Narrative introductory formulae in Jer. ii 1 and Jer. iii 6 define the pericope Jer. ii 1-iii 5 as a separate literary unit. This pericope is characterized by a multitude of repetitions. These can be accounted for by the emotional state of the speaker. A complicating factor in this part is the frequent change of expression: sometimes a human audience is addressed, for which purpose verbal forms in the second person are used, sometimes a third party, over the heads of the human audience, for which verbal forms in the third person are used. The human audience appears in Jer. ii 2, 5-9, 16-25, 28-31a, 33-7, iii 1-5. It is addressed as “Jerusalem” (Jer. ii 2), as “Judah” (Jer. ii 28), as “people of Jacob” (Jer. ii 4) or as “Israel” (Jer. ii 4). What really occurs in Jer. ii 1-iii 5 is the following: the prophet places the history of Judah/Jerusalem (according to Jer. ii 2, 28, the actual addressee) in a historical perspective, namely within the framework of the history of the last decades of the existence of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. He addresses Judah as if it were Israel. He draws a parallel between both kingdoms, because the histories of the two kingdoms have become very similar. Jeremiah recognizes the pattern of the last decades of the existence of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes in the contemporary history of Judah and Jerusalem. Speaking on behalf of God he wants to wake the people up to the fact that it will follow the same road to destruction as the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, if it continues on the road taken.

In addressing the human audience a further distinction can be made between
(A) an address in the second person feminine singular (Jer. ii 2, 16-25, 33-7, iii 1-5);
(B) an address in the second person masculine singular (Jer. ii 28);
(G) an address in the second person masculine plural (Jer. ii 5-9, 29-31a).
In cases A and B the people are seen collectively, in C as a collection of individuals. This observation is of importance for the question of the responsibility for what happens. In A and B the people as a whole are made responsible; in the latter case, each person’s individual responsibility is pointed out.

The third party is addressed in Jer. ii 3, 10-15, 26-7, 31b-32. Who this third party is, apparently present as a witness at the
dispute between God and the people, is not clear. It could be the heavens, mentioned in Jer. ii 12, which there are also described as executioners. Besides, one could also think of a heavenly court council, for which image one can be referred to Ps. lxxxii 2.

In most cases it is clear where the wording changes. In one case it is not obvious: the transition from speaking in the second person in Jer. ii 28-30 to speaking in the third person in Jer. ii 31b-32. It specifically concerns the status of the words ḫḏwr ṭm at the beginning of Jer. ii 31. The opinion to be maintained here is that these words form Jeremiah’s conclusion of the pericope Jer. ii 28-30, and that these words form a separate clause.

The words ḫḏwr ṭm have no equivalent in the LXX. This translation has a clause at the end of Jer. ii 30, which does not occur in the MT, καὶ οὐκ ἐξοβήθητε, and then continues in Jer. ii 31 as follows: ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου Τάδε λέγει κύριος. In the Peshitta one does find a rendering of the words: ῆτων δῆ, as well as in the Vulgate: generatio vestra. I take the MT as a starting-point.

Research in existing literature about this verse Jer. ii 31 tells us that there are different views on the words ḫḏwr ṭm. There are exegetes who follow the text of the LXX. Others consider the words to be a later annotation of a reader, originally placed in the margin but secondarily incorporated in the text. Again, others argue that the words should be considered as part of the original text, and should therefore be interpreted as part of the address, Jer. ii 31a. A. van Selms considers the words of Jer. ii 31a (ḥḏwr ...) to be the conclusion, coming from Jeremiah, of the preceding pericope, at least if it is not to be assumed, says Van Selms, that the Masoretic phrasing is the result of a corruption of the text. W.L. Holladay pleads in defence of the words ḫḏwr ṭm as coming from Jeremiah. However, he considers them to form a question (ḥḏwr is vocalized as ḥādōr) and translates as follows: “Are you a community?” A.B. Ehrlich has a vision which is in a class of its own; he wants to read: ḫr ḫlṭm râḇā dibber yy, and translates: “Seht doch, spricht JHVH.”

There is a clear difference in contents between Jer. ii 29-30 and Jer. ii 31b-32. The former is a divine complaint against his people, in which God accuses it of being incapable of being converted. The latter is a divine self-justification against the undefined third party. Jer. ii 31a shares with Jer. ii 29-30 the second person masculine plural, because of the form ṭm. This might lead to a conclusion like