

## JEREMIAH 31:30-36[31-37]<sup>1</sup> WILL THE REAL "NEW COVENANT" PLEASE STAND UP!<sup>2</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

The passage Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37] is unique in that it contains the only instance of the phrase בְּרִית הַדְּוָשָׁה (*BRIT hadashah*), **a new covenant**, in the Hebrew Bible. Both Christians and Jews view this passage as messianic, albeit for different reasons.

Christian missionaries claim that this unique phrase foretells the advent of the Christian "New Covenant" that would replace what they call the "Old Covenant", a reference to Judaism's Torah. Consequently, this passage is an important so-called "proof text" in the portfolio of the Christian missionary.

A detailed analysis of the Hebrew text of this passage, within its proper context, demonstrates how this messianic passage lacks any relevance or connection to the New Testament and to Jesus, Christianity's Messiah. Rather, it contains several important prophecies that will be fulfilled in the messianic era.

### II. CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH TRANSLATIONS OF JEREMIAH 31:30-36[31-37]

Table II-1 displays side-by-side English renditions and the Hebrew text of the Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37]. The King James Version (KJV) translation is shown with pointers to cross-referenced passages in the New Testament. [These referential notations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The corresponding passages quoted below the table are from the KJV.]

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<sup>1</sup> The passage Jeremiah 31:30-36 appears in Christian Bibles as Jeremiah 31:31-37; hence the notation Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37] will be used when appropriate. [In some Jewish editions the passage is numbered as it appears in all Christian Bibles, where Chapter 31 starts with the verse that is normally the last verse in Chapter 30, namely, Jeremiah 30:25.]

<sup>2</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letters that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "h"
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
  - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
  - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ נִשְׁוּ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

**Table II-1 – Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37]**

King James Version Translation		Jewish Translation from the Hebrew		The Hebrew Text	
Jeremiah 31		Jeremiah 31		ירמיה לא	
31	Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a <b>new covenant</b> with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. <sup>(i) (ii)</sup>	30	"Behold, days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will form with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah <b>a new covenant</b> ."	ל	הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נִאֲס־יְהוָה וְכָרַתִּי אֶת-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בֵּית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה :
32	Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although <b>I was an husband</b> unto them, saith the LORD. <sup>(i)</sup>	31	Not like the covenant that I formed with their forefathers on the day I held them by the hand to take them out of the land of Egypt, for they broke My covenant, although <b>I was a husband</b> unto them," says the Lord.	לא	לֹא כְבָרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת-אֲבוֹתֶם בְּיוֹם הַחֲזִיקִי בְיָדָם לְהוֹצִיאֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר-הִמָּה הִפְרוּ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי וְאֲנֹכִי בַעֲלָתִי בָּם נִאֲס־יְהוָה :
33	But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put <b>my law</b> in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>(i) (iii)</sup>	32	"For this is the covenant that I shall form with the House of Israel after those days," says the Lord; "I will place <b>My Torah</b> within them, and I will inscribe it upon their heart; and I will be their God and they shall be a people for Me.	לב	כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרֹת אֶת-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם נִאֲס־יְהוָה נְתַתִּי אֶת-תּוֹרָתִי בְקִרְבָּם וְעַל-לִבָּם אֶכְתְּבֶנָּה וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהִמָּה יְהִי-לִי לְעָם :
34	<b>And</b> they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall <b>all</b> know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. <sup>(iv)</sup>	33	<b>And</b> no longer they shall teach, a man his neighbor, and a man his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for they shall <b>all</b> know Me, from their smallest to their greatest," says the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will no longer remember."	לג	וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת-אָחִיו לֵאמֹר דַּעוּ אֶת-יְהוָה כִּי-כֹלֶם יִדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמִקְטָנָם וְעַד-גְּדֹלָם נִאֲס־יְהוָה כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעוֹנֵם וְלִחַטָּאתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר-עוֹד :
35	Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:	34	So said the Lord, Who gives the sun to illuminate by day, the laws of the moon and the stars to illuminate at night, Who stirs up the sea to make its waves roar, the Lord of Hosts is His name:	לד	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה נֹתֵן שֶׁמֶשׁ לְאוֹר יוֹמָם חֻקֵּת יָרַח וְכוכְבִּים לְאוֹר לַיְלָה רָגַע הַיָּם וַיִּהְמוּ גִלְיוֹ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ :

36	If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.	35	"If these laws could depart from before Me," says the Lord, "so will the seed of Israel cease being a nation before Me for all time."	אם יִמְשׁוּ הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה מִלְפָּנַי נְאֻם-יְהוָה גַּם זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבְּתוּ מֵהָיְוֹת גּוֹי לְפָנַי כְּל־הַיָּמִים :	לה
37	Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.	36	So said the Lord, "if the heavens above will be measured and the foundations of the earth below will be fathomed, so too will I reject all the seed of Israel because of all they did," says the Lord.	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱמִימָדוּ שָׁמַיִם מִלְמַעְלָה וַיִּחְקְרוּ מוֹסְדֵי-אָרֶץ לְמִטָּה גַם-אֲנִי אֶמְאָס בְּכָל-זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ נְאֻם-יְהוָה :	לו

(i) Hebrews 8:8-12(KJV) – See Section III.A

(ii) Luke 22:20(KJV) - Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

2Corinthians 3:6(KJV) - Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

(iii) Hebrews 10:16(KJV) - This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

2Corinthians 3:3(KJV) - Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

(iv) 1Thessalonians 4:9(KJV) - But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

John 6:45(KJV) - It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

Romans 11:27(KJV) - For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Hebrews 10:17(KJV) - And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Overall, the two translations are remarkably similar; there are no major issues of mistranslation to be resolved. However, as noted in Table II-1, this passage is cross-referenced with the New Testament on several occasions and, when "quoted" in Chapter 8 of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is subjected to significant manipulation by its author in an attempt to change the message, as will demonstrated below.

### III. OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

#### A. The Christian Perspective

The Christian perspective on Jeremiah's new covenant is contained in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament. The author first states the rationale:

**Hebrews 8:6-8a(KJV) – (6) But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. (7) For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. (8) For finding fault with them, he saith, ...**

Following the opening phrase in Hebrews 8:8, the author continues with a heavily edited version of Jeremiah 31:30-33[31-34] that is shown below with highlights color-coded to the texts shown in Table II-1 above:

**Hebrews 8:8b-12(KJV)** (8) ... Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: (9) Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. (10) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: (11) And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. (12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Note how the author designed this passage to “track” Jeremiah 31:30-33, as indicated via the respectively colored highlighted portions.

The author then concludes his discussion by explaining the status of the New Covenant relative to the Old Covenant:

**Hebrews 8:13(KJV)** - In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The overall message here is that Jeremiah's בְּרִית הַדְּוָשָׁה is the “Covenant of the Cross”, fulfilled some 2,000 years ago when, according to Christian theology, the blood of Jesus was shed for the sins of mankind. In other words, the author proclaims that the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai had expired; therefore, the Jewish people need no longer keep the commandments of the Torah – the “Old Covenant” – since salvation now comes with the belief in Jesus as high priest, sacrifice, lord, and messiah, as proclaimed in the Gospels:

**Matthew 26:28(KJV)** - For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Christian theology holds that the New Covenant has replaced the existing covenant, the Torah, which was deemed old and flawed. This is the basis for the claim that Jeremiah's בְּרִית הַדְּוָשָׁה is a prophecy fulfilled with the death of Jesus on the cross, an event that led to the writing of Christianity's New Testament, the one that, for Christians, has replaced the (Mosaic) Law.<sup>3</sup>

## B. The Jewish Perspective

A correct reading and understanding of the Hebrew text shows unequivocally that Jeremiah 31:30-36 is not a prophecy that was fulfilled during the first century C.E., or at any other time in the past. Rather, this passage contains two of several significant prophecies from the Jewish messianic vision that are yet to be fulfilled, namely, the ingathering and restoration of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, and the existence of a state of the universal knowledge of God.

<sup>3</sup> In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek noun διαθήκη (*diatheke*), which means a covenant or a testament, is used for the Hebrew noun בְּרִית.

## 1. Ingathering and Restoration of the Jewish People

The passage begins with Jeremiah addressing both the House of Israel and the House of Judah, which indicates that he is speaking to an ingathered, but not yet united, Jewish people. This was not the situation that existed at the time those words were written, nor was it the case in the first century C.E. The House of Israel has not existed as a people from the time Assyria had exiled the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah, well over 700 years before the first century C.E.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, during the first century C.E. the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. Thus, not even the House of Judah was all present in the Land of Israel at that time – the Jews had been exiled into the Diaspora and were dispersed among the nations much more than in their previous exile, in Babylon, that followed the destruction of the First Temple.

The fact that the era of which Jeremiah is speaking has not yet arrived – a future time when House of Judah and House of Israel will be restored and reunited in their rightful place, the land of Israel – is addressed elsewhere by Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 16:15 - But, As the Lord lives, Who brought the people of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands where He had driven them; and I will bring them back to their land that I gave to their forefathers.**

This is also foretold by several other prophets:

**Isaiah 11:12 - And He shall carry a banner for the nations, and He shall collect the lost of Israel, and the dispersed one of Judah He shall gather from the four corners of the earth.**

**Ezekiel 37:21-22 – (21) And say to them, Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will take the Children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them on every side, and I will bring them into their land; (22) And I will make them into one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall no longer be two nations, and neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more.**

**Zechariah 10:6 - And I will strengthen the House of Judah, and the House of Joseph I will save, and I will get them settled for I have mercy on them, and they shall be as though I had not neglected them; for I am the Lord their God, and will respond to them.**

Note how, in Jeremiah 31:30[31], the Prophet starts by speaking of "**... days are coming ...**" where both the House of Israel and the House of Judah are mentioned. Then, in Jeremiah 31:32[33], only the House of Israel is mentioned, when the Prophet speaks of an era "**... after those days ...**", i.e., the days after the scattered Jewish people are repatriated to the Land of Israel and then reunited under one kingdom called Israel.

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<sup>4</sup> The Northern Kingdom of Israel, i.e., the House of Israel, ceased to exist when the Assyrians conquered the territory and ended the reign of Hoshea ben Elah, its last king, in 722 B.C.E.

The message here is unambiguous – the dispersed Jewish people will be returned to the Land of Israel and will be united once again as one nation, Israel, led by the promised Jewish King/Messiah.

## 2. Universal Knowledge of God

Jeremiah 31:33[34] is a verse in this passage that is often overlooked or ignored by Christian missionaries. This verse possesses two interesting characteristics. First, in the Hebrew text, the verse starts with the conjunction וְ (V<sup>e</sup>), **and**, which indicates that Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37] is not a passage made up of two separate prophecies. Rather, the conjunction, וְ, at the beginning of Jeremiah 31:33[34] connects it with the preceding verse, Jeremiah 31:32[33], which makes Jeremiah 31:33[34] a continuation of the earlier prophecy and not the start of a separate prophecy.

**Jeremiah 31:33[34] – "And no longer shall they teach, a man his neighbor, and a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know Me, from their smallest to their greatest," says the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will no longer remember."**

Second, this verse speaks of a time when all of Israel will be equal in the knowledge of God, i.e., in terms of their reverence for Him and walking in His ways, much in the manner that the Prophet Micah states:

**Micah 6:8 – Man has told you what is good; but what does the Lord demand of you? To do justice, to love loving-kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.**

According to the Hebrew Bible, this will be the prelude to a universal knowledge of God among the nations:

**Zechariah 8:23 - Thus said the Lord of Hosts: In those days, ten men of all the languages of the nations shall grasp and hold on to the corner of the garment of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."**

*Is there a universal knowledge of God in the world today? If that were the case, then why are Christian missionaries still spread all over the globe, spending many millions of dollars annually, trying to spread the "good news", teaching people to "know the (Christian) Lord"? Is this not in complete contradiction to Jeremiah 31:33[34]? The presence of Christian missionaries throughout the world is a *de-facto* admission that this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled! *What does this imply concerning the Christian "New Covenant"?* Bad news!!!*

The message of Jeremiah 31:33[34], about a universal knowledge of God in the messianic era, is also echoed by other prophets:

**Isaiah 11:9 - They shall neither harm nor destroy on My entire Holy Mountain; for the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters of the sea cover up [the sea floor].**

**Zechariah 14:9 - And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One, and His Name One.**

The Jewish perspective correctly declares that the prophecy of Jeremiah's בְּרִית הַדָּשָׁה has not yet come to pass; its fulfillment is coupled with Israel being united again in the Land of Israel and with a prevailing universal knowledge of God.

#### **IV. DOES THIS PASSAGE FORETELL THE ADVENT OF THE CHRISTIAN NEW TESTAMENT?**

The Christian and Jewish perspectives cannot both be valid. Though the Jewish perspective clearly demonstrates how this messianic passage has not yet been realized, there still remains the issue of the nature of Jeremiah's בְּרִית הַדָּשָׁה, which is explicitly mentioned in Jeremiah 31:30[31], and then alluded to throughout the rest of the passage. Further analysis of the passage helps to resolve this issue.

##### **A. An Attempt to Reverse the Prophetic Message**

In his deliberate revision of the original text of Jeremiah 31:31[32], the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews intended to solve a serious theological problem for Christianity – the prophesied eternity of the Jewish people and the Torah – he attempted to reverse the Prophet's original message.

Hebrews 8:9 appears to be "quoting" Jeremiah 31:31[32]. However, the Hebrew phrase indicate that the phrase אֲשֶׁר-הִמָּה הִפְרוּ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי וְאֲנֹכִי בְּעֵלְתִּי בָם in Jeremiah 31:31[32] is rendered in both Jewish and KJV translations as, "for they broke my covenant, although I was a(n) husband unto them", while at Hebrews 8:9 it is rendered, "because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not". The highlighted phrases are obviously not congruent in their context.

The Hebrew term for the English phrase **I was a husband** is בְּעֵלְתִּי (*ba'Alti*). The identically conjugated verb appears also, and in the same context, at Jeremiah 3:14. The Hebrew root verb בעל (*BET-Ayin-Lamed*) is most commonly applied throughout the Hebrew Bible in the context of **[to be] espoused**. Of its 16 applications, in 11 cases the verb בעל refers to **espousal**, in one case it is used in a metaphorical sense, and in the remaining four cases it is used in the context of **[to be] a master** over someone or something. The Hebrew noun בעל (*BA'al*) derives from this root verb and is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible. This noun can mean **a husband** (either married or betrothed) or **a master** and, in various combinations with other terms, it is used to describe someone who possesses certain attributes, qualities, or skills.

*So, how can the state of "being a husband" in a passage be understood, or turned into, a state of "not regarding" in its alleged "mirror image"? Clearly, this can only be done through a deliberate attempt to change the context. Relative to the verb בעל in the context of espousal or mastership that is used at Jeremiah 31:31[32], disregarding someone, as Hebrews 8:9 has it, would be the *antithesis**

of being a husband or master of someone. To get a good measure of the huge gap that exists between Hebrews 8:9 and Jeremiah 31:31[32], contrast the message from Hebrews 8:9 with the message from following passage:

**Hosea 2:21-22[19-20] – (21) And I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy. (22) And I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you shall know the Lord.**

These two verses are recited as a Jew dons his phylacteries in the morning, a ritual that carries him back to the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, when God effected a 'spiritual marriage' with Israel, with the Torah as dowry – this was for eternity.

Another interesting aspect of this attempt to revise Jeremiah's original message is that it actually ends up contradicting one of the main messages of the Gospels – that Jesus did not come to change "The Law" but to fulfill it:

**Matthew 5:17-19(KJV) – (17) Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (18) For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (19) Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

Oh, the tangled webs they weave in their effort to deceive.<sup>5</sup>

## **B. Will the New Covenant Involve A New Torah/Law?**

What is a covenant anyway? *The American Heritage Dictionary* has the following definition:<sup>6</sup>

**covenant** *n.* 1. A binding agreement made between two or more persons or parties; compact. 2. *Law.* a. A formal sealed agreement or contract. b. A suit to recover damages for violation of such a contract.

In other words, a covenant is a contractual agreement between two parties. Concerning the case in point here, the Covenant is merely the agreement made by the Israelites to accept and obey the Torah in return for the promises made by God.

The opening promise to Israel is made just before the revelation at Mount Sinai:

**Exodus 19:5 - And now, if you will obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth.**

The T's&C's (terms and conditions) of this contract consist of blessings (rewards) that would accrue by obedience and warnings and curses (consequences) that

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<sup>5</sup> A paraphrase of a classic quote from Sir Walter Scott's poem *Marmion*, Canto VI. Stanza 17:  
"O, what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practise to deceive!"

<sup>6</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 334, Second College Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company (1991)



would result from disobedience. Detailed blessings earned by obedience are enumerated in Leviticus 26:3-13, in Deuteronomy 11:13-25, and in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The wages of disobedience are detailed in Leviticus 26:14-39, and again in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

The “contractual agreement” along with its “T’s&C’s” were presented to the Israelites following the national revelation at Mount Sinai, and the people voiced their acceptance:

**Exodus 24:3-4,7** – (3) And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances, and all the people answered in unison and said, “**All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.**” (4) And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel.  
(7) And he [Moses] took **the Book of the Covenant [סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית] (sefer ha'brit)** and read it for the people to hear, and they said, “**All that the Lord spoke we will do and we will hear.**”

It is important to understand and remember that the Covenant is the contractual agreement to obey the Torah; it is not the Torah itself. The Torah contains the precepts that are to be obeyed, and that is why it is referred to as סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית, **the Book of the Covenant.** Thus, even if Israel were to break its agreement to obey the Torah, that does not change or invalidate the Torah!

The fact that this בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה will not replace the Torah is noted by Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 31:32[33]** – “For this is the covenant that I shall form with the House of Israel after those days,” says the Lord, “**I will place My Torah [תּוֹרַתִּי (torat)] within them, and I will inscribe it upon their heart; and I will be their God and they shall be a people for Me.**”

The Hebrew term תּוֹרָה (**TORAH**) is applied in the Hebrew Bible in two general contexts. First, it is used to refer to **rules, doctrines, or other instructions for behavior**, i.e., laws, statutes, and ordinances. Second, it is used to refer to the **Mosaic Law**, which is commonly called **Torah**. The context of the Hebrew term תּוֹרַתִּי, **My Torah**, in Jeremiah 31:32 is unambiguous – it refers to the Torah. This is consistent with the way Jeremiah uses the root noun תּוֹרָה throughout his Book, in which the noun appears in various forms on 11 occasions. The remaining ten instances of תּוֹרָה in the Book of Jeremiah are at Jeremiah 2:8, 6:19, 8:8, 9:12[13], 16:11, 18:18, 26:4, 32:23, 44:10,23. In all ten cases the reference is to the Torah, as it also is at Jeremiah 31:32[33]. It is interesting to note that even the KJV translators render all 11 instances as “the law”, or “my law”, or “his law”, as appropriate in the respective passages, clearly indicating this is “The Law”, the term commonly used by New Testament authors in referring to the Mosaic Law, i.e., the Torah.

**Sidebar note:** Jeremiah 31:32[33] would have been the ideal place for God to let us know, through the Prophet, that this new Covenant will be a **new Torah**. All that would have had to be said in Hebrew is תּוֹרָה הַדְּשָׁה (**TORAH hadasha**), a **new Torah**, or

תּוֹרַתִּי הַחֲדָשָׁה (*torati ha'hadaSHAH*), **My new Torah**, instead of תּוֹרַתִּי, and the deed would have been accomplished.

Therefore, Jeremiah is not speaking of a new Covenant that replaces the previous one. Rather, he is referring to a *renewed* Covenant, i.e., the original contractual agreement that was made at Mount Sinai will be renewed.

### C. The New Covenant vs. the Original Sinai Covenant

In Jeremiah 31:31[32], the Prophet declares the new covenant to be:

**Not like the covenant that I formed with their forefathers on the day I took them by the hand to take them out of the land of Egypt, for they broke My covenant ...**

*How will this new Covenant differ from the original Sinai Covenant?* The only difference between the two covenants is the place where סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית resides. In the original Sinai Covenant, it was placed in the mouths of the Israelites:

**Exodus 13:9 - And it shall be to you for a sign upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes, in order that the Torah of the Lord shall be in your mouth; for with a mighty hand has the Lord brought you out of Egypt.**

And this contract was verbally agreed to, as indicated in Exodus 24:3,7 above. On the other hand, according to Jeremiah 31:32[33], God says, "... I will place **My Torah** within them and I will inscribe it upon their heart ...", i.e., the new Covenant will be placed within the people. In other words, this new Covenant will simply be an integral part of the people of Israel and, thus, it will become just part of the Jewish way of life.

### D. The Everlasting Sinai Covenant

Christian missionaries often use the phrase, "**for they broke My covenant**", from Jeremiah 31:31[32], to support their claim that the original Sinai Covenant is no longer in force. After all, they claim, it is clearly stated here that Israel broke the contract and, therefore, the New Testament is the new Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, and it replaces the "Old Covenant/Testament".

*Is this claim valid?* Evidently, those who make this claim do not understand the difference between "the Covenant" and "the Book of the Covenant", which was explained above. The Hebrew Bible teaches that, although the people of Israel often fell short of fulfilling their end of the agreement made at Mount Sinai and, in effect, broke the Covenant, God has stated on many occasions that He will not break His Covenant with Israel:

**Leviticus 26:44-45 – (44) And despite all this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them nor will I reject them to annihilate them, thereby breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. (45) And I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be a God to them; I am the Lord.**

**Judges 2:1** - And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said [in God's name], "I will bring you up from Egypt, and I have brought you to the land which I swore to your forefathers, and I said, **'I will never break My covenant with you.'**"

**Ezekiel 16:59-60** – (59) For thus said the Lord God [to Jerusalem]: "I have done with you in accordance to that which you have done, that you have despised an oath in breaking a covenant. (60) **Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant.**

**Psalms 105:8-10** – (8) **He has remembered His covenant forever**, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations. (9) That which He had made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac; (10) And He established it for Jacob as a law, **and for Israel as an everlasting covenant;**

There is no argument about the fact that Israel has strayed from the path many times since the promise was made at Mount Sinai, and for which Israel has suffered the consequences. Yet, the Hebrew Bible clearly shows that God will neither break that Covenant nor replace the Torah - the Torah is eternal!

## **E. Additional Difficulties with the Christian Interpretation**

Because Christian missionaries concentrate on the first few verses, discussions and analyses of Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37] generally tend to focus on the first half of the passage while the remainder of the passage is often given short shrift or ignored, even though it contains additional information that Christian missionaries would find quite challenging to their message.

First, it was already noted earlier that Jeremiah 31:33[34] is a continuation of the prophecy from the previous verse, not a separate prophetic statement, and it speaks of the universal knowledge of God. But note how this verse ends:

**Jeremiah 31:33[34]** – ... says the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will no longer remember."

Once Israel has been gathered in the Land of Israel from the Diaspora and this *renewed* covenant is placed in the hearts of the people, their past sins will be unconditionally forgiven and forgotten by God. Not only is there no mention of any required sacrificial offerings for this to take place, there is no mention here of God sending someone (His "only begotten Son" to Christians) to take on Israel's sins and serve as a sacrificial offering for the purpose of expiating these sins.

Second, the last two verses of the passage, vs. 35-36[36-37] unambiguously affirm the continuity of Israel as God's chosen nation:

**Jeremiah 31:35-36[36-37]** – (35) "If these laws could depart from before Me," says the Lord, "so will the seed of Israel cease being a nation before Me for all time." (36) So said the Lord, "if the heavens above will be measured and the foundations of the earth below will be fathomed, so too will I reject all the seed of Israel because of all they did," says the Lord.

Jeremiah uses the immutable laws of nature, stated in Jeremiah 31:34[35] as metaphors, to ascertain Israel's status as an eternal nation before God,

regardless of its past sinfulness. This invalidates the "Replacement Theology" followed by some segments within Christianity, which is based on the (false) premise that, because of its stubborn refusal to accept Jesus, God has rejected Israel and replaced it with Christians as His chosen people.

The evidence presented Sections IV.A-E above illustrates how the claim by Christian missionaries, that Jeremiah's prophecy points to the New Testament, contradicts the message of the Hebrew Bible. Quite to the contrary, the Hebrew Bible establishes the eternity of both the original Covenant and the Torah, along with the eternity of Israel as God's chosen nation.

## V. SUMMARY

The analysis presented in this essay demonstrates that the correct reading and interpretation of Jeremiah 31:30-36[31-37] refutes the claims made by Christian missionaries, and exposes the attempted revision by author of the Epistle to the Hebrews of Jeremiah's prophetic message concerning the eternity of the Jewish people and the Torah and turn it into a prophecy about the advent of Jesus and Christianity's New Testament.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible prophets foretell that, in the messianic era, the Jewish people will be observing the commandments of the Torah:

**Isaiah 2:3** - And many people shall go and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths;" for out of Zion shall Torah emerge, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

**Ezekiel 37:24** - And My servant David shall be king over them, and one shepherd shall be for them all; and they shall follow My ordinances, and observe My statutes, and perform them.

**Malachi 3:22[4:4]** - Remember the Torah of Moses My servant; that which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, statutes and ordinances.

It is evident that Jeremiah's use of the term **בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה**, **a new covenant**, does not involve the replacement of the (eternal) Torah by the New Testament. Rather, it signals a renewal of the original Sinai Covenant, which was declared to be everlasting, through its placement within us along with **סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית**, **the Book of the Covenant**, to make them an inseparable part of the Jewish way of life. The term **בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה** would be meaningless in any context other than one that describes the revitalized original Sinai Covenant, along with the Torah, which cannot be replaced, superseded, or rescinded.