

Jeremiah 31:31-34ⁱⁱ

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says 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. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

ⁱⁱ About the First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry to Judah about 627 BCE and ended it around 580 BCE. He thus spans the period leading up to Judah’s final defeat by the Babylonians (587 BCE), the destruction of the temple and the exile of much of the population. Today’s lesson comes from a section, chapters 30–31, called the “book of consolation.” In it are gathered Jeremiah’s oracles of hope for an eventual renewal and restoration for Israel.

In today’s passage, Jeremiah looks forward to a “new covenant” (v. 31). Unlike the old, this one will be written on the heart, which in Hebrew thought is the seat not of the emotions but of the will. This covenant is not new in content, for the Torah, the written law, is not replaced. It is new, however, in the means of its realization. The internalization of the covenant will enable people to keep it. The will of the individual shall become one with the will of God. There will be no need of teachers, for all will know the Lord, not just in intellectual terms but in the Hebrew sense of a close, intense and intimate personal relationship