

Background Information for Jeremiah 31



“In Ramah is heard the sound of sobbing, bitter weeping! Rachel mourns for her children; she refuses to be consoled for her children— they are no more!” (Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel, the wife of Jacob/Israel, throughout Scripture is pointed to as the symbol for both sorrowful mothers in general as well as the sorrowful mother of Israel itself. Here Jeremiah explains that the time is coming for the end of Israel’s constant state of sorrow. He states, “How long will you continue to hesitate, rebellious daughter? The Lord has created a new thing upon the earth: woman encompasses man” (Jer 31:22). The most common interpretation throughout the Tradition is that this image refers to Jesus enclosed within the womb of Mary. I am convinced this is the correct interpretation for two reasons. One, the context surrounding this text is the announcement of a New Covenant. The new thing naturally points to what is described in Jeremiah 31:31-35. Two, Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, is the Sorrowful Mother par excellence, and can correctly and properly described as the mother of Israel. She is the embodiment of the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. She is the mother of the New Israel, the chosen Son of God.

In Jeremiah 31:27-40 the announcement, description, and result of the New Covenant is explained. With echoes of a complete start over akin to the Flood and the Noahic covenant and its effects, Jeremiah states “I will place my law within them, and **write it upon their hearts**; I will be their God, and they shall be my people...for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin.” The old law was not written on the hearts of the Israelites. They had no interior power to help them in their attempts to uphold the law in righteousness. Now, Jesus, the resurrected new Israel, has instituted a New Covenant to be upheld through a new interior law, which is chiefly the very grace itself of Holy Spirit. This “new thing” is given to those who receive the sacrament of Baptism and persevere in faith in the Mother’s Son that the sacrament supplies. You are all children of God, and you have the power within you to believe and follow THE Divine Child of God.