

A Theological Commentary on the Promises of the New Covenant Jeremiah 30–33

Jeremiah 30–33 has often been called the ‘Book of Consolation’ because in Jeremiah’s long, sad book about Judah’s impending exile into Babylon (see Jeremiah 29), it promises hope and a future for God’s people.

Marked out as four chapters, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah three times. For instance, the book of consolation begins, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you.” (30:1–2; cf. 32:1; 33:1). Additionally, the Lord’s speaking is emphasized nearly fifty times in these four chapters: “Thus says the Lord” occurs twenty-three times¹ and “Declares the Lord (of hosts)” twenty-two times.² The former marks out various sections of the oracles; the latter is found within in the content of the prophecies themselves and often adds certitude to the Lord’s remarkable promises.

By following these verbal cues, we can identify various clusters of redemption that center around the new covenant (31:31–34), where each verse is secured by the repetition of “declares the Lord.” This indicates the way the new covenant anchors this whole section and secures God’s plan of restoration for Judah and Israel, and through them the whole world.

While the “new covenant” is only mentioned once, the whole section foretells the gracious redemption God intends to bring to his people through this new covenant. As Jeremiah 31:3 introduces, “Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people.” Importantly, “restore” or “turn back” (שוב) is another word that runs through this section (20x).³ Many of the promise clusters conclude with this promise: God will restore/ return his people to Israel. Therefore, to grasp all that God promises in this book within the book of Jeremiah, let me aim to outline its contents.

30:1–4 – The Introduction to Jeremiah’s First Prophecy of Comfort

For twenty-nine chapters the book of Jeremiah indicts Judah (and Israel) for their wicked idolatry and covenant-breaking. But Jeremiah 29 proffers hope, as the Lord tells his people that when the time of exile is complete (i.e., 70 years), he will bring his people back to the land. Therefore, there *is* a hope and future for Judah. Salvation is promised *after the exile*. This sets up the Book of Consolation (Jeremiah 30–33) and Jeremiah’s words in 30:1–4.

Verse 1 is the first of three prophecies in Jeremiah 30–33 where the word comes to Jeremiah (cf. 32:1; 33:1). Verse 2 records God’s command to Jeremiah to write these words in a book. But verse 3 is the programmatic thesis for this oracle and it includes four parts.

¹ “Thus says the Lord” = 30:1, 5, 12, 18; 31:2, 7, 15, 16, 23, 35, 37; 32:3, 14, 15, 28, 36, 42; 33:4, 10, 12, 17, 20, 25

² “Declares the Lord” = 30:3, 8, 10, 11, 17, 21; 31:1, 14, 16, 17, 20, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38; 32:5, 30

³ “Restore(s)” = 30:3 [2x], 10, 18, 24; 31:8, 16, 17, 18 [2x], 19, 21 [2x], 23; 32:37, 40, 44; 33:7, 11, 26

1. “For behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord . . .
2. “When I will restore the fortunes . . .
3. “to my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord . . .
4. “And I will bring them back to the land I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.”⁴

As Jeremiah 30–33 unfolds, emphasis is put on the coming day of the Lord and the restoration of fortunes to Israel. The reunification of Israel and Judah is also a promise of the new exodus and new covenant. And finally, as the new covenant is established, it will result in a new creation, i.e., a return to the land where Judah, Israel, and all who take refuge in their savior will find a place to dwell eternally. In all, these four chapters provide a near comprehensive list of all the blessings found in Christ. Therefore, they merit our attention and understanding.

In what follows, I will consider the promise clusters in Jeremiah 30–31 and give a summary word to classify each section. As time permits, I will come back to Jeremiah 32–33.

30:4–11 – SALVATION on the Great Day of the Lord by a New David leading a New Exodus

After an introduction to the first prophecy (30:4), we can divide the first part of this oracle into three sections (vv. 5–7, 8–9, 10–11). The first is identified by the “Thus says the Lord” (v. 5). The next two repeat “declares the LORD of hosts” (v. 8) and “declares the LORD” once in verse 10 and again in verse 11. The certainty of God’s promises are supported by this repetition.

In the first, Yahweh promises to save his people (Jacob) from the distress of exile. Verses 5–7 focus on the physical anguish associated with the exile and God’s peoples cries for deliverance. In response, the Lord promises a great day when he will rescue his people: “Alas! That day is so great there is none like it. This promise sets the course of these oracles: a day of salvation is coming; this is the day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord repeats in verse 8, where God promises to break the yoke of oppression from his people’s neck. Completing the reversal, the nations which oppressed Israel will now serve Yahweh as “their God” and David as “their king.” This liberation will come when God raises David up for him.

Twice more Yahweh promises to save his people: “I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity” (v. 10) and “For I am with you to save you, declares the Lord” (v. 11). In context, Yahweh tells Jacob his servant not to fear, for he will return him from their far away country. Though, he disciplined his people through

⁴ I owe this observation to Nicholas Piotrowski, *Matthew’s New David at the End of the Exile: A Socio-Rhetorical Study of Scriptural Quotations* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 170; Boston: Brill, 2016), 131

their captivity, he will not make a full end of his people. This is in opposition to the nations whom he “will make a full end.”

In sum, God promises to save his people by raising up a new David (vv. 8–9) and bringing them to his own land by way of a new exodus (vv. 10–11). Salvation is not an abstractly defined term. Rather, it is specifically related to the historical context of Israel and the historical person of David. The psychological relief and spiritual rest promised comes only as the punishment of God is lifted from his people.

30:12–17 – “RESURRECTION” Life Motivated by Yahweh’s Great Compassion

Yahweh’s second oracle is remarkable for the way it appears to contradict itself. First, in verses 12–15, Yahweh twice indicates the “incurable” nature of Israel’s disease (v. 12, 15). In a word, Israel is sick unto death. “There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you” (v. 13). Twice the reason for Israel’s sickness is attributed to her sin: “Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you” (v. 15). In short, there is no hope for Israel but to die.

Yet, verse 16 turns around to promise the demise of all Judah’s captors. And verse 17 says, “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord.” In Israel’s history, it is not unheard of for God to relinquish his pronouncement of death. For instance, Hezekiah was “sick and was at the point of death” until he prayed and God gave him an extra fifteen years of life (Isaiah 38:1–6). Thus, the words of Jeremiah 30 do not have to mean literally resurrection. But figuratively speaking, these words are a kind of resurrection from the dead (cf. Hebrews 11:17). Israel was sick unto death, until God had compassion on them.

And why did he have compassion? Verse 17 says, “Because they have called you an outcast: ‘It is Zion, for whom no one cares!’” God’s promise stands firm to his people. And while he called upon the nations to punish his people, he loathed the pride with which his chosen instrument exercised their judgment (see Isaiah 10). Therefore, in the right time, he would plunder and prey upon all who plundered and preyed upon his people (Jeremiah 30:16). Thus, the second oracle promises “resurrection” life God’s people because of his great compassion.

30:18–24 – RESTORATION of Worship in God’s House, Mediated By God’s Royal Priest, Establishing a New Covenant

Once again, Yahweh promises salvation to his people (vv. 18–22) and judgment on his enemies (vv. 20c, 23–24). Restoration is the opening promise and it is qualified by four mentions of blessed residence:

Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the *tents* of Jacob
and have compassion on his *dwellings*;
the *city* shall be rebuilt on its mound,

and the *palace* shall stand where it used to be.

Returning from exile, the nation whose holy city, along with its temple, had been razed would now be rebuilt. And what follows is the promise that praise and thanksgiving would rise to the heavens (v. 20), because the Lord was restoring the elements of worship to Israel. This includes a holy city (v. 18), with large and glorious congregation (vv. 19–20), a royal priest who could approach the throne of God (v. 21), and a restored covenant with God (v. 22).

Indeed, these verses list out the three necessary elements for covenantal worship: (1) a holy priest who approaches the (2) altar of God in the (3) house of the Lord. But it does so without naming Levi, Aaron, or even David. The ambiguity of the ruler is striking. Earlier in the chapter David is mentioned. And any true prince in Judah must be Davidic, yet neither David or a Son of David is mentioned. Neither is this figure called a priest. Yet, they clearly are doing what a priest does—entering the precincts of the Lord’s house and drawing near to worship and intercede.

To be fair, I am importing some ideas into the text. Jeremiah does not say that this prince is a “priest,” nor that he offers sacrifice, nor that he enters into the holy of holies. But surely these elements are implied, or assumed by the Jews who knew that “biblical worship” depended in the Law upon a holy priest (or priests), a sacrificial system to make God’s people clean, and a temple where God would receive such offerings—offerings of praise and sacrifice. These elements are in the cultural background of Judah.

But there’s another reason to read this text as a restoration of the cult (i.e., Israel form of worship). Verse 22 says, “And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” This is the classic covenantal formula for God’s people from the time of Abraham forward (Genesis 17:8; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; etc.). Thus, what was in jeopardy and ostensibly erased by God’s divorce with his covenant people (cf. Jeremiah 3:8) is now restored. Or, is promised to be restored.

As the flow of Jeremiah 30 tells us, God has heard his people’s cries and will save them with a new David, through a new Exodus. This salvation is to be seen as a resurrection from the dead, for as Israel’s sin led them to death, now God was going to heal them and raise them back to life. In this process, he was going to destroy those who sought to destroy his covenant people. And through it all, he would establish a new covenant, by means of bringing near to him a prince who would offer a sacrifice for sin.

The only thing not explicitly mentioned in Jeremiah 30 is the sacrifice for sins. But I believe the clause “for who would dare of himself to approach me?” (v. 21) give sufficient grounds for seeing the need for sacrifice. No priest in the Old Testament could come before God *and live* without sacrifice. Who would dare to approach God without atoning blood? Only a fool—and a dead fool at that. Thus, what is promised here is the reestablishment of the Israel’s worship, only because it does not specify with concrete images the rebuilding of the temple, the return of the Aaronic priesthood, and the blood

of bulls and goats, it raises the possibility that a new manner of worship is in view—one that will require the coming of Christ in the fullness of time.

31:1–6 – REUNIFICATION of God’s People in the Promised Land

Chapter 31 begins with its eyes to the future. The preceding verse (30:24d) states, “In the latter days you will understand this,” which I take to be an indication that what follows (31:1–40) will be fulfilled after the return from exile. Only after those events have eventuated can the promises made in Jeremiah 30–31 be fully understood. From our vantage point, we can see how these events are fulfilled in Christ, but before making such connections, let’s see what Jeremiah 31 says, and in this chapter there are five sections, marked off by five “Thus says the Lord.”

In verse 1, the reunification of God’s people is mentioned. God says that “at that time” he will be the one God of “all the clans of Israel.” Whereas, the clans divided in Israel’s history; the future promises peace where the whole nation will “be my people.” From this the verses follow: Israel is a people who will receive (v. 2), for God will love them with an everlasting love (v. 3). Motivated by his covenant faithfulness, God will rebuild his people, such that they overflow with praise (v. 4), replant the fields, and enjoy the bounty of God’s material blessing (v. 5). Verse 6 reminds us that these promises are yet future: “For there shall be a day when the watchman will call in the hill country of Ephraim: Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD of our God.” This imagery foreshadows the day when God’s people will be in the land again, and thus the main promise in these verses is God’s future reunification.

31:7–14 – INGATHERING his people by means of redemption and for the end joyful service and worship in the land.

The theme of verses 7–14 does not deviate much from verses 1–6. Only instead of reunification, the focus is ingathering. Israel, a people scattered by the Lord, will be brought back to dwell with him. The stanza begins and ends with praise (v. 7, 13–14). In between, the Lord returns his people to himself, and it is worth noting the places they come from, the people who come, the way he brings them, and the attitude of their return.

1. Locations: verse 8a says he brings them back “from the north” and “from the farthest parts of the earth.”
2. The Diaspora: verse 8b says he brings back a “great company” comprised of the blind and the lame, even pregnant women.
3. The Emotions: verse 9 says that the once rebellious people now come “weeping . . . with pleas of mercy.” This will anticipate Jeremiah 31:20, “a woman shall encircle a man.” Whereas before the people hardened themselves against God, now they are contrite and thankful. Hence, the weeping is not tears of sorrow, but tears of joy (see vv. 7, 13–14).
4. The Means: verse 11 states that God will ransom his people, redeeming them from the hands too strong for him.

5. The End: verse 12 anticipates the restoration of creation and the pleasantness of being in God's land.

Altogether, this stanza highlights the blessing of God going out into the world and gathering his sheep. Verse 9 speaks of Yahweh as a father to Israel; verse 10 describes him as a shepherd. Clearly, his intention was not to make a full end of his people, but to return them at the right time, redeeming them in order to satisfy them with his goodness.

31:15 – EXILE'S SORROW just before the Restoration's Comfort

In the middle of Jeremiah 31 stands a verse that sounds like it belongs in another part of Jeremiah's sad book. Though only one verse in length, verse 15 speaks of the suffering of associated with the exile, Rachel weeping for her children. What should we make of this verse?

First, Rachel is a reference to Israel, or better, she is a figurative mother of the nation of Israel. She cannot, in this context, be the beloved wife of Jacob. Rachel had died centuries before the exile, and the context is clearly related to the exile to Babylon. Rather, it is better to see Rachel as a metonymy for Israel.⁵ Just as Ephraim and Jacob are used to describe the nation, so Rachel is too.

Second, the focus of this verse is pain of her weeping, not the geography of her tomb, as many have suggested. Verse 15 begins by saying, "a voice is heard in Ramah." What kind of voice? One of intense sorrow, for "lamentation and weeping" qualify the voice. Again, "Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." The "are no more" relates to the exile; Rachel, as a reference to the mother of Israel, laments over her children's deportation to Babylon. Sorrow and sadness are the main point of the verse.

That being said, we do have one place name: Ramah. Where is that? And what does that place have to do with anything?

While there is debate about the exact location of Ramah, there is good reason to believe that it was a few miles north of Jerusalem. This location makes it a place located on the path of Judah's exile. Such an exilic location makes sense of 31:15. And this is confirmed when we look at Jeremiah 40:1–2, the only other place where this location is mentioned in Jeremiah. In those verses, we discover Jeremiah was imprisoned in that city at the time when "he [Nebuzaradan] took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon." Thus, Rachel weeps in proximity to Ramah because of the exile associated with that city. In this context we can make our third point: *the weeping is for her exiled children.*

⁵ You might say, 'What is a metonymy?' Well, just like you have synonyms (one words that is like another) and antonyms (one word that is opposite another), so you have metonyms (one word that takes the place of another).

Fourth, the weeping does not last long. While the exile to Babylon lasted seventy years, Jeremiah immediately follows Rachel's plight with words of comfort. And words specifically addressing the loss of children. In fact, as Nicholas Piotrowski notes, verse 15 functions as a foil. "What begins as lament over the exiles in verse 15 is *immediately quelled* in light of the nation's future hope, the certainty of their return. It serves almost as a foil for verses 16–17."⁶ And it is to these verses and their ensuing stanza we now turn.

31:16–22 – RESTORATION PROPER: God creates a new people who will repent and return to the land

Rachel refuses to be comforted for her children (v. 15) because only their return and restoration will satisfy her heart. Again, the strangeness of this verse stands out because the whole chapter is *about* restoring the children of Israel. Yet, this surrounding context highlights the reason for verse 15's inclusion, and now we see how the Lord responds to Rachel's plight in verses 16–22.

First, the Lord takes account of her tears: "keep your voice from weeping," he says (v. 16). He's not an uncaring stoic with no power to help, because when he says "stop weeping," he can and will restore her children. The end of the verse reads, "they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is a hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country." Twice he declares he will restore her children. But why will he restore her children?

In the middle of verse 16, Yahweh says: "for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord." Whose work are we talking about? And what is that work? Clearly, the antecedent to "your" is Rachel. Her weeping has not been in vain. Whereas Rachel, Jacob's wife, was separated from her son Benjamin (who she called Ben-Oni), because she died in childbirth (Genesis 35:16–20). This time, God would reward her labor, and restore her children. In other words, God in his mercy would bring back her children, as part of his plan of restoration.

Verses 17–22 continue this theme of restoration, regathering, and reuniting. Verses 18–19 recount the penitence of Israel, lamenting over their sin and requesting restoration—the word for "restored" is the technical term for repentance. So, in verses 18–19 we find a repentant heart in Israel. Verse 20 responds with God's warm affection for his "dear Son" Israel and promises to have mercy on him. Once again, "declares the Lord" strengthens the force of his words.

Then in verses 21–22, Yahweh gives Israel instructions for how to return, recognizing this new thing that God has created: namely, a people who embrace their maker. Poetically, he describes it as a "woman encircling a man." The phrase is ambiguous, but it likely envisions an unfaithful wife embracing her husband. Importantly, notice the way God must create a new people in order to bring about repentance and covenantal embrace.

⁶Piotrowski, *Matthew's New David*, 136.

In all these verses, therefore, what we find is comforting news that God is restoring to Israel what was lost in the exile. The sorrow of losing children—one of the most painful tragedies in human experience—will be overcome by the return of God's people to the land. This is the promise God gives to Rachel, and it sets up verses 23–40, where the promise of the New Covenant explains how these children can remain in the land.

31:23–40 – A NEW COVENANT based upon the forgiveness of sins and intended to bring about a new creation.

The climax of Jeremiah's first prophecy (ch. 30–31) in the Book of Consolation (ch. 30–33) is found in Jeremiah 31:23–40, as the Lord declares his intentions to bless his people with a new covenant. The new covenant "proper" is found in verses 31–34, but it is preceded and followed by important qualifications.

31:23–30

Verse 23 begins by repeating the opening promise of the prophecy (see 30:3), namely the restoration of their fortunes. The Lord promises Judah that their cities shall be returned and their souls satisfied (vv. 24–25). Apparently, this word came in a vision of the night and it comforted Jeremiah (v. 27).

Next, verse 27 picks up the future setting of this restoration. God promises to replant the nations of Israel and Judah "with the seed of man and the seed of beast," indicating the coming reunification of God's people and the prosperity that comes when God's people abide in God's covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 27–28). Verse 28 uses the imagery of Jeremiah's prophetic calling (cf. Jeremiah 1): what God had previously plucked up, broken down, overthrown, and destroyed, he would not build and plant.

The restoration is described in the physical terms of the old covenant, but it is promising a way of salvation in the terms of the new covenant. For verses 29–30 describe the "democratization" of the new covenant, when children will no longer be destroyed for the sins of their fathers, as in the days of Achan (Joshua 6–7) and Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16, esp. v. 27). Rather, every individual will stand to give an account for their own faith or unbelief. The proverb of old ("The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"), which speaks of the bitterness felt by sons in Israel for their fathers' sins, is going away. Instead, under the new covenant, every man will know the Lord and everyone will give an account for his own obedience.

Thus, the opening verses to this final section indicate a restoration of fortunes to God's people, a reunification of Judah and Israel, and a change in the structure of God's covenant itself. God is doing a new thing, without eviscerating the old. What was established with Israel under Moses is now coming to its completion, in the day when the new covenant is ratified.

31:31–34

Verse 31 repeats the forward gaze as it begins, “Behold, the days are coming . . .” And it reinforces its heavenly origin and divine certainty when it repeats “declares the Lord” four times. In fact, that these verses are the centerpiece of this prophecy stands out, not only from the fact that they are the ones which are quoted in the New Testament with greatest frequency, but because in its original context “declares the Lord” undergirds every promise made.

The first promise is that God is making a “new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” Continuing the theme of reunification, this promise indicates that God is restoring his blessing to all of his people. That Israel was scattered in the first exile and did not return to the land like Judah does not overturn the point of reunification. It may hint that an overly literal interpretation is not what Jeremiah has in mind. Since the divided kingdom of Rehoboam, Israel had always existed in less than ideal conditions. This promise of one house restores that design. But it may also leave room, as history will prove, for the inclusion of others to come into this covenant. In other words, the new covenant is not a return to Sinai, but a forward march to Zion where the son of David will come and shepherd all the nations—Israel and Judah, Egypt and Assyria (cf. Isaiah 19).

Next, this covenant will not be like the one made at Sinai. That covenant made between Yahweh and nation he redeemed out of Israel was established on the blood of bulls and goats; it was mediated by a sinful redeemer; and it only wrote a law on tablets of stone. As Hebrews will eventually explain, the “old covenant” could not accomplish the salvation needed by sinful mankind. In short, that covenant was impotent, unable to cleanse the conscience, and not intended to save men from the fires of hell. This covenant, the new covenant, is the one that saves men eternally. Even when Yahweh made that covenant with Israel, it was this new covenant that he was aiming at.

Third, the covenant God will make with his people comes with four main promises. Legally, it will write the law on their heart, explaining where the power to repent and believe and obey comes from. Relationally, God will be their God, and they will be his people, explaining why the people will no longer seek other gods. Epistemically, they will know the Lord, meaning there will not be a priesthood of mediators who are required to go between God and the people. Access to the Lord will be more immediate in this covenant. And last, spiritually, their sins will be remembered no more. This is the (logical and grammatical) foundation for all the promises.

The promise of pardon encapsulates and ensures all the other promises will stand. For it was always sin that broke the covenant in the past, but now with the assurance of pardon, Yahweh promises an everlasting covenant. By comparison, forgiveness of sins was only foreshadowed in the old covenant. The blood of bulls and goats effectively cleansed the flesh and purified the man-made temple, but it could never touch heaven. Now, in this covenant, sin will be fully pardoned and thus the other promises will stand unhindered.

That being said, there are many questions these promises raise: How can God forgive sin? How will all children know the Lord? What is the instrument by which the law is written on the heart? Comparison with the other prophets supply answers to these questions (see Isaiah 53, Joel 2, Ezekiel 36, to name a few), but from Jeremiah 31 it is plain, that the source of God's restoration is this new covenant—a covenant to which all the previous covenants pointed.

31:35–40

While verse 34 is definitive in its foundation for the new covenant, Yahweh goes further. In verses 35–36, he grounds his new covenant of redemption, in the faithfulness he's shown in his covenant with creation. He reasons that because he has never failed to maintain creation (and his covenant with creation), we can trust that this new covenant will stand. Verse 37 adds a second layer of confirmation from creation: if all creation can be measured and explored, then he will cast off all the offspring of Israel. What does he mean?

I take him to that creation is so vast and wonderful, it is impossible for us to measure it all or explore it all. Therefore, because we cannot know all of creation, he will not overturn his promise. In some ways, this is an odd comparison. Generally speaking, it denotes God's power. Like his questioning of Job, God displays his power and wisdom through his creation. But, I wonder if there is a more specific application? Creation in its near-infinite array of wisdom and wonder is beyond our comprehension. (This is clearly his point). But so is God's wisdom and wonder in redemption. It's impossible to know and understand all God is doing in redemption. Therefore, let creation be our guide. As his infinite wisdom and power is displayed in creation, so redemption. And just as we can trust God with the former (for he has never failed, vv. 35–36), so we can trust God with the latter. He will not fail in bringing to completion the redemption of all his people.

Maybe this goes beyond the scope of Jeremiah 31:37, but it is a glorious thought and wonderfully true. Paul has a spell when he realizes a portion of God's plan between Israel and the nations (see Romans 11:33–36). So too, Jeremiah 31 is the source of that Jew-Gentile fusion, as God in the fullness of times brings the nations to salvation through the new covenant promised to the houses of Israel and Judah.

Finally, verses 38–40 make one more futuristic promise (“Behold, the days are coming, declared the Lord, . . .”), when creation itself will be restored. Verse 38 promises the rebuilding of the city. But not only the city, for verse 39 speaks of a line going out to Gareb and Goah. These places are unknown to us, but we can conclude that from the rebuilt capitol there is an extension that goes into the world. Moreover, this rebuilding includes purification as the “whole valley of dead bodies and the ashes” is declared “sacred to the Lord.” In other words, accompanying the new covenant is the hope of a new creation.

To be sure Jeremiah 31 is not as explicit as Isaiah 65–66 concerning the new creation, but it is important to see the connection. Just as Yahweh confirms his covenant of

redemption in his covenant with creation, so the new covenant of redemption ultimately expands to include creation as well. As Jeremiah 31:27 says, “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.*” Notice, he doesn’t say the seed of Abraham (meaning Israel alone), nor does he only say the seed of man (excluding other creation). Rather, he implies that when restoration comes in the future, it will encompass all humanity (the elect from every nation) and all creation. Thus, the new covenant brings about the new creation.

This point of contact between covenant and creation is well-attested throughout Scripture and may help answer the question: When will these things take place?

From the light of the New Testament, we know Jesus established the new covenant with his death on Calvary. Hebrews explains in great detail how Christ’s death paid the penalty of the first covenant and inaugurated a new covenant. And all the New Testament shows how this covenant with Israel and Judah also included the Gentiles (just see the expansion in Luke’s Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome).

Still, what about creation itself? Have these promises of physical restoration taken place yet? The most obvious answer is “no.” Death still reigns in this fallen world. Jesus’ exaltation gave him authority over all creation, but in this age, we still suffer the effects of sin and death. That being said, we are not waiting his return for the “new creation.” For Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, that we who are in Christ are new creations in Christ, the old has gone and the new has come. Indeed, regeneration is the experience of new creation in the life of Christian. Yes, our bodies have not been redeemed yet, but our souls have.

In other words, like everything else in Christ’s coming, the new creation is already and not yet. The new covenant ratified by Jesus’ blood has forgiven sinners, written the law of God on their hearts, and restored them to right relationship with the God of life. In all these ways, the new covenant has imparted life. However, because the far-reaching effects of the new covenant have not been completed, i.e., we are still awaiting the identification of the sons (and daughters) of God, creation yet groans. This is Paul’s point in Romans 8:19–26.

Therefore, in Jeremiah 31, we do not need to conclude that new creation and physical restoration is only a future event. We do experience the resurrection life of Jesus even today. But because that spiritual life is given to men and women who inhabit fallen bodies, we are still awaiting the physical resurrection of our bodies, a resurrection that will come when all creation is regenerated (see Matthew 19:22), thus fulfilling every aspect of Jeremiah 30–31.

Until that day we wait and watch, even as we learn how to walk according to the new covenant with the power of the new life given to us in Christ. Indeed, what is described in Jeremiah 30–31 is not just for the ethnic people of Israel and Judah. As Christ and his disciples made known, this message of forgiveness, blessing, and life is offered to all

nations---first for the Jew and then the Gentile. For indeed, the new covenant is the content of the gospel and the reason why we can believe and proclaim the good news of God.

To Be Continued . . . dv

32:1–15 and 32:16–25

32:26–35

32:36–41

32:42–44

33:1–11

33:12–16

33:17–22

33:23–26