



Lesson 21 / September 17, 2017

THE NEW COVENANT

Jeremiah 31:31-40

Key Verse

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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.”

Jeremiah 31:33

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jeremiah describe the sins of Israel? Consider Jeremiah 2:11-13.
2. Can the same rebuke be made of you?
3. In Jeremiah 7:1-4 and 8-11, how has the temple become a false security?
4. Where do we find false security today?
5. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. How is the new covenant unlike the old covenant?
6. How does Jesus fulfill the new covenant? (i.e. Hebrews 8:6-13)
7. Have you entered into this new covenant with God?
8. How shall we live today as members of the new covenant?

Question 41: Why does Jeremiah lament?

Short Answer: *Jeremiah laments because Israel has broken her covenant with God.*

Full Answer: *Jeremiah laments with poems of sadness because Israel has broken her covenant with God and been sent into exile; and the city of Jerusalem now lies desolate and the temple is destroyed.*

Question 42: What is the promise of the new covenant?

Short Answer: *God promises a coming day when he will forgive their sins and give them new hearts.*

Full Answer: *God promises a coming day when he will make a new covenant with his people, when he will forgive their sins and give them new hearts by his Spirit so they will be restored to faithfulness as his people.*

Summary

“A New Hope.” This is the title of the first Star Wars film released in 1977. In the movie, Princess Leia leads the Rebel Alliance against Darth Vader and the Galactic Empire in a classic battle of good versus evil, light versus darkness. The Empire appears to be winning the battle with their new weapon, the Death Star, and its ability to destroy entire planets. Even worse, Princess Leia has been captured and the Rebel Alliance is in disarray. But from within the dark shadow of this imposing empire, a new hope emerges in the form of a young Jedi, Luke Skywalker, who has gained access to architectural plans for the Death Star. Can Luke and the Rebel Alliance destroy the Death Star before it destroys them?

In our Bibles, the prophet Jeremiah lived and prophesied from about 627BC to 586BC, during the years after the northern kingdom was captured by Assyria and in the time leading up to the southern kingdom being captured by Babylon in 587BC. He prophesies even as the dark shadow of the Babylonian empire looms over God’s people. Jeremiah repeatedly reminds the people that the LORD has promised to send them into exile if they persist in their unfaithfulness to their covenant with the LORD, but the LORD will also relent if they will repent and return to faithfulness (Deut 28).

Jeremiah was even known to stand in the gates of the temple in Jerusalem and rebuke the people for coming to worship the LORD when in reality they had exchanged the LORD for other gods (Jer 2:11-13). He exposes their false sense of security wherein they think they can live in wickedness all week long and yet assume the LORD will redeem them simply because they have his temple (Jer 7:1-10). But like Isaiah, Jeremiah was ignored and the dark empire of Babylon took them into captivity.

And Jeremiah weeps. He is the saddest of all the prophets, the “weeping prophet,” whose tears flow freely as he looks upon the destroyed city of Jerusalem and the razed temple. Jeremiah even has a full book containing nothing but his laments, and thus it is called Lamentations, a collection of his poems of grief as he experiences the exile. Jeremiah’s laments reveal the full measure of despair that comes when God allows his people to fall to the dark empire.

And yet Jeremiah, even in his sadness, still finds hope. The heartache of Lamentations gives way to a brief moment of light

at its center as Jeremiah reminds us of the unceasing love of the LORD who renews his mercies each morning (Lam 3:22-23). No matter what sins and sorrows yesterday held, the LORD remains merciful and faithful to us today.

Likewise, in the central chapters (30-33) of the book of Jeremiah, we find a message of consolation built upon the hope of a new covenant (31:31-34). Because Israel has broken the old covenant of Moses and been unfaithful to the LORD, the LORD promises to establish a new kind of covenant. In this new covenant, the LORD will forgive their iniquity and he will write his laws directly on their hearts by his Spirit, so that they will walk faithfully before him and be his people and he will be their God.

The prophet Ezekiel has a similar message to Israel in the midst of exile. He describes this new covenant as a “covenant of peace” (Ezek 37:26-28), and God gives to Ezekiel a vision illustrating this covenant. Ezekiel sees a valley full of dry bones decayed of all flesh, and God raises these bones, restores their flesh, and breathes new life into them so that they become living beings (Ezek 37:1-14). In the same way, in the new covenant God will bring new, spiritual life to those who are dead in their sins. This message of hope resonated among Israel’s exiles as they anticipated the coming day of their restoration from exile, when they would be gathered and restored to new life, but they surely never realized the full magnitude of the hope God instilled in the new covenant.

If we fast forward in the Biblical story to Jesus’ last supper with his disciples, we find Jesus taking a cup and saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Later in the New Testament, Hebrews 8:6-13 describes how Jesus fulfills Jeremiah 31:31-34 by initiating a new covenant that is far superior to the old covenant, for Jesus has offered himself as a better sacrifice and he has become for us a better high priest, and therefore he is able to remove our sins and give us new life by the Holy Spirit whom he sends to dwell in our hearts.

Indeed, by his blood Jesus has defeated the dark empire of sin, and by his resurrection Jesus has defeated sin’s greatest weapon, the curse of death, the Death Star itself. Thanks be to God for our greater-than-a-Jedi hero, Jesus Christ, who is a new hope – *our* new and only hope.