of hell will not be able to overcome it, Matt. 16, 18. (Kretzmann)

31:37 *cast off all.* Israel will continue to exist, even though a terrible judgment is about to sweep the kingdom of Judah away. (CSB)

In spite of the fact that the justice of God compels Him to reject the willful transgressors, His mercy will always find some whom He will save from the general fate, for He does not desire the death of the sinner. (Kretzmann)

31:38–40 See Zec 14:10–11. (CSB)

In a closing vision, Jeremiah is made to see Jerusalem rebuilt tower by tower, gate by gate. (TLSB)

31:38 *the city.* Jerusalem. (CSB)

Tower of Hananel ... Corner Gate. The eastern and western ends of the northern wall. (CSB)

Jeremiah sees the holy city rise out of its ruins. (TLSB)

31:39 *measuring line.* Mentioned in connection with restored Jerusalem also in Eze 40:3; Zec 1:16; 2:1. (CSB)

Gareb ... Goah. Exact locations unknown, but probably to the west of Jerusalem. (CSB)

31:40 *valley.* Probably the Hinnom Valley (CSB)

This was where the ashes of the sacrificial fires were dumped. (Kretzmann)

Horse Gate. Where Athaliah was slain (2Ch 23:15). It may have been the easternmost point in the city wall—a gate through which one could reach the Kidron Valley. (CSB)

sacred to the LORD. Engraved on the gold plate worn on the high priest’s turban (Ex 28:36–38) as a reminder of his consecration to the Lord’s service. God’s original purpose for Israel will be realized.) (CSB)

The sacredness of the temple courts will expand to encompass the secular and profane regions of Jerusalem. Cf Ezk 43:12. (TLSB)

uprooted ... overthrown. The entire passage is evidently figurative, the purpose being to set forth the increase and the glory of the New Testament Church, especially in its final perfection. It is proper that this description of Jehovah’s Church should form the conclusion of the prophecy concerning the restoration of the Lord’s people, since it includes both the redemption through the

Messiah and the establishment of the holy Christian Church in its beginning here on earth and in its glorification in heaven. (Kretzmann)

31:31–40 God promises His people a new relationship, not based on the Law of Moses but on grace and faith. The promise finds fulfillment in Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the NT (cf Heb 8). Although the Law is good and holy, it condemns sinners for what we are and what we do. In Christ Jesus, God provides the sacrifice necessary to silence the accusations of the Law. By faith, Christians have a new and right relationship with God (cf Rm 3:21–26). • We thank You, Father, for the new covenant of forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross. Amen. (TLSB)