

A New Hope comes as an infant born at Christmas

The world of *Star Wars* has a great deal in common with the world into which Jesus was born.

When the original *Star Wars* movie (“A New Hope”) was released in 1977, we learned about a history which took place “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” We heard how much of this galaxy was being oppressed by an evil Empire, under the leadership of the all-powerful Emperor Palpatine. The Empire sought to bring order to the galaxy by conquering it, but the common people understandably did not wish to be conquered. This would give rise to the Rebellion, where we would encounter those compelling heroes of the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

At the time of Jesus, the known world was being oppressed by an evil (Roman) Empire, under the leadership of an emperor who believed himself to be all-powerful. The Roman empire had achieved what is known today as the “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace) – a period of relative peace and stability for the known world, that was achieved largely because Rome had conquered everyone else.

In Scripture, we hear about the ways in which the Israelites, like many others, were not pleased with having been conquered ... in the midst of their own rebellions they were awaiting a promised Messiah, whom they expected would be some sort of warrior hero. This Messiah would lead them into battle against Rome, ending the occupation and re-establishing the Kingdom of Israel.

In the original *Star Wars* trilogy, a man named Luke Skywalker became precisely the sort of hero most in Israel were awaiting 20 centuries ago; his actions were critical in defeating Palpatine and bringing down the Empire.

You would expect that, following Luke’s actions in *Return of the Jedi*, everyone lived “happily ever after.” That is precisely what we all assumed until in 2015 when a new chapter of *Star Wars* was released. *The Force Awakens* was set 30 years later, and we learned that the galaxy is once again oppressed by an evil empire (now known as ‘the First Order’), under the rule of another “divine” leader (Snoko). Once again, the people of the galaxy are looking for another hero to save them.

It sounds a lot like our own human history. The Roman occupation of Israel was not the first (nor the last) in the history of God’s chosen people; Scripture gives accounts of various campaigns against Israel undertaken by a multitude of enemies. Various heroes – notably King David – would fight and gain Israel her freedom, which would last for a time. As the years would pass, Israel would once again find herself in need of deliverance.

History has also repeated itself far beyond the biblical narratives. In more recent human history, the First World War was seen as the “War to end war” – and the armistice of 1918 didn’t last another 20 years before the world was embroiled in another terrible conflict.

The reality is that Jesus could have been born and grown up to be the warrior hero most were expecting. He could have recruited disciples who would have fought alongside him for the freedom of Israel. He could have sought to establish God’s reign on earth by force, setting aright not only the oppression of the Roman empire, but also bringing an end to poverty and injustice throughout the world.

How long would that have lasted? Would it have stayed in place even for a generation after He eventually ascended to the Father? It certainly doesn’t seem likely.

It makes God’s decision to step into our story and become one of us all the more wonderful. Rather than trying to solve our problems from the outside in, Jesus comes to change us from the inside out. It brings to life words prophesied by Ezekiel six centuries before the birth of Jesus.

Thanks to the ministry of other prophets, notably Jeremiah, Israel was already expecting there to be a new covenant. Ezekiel was further explaining that this covenant would take place in the human heart: “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” ([Ezekiel 36:26](#)).

The blessed difference between a story like *Star Wars* and the narrative of Salvation history is that God isn’t sending someone to impose an external peace on us: he’s trying to get to the heart of the issue. What we celebrate at Christmas is not the birth of any warrior hero, at least not in the traditional sense of the term. The Messiah all of Israel waited and prayed for was born as an infant child – a baby. This baby grew up and fought a battle not against the powers of the world around Him, but one against sin and selfishness, and that which really ails us.

The challenge, of course, is giving Christ the room and the permission to give us the new heart and a new spirit: allowing that peace “which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” ([Phillippians 4:7](#)).

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