

Small Group Guide
The New Covenant
Cleary Baptist Church, April 24, 2011

Jeremiah 31

Jeremiah 31 is a pivotal chapter in the redemptive history of God's people as God provides further insight into how He will redeem a disobedient people. Jeremiah introduces us to the new covenant, and the reality that the old covenant is only a pattern of the covenant that Christ will initiate. The old covenant is dependent on man circumcising and transforming his or her own heart to follow God alone, and man is responsible for offering yearly animal sacrifices for sin. With the new covenant, God will circumcise the hearts of His children, and God will offer His son as a substitutionary sacrifice that covers all the sins of His children.

In this guide, you will walk through several different texts to see how Jeremiah 31 connects Deuteronomy with Acts and Hebrews. This text clearly reveals that the Bible contains one overarching story of God's perfect plan in salvation history.

Study the Text . . .

Deuteronomy 4:1-14: Listen and obey the law of God and teach the rules to your children.

- Why are they to obey the rules of the LORD?
- To whom are they to teach the rules?

Deuteronomy 6:1-9: Fear the LORD by keeping his statutes and writing them on your heart.

- What kind of fear is Moses writing about?
- Why does Moses tell them to be careful to obey the commandments?
- How are they to write the commandments on their hearts?

Deuteronomy 10:12-22: Circumcise your heart because our God is God of gods and Lord of lords.

- Describe God.
- How are they to circumcise their hearts?

Deuteronomy 28:45-47: God will punish the people because they did not obey Him. Moses foretells the disobedience of the nation. Why according to verse 47 will they be punished and cursed?

Deuteronomy 30:1-10: God will circumcise the hearts of His people so that they will love Him with all their hearts and souls.

- Why does God circumcise their hearts?
- Are we able to circumcise our own hearts?
- What does it mean to circumcise your heart?

Jeremiah 9:25-26: The LORD promises punishment on all those who are merely circumcised in the flesh. As you read through Jeremiah, you will notice the attention Jeremiah gives to showing and explaining how both Judah and Israel have been unfaithful and broken the covenant. God is reminding them of His words in Deuteronomy, and He is clearly proclaiming to them that outward circumcision is not enough. He expects and demands inward circumcision. Since the people do not worship Him alone with all their hearts and souls, He will punish them.

- Who will God punish? Just Israelites? Or all nations who are not circumcised of the heart?

Jeremiah 31:31-40: God promises a new covenant that He will write on the hearts of His children.

- How is this covenant different?
- How do you think He will put His law in His children?

Hebrews 8, Hebrews 10:1-25: Jesus Christ is the new and better covenant. The writer of Hebrews is making the point that what Moses set up (tabernacle and sacrificial system) was according to the pattern Moses saw on Mount Sinai. God gave Moses a glimpse of heaven and then instructed Him how to do everything according to what He saw. Jesus did not follow a pattern when He came. He is what Moses was foreshadowing in the Old Testament. Jesus died on the cross, and he offered atonement for all mankind before the throne of God. Jesus' substitutionary atonement replaced the old covenant with a new and better covenant.

- Why is the new covenant better than the old covenant?
- Why is the blood of Jesus better than the blood of bulls and goats?
- Does the new covenant mean that the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments should be ignored? How does the new covenant impact the way we read, understand and apply the truths in the Old Testament?
- Does the blood of Christ circumcise the hearts of Christ-followers? How is the law put on our hearts and written on our minds?

Acts 2:1-37: The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles who proclaimed the Word of God so that those who heard the Word would be cut to the heart. God works in indescribable ways. He gives us Moses' covenant to show us what is required to follow Him, but God knows all along that we are too sinful to be able to faithfully obey it. He calls us to write His law on our heart and obey Him. But, we are unable.

Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David – they all sinned. God not only provides redemption through Christ, but He sends His Spirit to open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. The Spirit cuts us to the heart and calls us to repent. He enables us to repent and turn to Christ, and when we do He fills us and begins to make us more and more like Christ. The Holy Spirit writes the law on our hearts.

- What do you think God means when He says, “Write the law on your heart”?
- What role does the Spirit play in the proclamation of the Word?
- What role does the Spirit play in the reception of the Word?
- What role does the Spirit play in the transformation (sanctification) of a Christ-follower?

Group Discussion Questions . . .

Jeremiah 31 is rich with meaning, and the truths found here should impact our understanding of God and our response to Him. As a group think through many of the questions above together and focus on a few specific questions.

- Is it possible for us to turn our hearts to God and live for God alone (circumcise our hearts)?
- How are our hearts circumcised? What does that mean exactly? Does it mean we are sinless?
- What role does the old covenant play in our life as Christians? Are the 10 commandments important to us? How do we read the Old Testament?
- How do we seek the power of the Holy Spirit? Can we? Is repentance important?
- What is the evidence in a person’s life that they have a circumcised heart?
- How should this entire discussion cause true Christians to view the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives on a daily basis?
- When Christ died, was buried, was raised, and then ascended into heaven, what did He promise to send to His followers (Jn. 16:7-7)?