

Jeremiah 31:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.

Analysis

How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. This enigmatic verse challenges Israel's wavering and announces unprecedented divine action. **How long wilt thou go about** uses *chamaq* (חָמַק), meaning to turn away, wander aimlessly, or avoid. God confronts Israel's indecision—oscillating between repentance and rebellion, unable to commit. **O thou backsliding daughter** (הַבַּת הַשׁוֹבֶבָה, *ha-bat ha-shovevah*) uses *shuv* in its negative sense: apostate, wayward, turning away from covenant.

For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth announces divine initiative that breaks historical patterns. **Created** (*bara*, בָּרָא) is the same verb used in Genesis 1:1—God bringing into existence what previously did not exist. **A new thing** (*chadashah*, חֲדָשָׁה, feminine) is unprecedented, not mere repetition. The phrase **A woman shall compass a man** (נִקְבָּה תְּסֹבֵב גָּבָר, *neqevah tesovev gaver*) has challenged interpreters for millennia. *Tesovev* (surround, encompass, protect) and the reversal of normal gender roles suggest radical new reality.

Christian interpretation traditionally sees messianic prophecy: the virgin birth, where a woman (Mary) encompasses/contains the man (Christ the God-man) in her womb. Others see the new covenant reversing Israel's unfaithfulness—the weak (woman) protecting the strong (man) pictures God's transforming power. The 'new thing' is certainly the New Covenant of vv. 31-34, inaugurated by Christ.

Historical Context

This verse sits at the heart of Jeremiah's 'Book of Consolation' (chapters 30-33), transitioning from promises of return to promises of the New Covenant. The 'new thing' God creates transcends mere return from Babylon—it requires divine intervention creating new hearts (v. 33), new relationship with God, and ultimately a new creation. The virgin birth represents the supreme 'new thing'—God becoming man, inaugurating the New Covenant in His blood. The early church fathers unanimously interpreted this verse messianically, seeing Mary's conception of Jesus as the unprecedented 'woman encompassing a man.'

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does our tendency to 'go about' (waver in commitment) delay experiencing God's 'new thing' for our lives?
2. What does it mean that God must 'create' (bara) something new rather than merely improve what exists?
3. In what ways does the virgin birth and incarnation represent the ultimate 'new thing' that reverses the curse and enables covenant restoration?

Interlinear Text

עַד H5704	מַתִּי H4970	תִּתְחַמֵּק יֵן H2559	הַבַּת H1323	הַשׁוֹבֵב הַ H7728	כִּי H3588
		How long wilt thou go about	daughter	O thou backsliding	
בָּרָא H1254	יְהוָה H3068	מַדְּשָׁה H2319	בְּאֶרֶץ H776	נִקְבָּה הַ H5347	וְיָס וְיָבֵב H5437
hath created	for the LORD	a new thing	in the earth	A woman	shall compass
גִּבּוֹר: a man H1397					

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 49:4 (Parallel theme): Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me?

Isaiah 7:14 (References Lord): Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Jeremiah 2:23 (Parallel theme): How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways;

Jeremiah 2:36 (Parallel theme): Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria.

Jeremiah 3:22 (References Lord): Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

Jeremiah 7:24 (Parallel theme): But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

Jeremiah 2:18 (Parallel theme): And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?

Jeremiah 4:14 (Parallel theme): O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

Jeremiah 3:6 (References Lord): The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

Genesis 3:15 (Parallel theme): And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.