

The Law on the Believer's Heart

We know that the law is written on a believer's heart in the new covenant, written by the Spirit in regeneration.¹ The terms and promises of the new covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and set out in Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:16-17, are these:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD', for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

How should we interpret and apply such prophecies? What are the general principles? Specifically, of what time was Jeremiah speaking? To whom does this prophecy apply? And to what law does it refer?

As to the time in question, in the first instance, of course, Jeremiah was speaking to the people of his own day; his words had relevance for them in their particular circumstances. But *that* does not exhaust the import of the passage – not by a long chalk. Jeremiah was clearly speaking of what he called 'the days [which] are coming', 'after those days'. What 'days' are these?

Next, he addressed 'the house of Israel and... the house of Judah', saying God would make 'a new covenant' with *them* in those 'days'. Of whom was he speaking? There are two main views. Some think he was speaking of the spiritual blessing of national Israel at the end of the gospel age; namely, a general

¹ This article is taken from my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* pp299-301,312-321,543-555, lightly edited.

conversion of the Jews, and a covenant which God will make with the Jewish nation in those days. Others, however, think the prophecy refers to the church, the new or spiritual Israel, and speaks of the new covenant with every child of God throughout this gospel age. Some believe both.

Then there is the ‘law’ of which Jeremiah prophesied. In Jeremiah’s day, of course, ‘the law’ was the entire law of Moses, just as ‘Israel and Judah’ in Jeremiah’s day meant ‘the nation of Israel’. But Jeremiah was a prophet, and his words were a prophecy. What does ‘the law’ mean in the days of which he was speaking, the days of this new covenant? *That* is the question. As above, there are two main views, dividing in precisely the same way as over the first question. Many think Jeremiah’s prophetic use of ‘law’ refers to the law of Moses, the ten commandments in particular; others think it is the law of Christ. But there is a great deal of inconsistency. As I will show, many want to regard the ‘Israel and Judah’ as spiritual Israel, but keep the law as the law of Moses.

Whatever answers to these questions we arrive at, three things must be borne in mind.

First, we must not assume our answers, but work them out scripturally. We must not assume, for instance, that ‘law’ must mean the law of Moses. The ‘law’ does not automatically mean that. I have already dealt with this. ‘The law of faith’ (Rom. 3:27), ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:2), ‘the law of liberty’ (Jas. 2:12) and ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) – these are not the law of Moses! In any case, is it not possible – to put it no stronger – that a prophecy of a *new* covenant might be concerned with something other than the law of the *old* covenant, the law of Moses? We must not assume that ‘the law’ for this new-covenant people is the same as for the old-covenant people of God. Nor must we assume the people are the same. Might not a new covenant speak of a new law for a new people? And it is a *new* covenant: ‘I will make a *new* covenant... *not according to* the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt’.

Secondly, we must be consistent. If Jeremiah’s use of ‘Israel and Judah’ is a prophecy of a new Israel, then a similar conclusion

and ‘change’ of meaning must apply to ‘law’. It will not do to say that one part of the passage – ‘Israel and Judah’ – becomes ‘new’ in the prophecy, but the other – ‘the law’ – does not. A new Israel requires a new law.

Thirdly, if it is the law of Moses that is written on the heart in the new covenant, then it is the law of Moses – all of it! It is quite wrong to whittle this down to the ten commandments, blithely assuming it is so. If it is the law of Moses, the complete law, that is written on the heart of every believer, the consequences will have to be lived with!²

Clearly, all this raises a very important point of biblical interpretation. Did Jeremiah prophesy the law of Moses would be written on the hearts of the Jews? Or did he prophesy the law of Moses would be written on believers’ hearts? Or did he prophesy the law of Christ would be written on the hearts of Jews at the end of the age? Or did he prophesy the law of Christ would be written on believers’ hearts now? In other words, how should we read Old Testament prophecies such as this? That is, should we read them as predicting old or new-covenant blessings to old or new-covenant people? Naturally, the prophecies were delivered, in the first instance, to Jews in old-covenant language and terms, but are they to be understood in that way in the days of the new covenant?

What tools has God given us so that we might do the job – and come to a definitive, biblical answer to such questions? It is high time we looked at the key passage, namely 1 Peter 1:8-12, leading to an overview of all the prophets. And that is precisely what I did in: ‘The Prophets and the New Covenant’. If you have not read that article, reader, I respectfully ask you to do so at this point. It is vital background material for what follows.

Assuming that you have, I now go on to consider the major Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant; namely Jeremiah 31:31-34.

² Consequences? Every believer will have heart love for, and devote heart obedience to, the sacrifices, observance of the festivals, dietary laws, and so on.

A look at Jeremiah 31:31-34

Let me start by retracing my steps. The law *is* written on a believer's heart in the new covenant, written by the Spirit in regeneration. The terms and promises of the new covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and set out in Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:16-17, are these:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD', for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

After all we have seen, we know how we should interpret this prophecy. We need be in no doubt. Jeremiah was predicting the coming of Christ and the setting up of the new covenant. God was announcing that in that new covenant, he would write his law – the law of Christ – upon the hearts of believers.

Moving from the general, to the specific, the New Testament directly quotes this prophecy, and interprets and applies it. I refer, of course, to Hebrews 7:18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:24-28; 10:1-18. How does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews interpret this prophecy? Literally or spiritually? The literal interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy and its context would entail the setting up of David's kingship once again (Jer. 30:9), the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Jer. 30:18; 31:38-40), its establishment for ever (Jer. 31:40), and the reinstatement and immense enlargement of the priesthood with its sacrificial ministry (Jer. 31:14; 33:17-18,21-22). Did the writer to the Hebrews speak of such things? Certainly not! That there was a physical restoration of the Jews to their land after their captivity in Babylon, I do not deny, but we are left in no doubt as to the New

Testament fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophetic words; which is, the gospel, the new covenant (Heb. 8:6-13).

In a lengthy extract drawn from the prophet, and a detailed exposition of that extract, the writer to the Hebrews is explicit as to how we should read, interpret and apply Jeremiah. May I suggest, reader, that you read Hebrews 7:18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:24-28; 10:1-18, and do so out loud? If you do, I think things will soon become exceedingly clear. Having already spoken of a change of law under the gospel, and that change a 'necessity' (Heb. 7:12), the writer to the Hebrews contrasts the new 'law' with the Mosaic law, which he called 'old', 'obsolete', and 'ready to vanish away', 'disappear' (NIV) (Heb. 8:10,13). Note how he speaks of 'now... now... now, once at the end of the ages' (Heb. 8:6; 9:24,26). Note the 'us' and 'we' (Heb. 7:19; 9:24; 10:10,15). Note the utter lack of a whiff of a suggestion that there will be another fulfilment – a greater fulfilment – of the prophecy, which will come in some future Jewish kingdom. In fact, the whole context is that the prophecy was being fulfilled there and then – even as the writer was penning his letter. It was the present experience of the early believers. And it is ours, now, as believers. The passage speaks for itself. On its own, it is conclusive.

In short, Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31-34) is to be understood spiritually, of believers. The law of which he prophesied, and which is fulfilled in the new covenant, is not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ, the gospel. The hill of Zion, Jerusalem, spiritually, is the church (Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 14:1-5) – which is called the *new* Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2); the temple is the church (Eph. 2:19-22; see also 1 Cor. 3:9,16; 2 Cor. 6:16; and I would include 2 Thess. 2:4).

All this, of course, is a hammer blow to those who object to the case I made out for the believer's rule in my *Christ is All* on the grounds that, in the new covenant, the law is written on the believer's heart. It is no objection at all. Jeremiah's prophecy is, in fact, the strongest biblical proof for the rebuttal of Calvin's third use of the law. For 'the law' in Jeremiah's prophecy, is nothing other than the law of Christ. It *cannot* be the law of Moses. It *is not* the law of Moses; no, not even the limited Reformed view of the law – 'the moral law', as they call it. Neither Jeremiah, nor any

other prophet, nor, come to that, any New Testament writer, ever used the phrase. They would not know what it meant! The truth is, God, through Jeremiah, promised that with the coming of his Son, he would set up the new covenant and, by his Spirit, write Christ's law in the hearts of all his people. Indeed, as I showed in 'The Prophets and the New Covenant', the law of Christ is Christ himself, *for the new covenant is Christ himself*.

All this is further strengthened when we consider that most intriguing of phrases, 'the Israel of God', coined by Paul in Galatians 6:16.

'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16)

As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

In my *Christ is All* (pp211-278,481-527), I gave my reasons for regarding 'this rule' as the law of Christ, but I now ask: Who or what is 'the Israel of God'? The verse is unique, and presents several difficulties, punctuation – which has to be supplied – being one of them. Without getting involved in a convoluted discussion, let me say that, along with the majority, I take the punctuation as above, placing the comma after 'rule' and before 'peace'.³ But what of 'the Israel of God'? This is the only time Paul used the phrase. Indeed, as I have said, it is unique in the whole of Scripture. What did the apostle mean by it? Above all, what of the 'and' in '*and* upon the Israel of God'? And why did Paul pen a

³ The two possibilities are: 'As many as by this rule shall walk, peace upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God'; in other words, 'peace' and 'mercy' both belong to 'as many as shall walk by this rule'. That is one possibility – the one I accept. Or: 'As many as by this rule shall walk, peace upon them, and mercy [and] upon the Israel of God'; in other words, 'peace' belongs to 'as many as shall walk by this rule', but 'mercy' belongs to 'the Israel of God'. That is the other – the one I reject. There is a second point; 'peace' and 'mercy' are in reverse order to every other occasion of their conjunction in Scripture (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; 2 John 3; Jude 2). The order in Gal. 6:16 is 'illogical', although it occurs in the Nineteenth Benediction in the liturgy of the synagogue, which Paul might have been using. But this does not explain the structure of Gal. 6:16.

piece of such remarkable, if not awkward, Greek? And why did he do it here – at the end of Galatians?

Let me tackle the ‘and’ first. When Paul said ‘*and* the Israel of God’, was he using ‘and’ as ‘and also’? In other words, was Paul speaking of two distinct groups – on the one hand, those who were living according to Christ’s rule, *and also*, on the other, the Israel of God? If so, the Israel of God could not have been walking according to Christ’s rule. Therefore, they were unbelievers; in fact, they were unbelieving Jews. But what an odd way of expressing it! ‘The Israel of God’, apparently, counter-balances ‘as many as walk according to this rule’. This is not convincing. Quite the reverse! It is hard – for me, impossible – to accept that Paul called unbelieving Jews ‘the Israel of God’. Why did he not use ‘the circumcised’ or ‘the circumcision’, his usual terminology (Rom. 3:30; 4:9; 15:8; Gal. 2:7-9,12; Eph. 2:11; Tit. 1:10, for instance), and which would have aptly fitted the context? What is more, if he was speaking of unbelieving Jews, it means that Paul desired peace and mercy upon them, every bit as much as he did upon those who belong to Christ. This is unthinkable. Why would Paul wish peace and mercy for those who did not see eye to eye with him on Galatians 6:14-15, who were not believers? For their salvation, he would pray, yes (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1), but a desire for ‘peace and mercy’ does not translate into a desire ‘that they might be saved’. In any case, concern for the salvation of unbelieving Jews is foreign to the context, both immediate and throughout the letter. And if he was including the Judaisers in ‘the Israel of God’ – as he ought, if he was speaking of unbelieving Jews – I cannot see how Galatians 6:16 can be made to fit with Galatians 5:12.

Not only is it very unlikely (it is unthinkable!) that Galatians 6:16 teaches that Paul prayed for ‘peace and mercy’ for both believers and unbelievers, it is hard to see how the verse teaches that Paul prayed for two sorts of believers – Gentile and Jewish.⁴ The idea that the people of God can be divided into Gentile

⁴ Nor was Paul thinking of ministers, on the one hand, and private believers, on the other. I have not made up these ‘explanations’. As always, they are seriously suggested by various writers.

believers and Jewish believers is utterly foreign to Galatians,⁵ and is surely eliminated by John 10:16; 11:52; 17:20-23; Ephesians 2:11-22.⁶ Paul never does such a thing. So this kind of division cannot be the meaning of ‘and the Israel of God’.

The fact is, Paul was not praying for two groups at all. The ‘and’, *kai*, can be translated ‘namely’, ‘even’ or ‘that is’, and this is how it should be read here: ‘Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God’ (NIV).⁷ Indeed, the word is sometimes best left untranslated. The upshot is, Paul prayed that ‘peace and mercy be upon them, [that is, namely, even] upon the Israel of God’. In other words, he desired peace and mercy upon all who walk according to Christ’s law; that is, all believers. ‘The Israel of God’, therefore, is an all-encompassing term for all believers, for all – for ‘as many as’, whether Jews or Gentiles – for all who live according to Christ’s law.

But why did Paul choose the term ‘the Israel of God’? Why did he not say ‘the elect’, or ‘the saints’, or ‘the church’, or some such? Why did he use ‘Israel’? This is the most interesting question of all. We find its answer by re-considering our parallel discussion,⁸ of Paul’s choice (and in the same context – and, as always, the context must be king) of the word ‘law’ in ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2). When thinking about *that*, I asked why Paul did not use another, neutral word for ‘law’, saying he must have had good reason for his use of the old Jewish word. It could only have been deliberate. I called ‘the law of Christ’ a staggering phrase, a breathtaking paradox, and noted how intriguing was Paul’s choice of such a loaded term as ‘law’. I also commented on his word play

⁵ Moses, through his law, divided men, whereas Christ unites. This is a vital part of Galatians.

⁶ See also Ezek. 34:23-31; 37:24-28.

⁷ There is scriptural warrant for it, not least in Galatians. For instance: ‘But even (*kai*) if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8). ‘And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with [Peter], so that even (*kai*) Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy’ (Gal. 2:13). ‘Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even (*kai*) we have believed in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 2:16). ‘Even (*kai*) so we’ (Gal. 4:3).

⁸ See my *Christ* pp214-218,481-483.

over 'law'. Above all, I noted the important part played by the eschatological aspect of law and grace.

All this applies equally to Paul's use of 'Israel' here and elsewhere. His word play, for instance, is clearly at work in his astounding statement that 'they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rom. 9:6). At once the spotlight shines upon 'Israel'. Paul, there can be no question of it, meant his readers to sit up and take notice. We know that 'Israel', as a word, had enormous resonance for the Hebrew people. It was peculiarly their own name, their self-designation as the covenant people of God; outsiders called them Jews. This is significant. Whenever we come across 'Israel', we have something noteworthy, something precious. 'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), therefore, must be exceedingly significant; not only 'Israel', but *the* Israel, even 'the Israel of God'!

Then again, it is clear that in leading up to his use of 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), Paul has had 'Israel according to the flesh' in mind. Note his emphasis on law, circumcision, flesh and boasting (Gal. 6:12-13). This is what I meant by the context. Then comes his thunderous: 'But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. 6:14), which prepares the way for his shattering statement: 'For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation' (Gal. 6:15) – an unmistakable echo of Galatians 5:6. I say shattering, and so it is in light of the context. Paul could not have picked a more emotive topic to make his point for those tempted to go to the law – circumcision, of all things. How often he has spoken of it in this letter in one way or another (Gal. 2:3,7-9,12; 5:6,11-12; 6:12-13,15). The truth is, 'the circumcision' or 'the circumcised' was a euphemism for 'Israel' (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom. 3:30; 4:9,12; 15:8; Gal. 2:7-9,12; Eph. 2:11; Col. 4:11; Tit. 1:10). But circumcision, or lack of it, is of no concern, says Paul. All that matters is to be 'in Christ', to be a new creation, to boast in nothing but his cross. 'And as many as walk according to *this* rule, peace and mercy be upon them'. *They* are 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16). Furthermore, in his use of 'peace and mercy', unmistakable Jewish overtones are evident once again. As I say, Paul's readers would not have missed all this emphasis upon Israel; 'the Israel of

God' would have assumed enormous significance for them. The phrase was no idle choice, one grabbed out of the air, but was deliberate, calculated to produce maximum effect.

And not the least aspect of the phrase's fascination lies in the fact that 'the Israel of God' is virtually impossible to express in Hebrew. It is entirely a New Testament phrase and concept. All this indicates that Paul had a special purpose in coining⁹ 'the Israel of God', every bit as much as when he coined 'the law of Christ'. As with 'law', so with 'Israel'; the significance of both lies in the eschatological period we are talking about.¹⁰ Which Testament are we in? Which covenant are we talking about? 'The law of Moses' was for 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Cor. 10:18) in the old covenant. 'The law of Christ' is for 'the Israel of God' in the new. Both 'law' and 'Israel' have been taken over and transformed in the change of covenants. Paul, in the same context, using the two weighty Jewish words, pregnant with meaning, 'law' and 'Israel', coined two new-covenant phrases, 'the law of Christ' and 'the Israel of God'. It is a classic demonstration of how the New Testament writers (Paul in particular) use the language, rites and titles of the old-covenant people, Israel, and apply them to the new-covenant people, the church. 'Passover', 'circumcision', 'sabbath', 'altar', 'sacrifice', 'priest', 'temple', *etc.* have all come over and been transformed.¹¹ Likewise with 'law' and 'Israel'. The law of Christ is the new law for the new people. As the Israel of the Old Testament had its law, the law of Moses – so the Israel of the New Testament has its law, the law of Christ.

⁹ As before, I deliberately use the word 'coin'.

¹⁰ By eschatological, I do not mean some supposed restoration of national Israel in the millennium, which is utterly foreign to Galatians (and everywhere else, as far as I can see). As I have explained at large, Paul has been speaking about the eschatological 'but now'. 'Once at the end of the ages, [Christ] has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb. 9:26). 'The ends of the ages have come' upon us (1 Cor. 10:11). 'Now', 'but now' (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second 'now' in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). I cannot stress too much the 'but now'.

¹¹ For more in this vein, see my *Psalm 119 and The New Covenant; Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray*.

Linking this with Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant, we can, once again, face up to the two questions. Who are the 'Israel' and 'Judah'? What is the law? These two questions are inextricably linked through the historic change of epoch in redemption history. The law of Moses gave way to the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), and Israel after the flesh gave way to the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Let me use the despised word, 'replacement'; I am not ashamed of it: 'the law of Christ' has replaced 'the law of Moses', and 'the Israel of God' has replaced 'Israel after the flesh'. There is a contrast between the 'Israel of God' and the 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Cor. 10:18) The 'Israel of God' is the spiritual Israel, the whole body of believers whether Jew or Gentile, those who are governed by this rule. On them, peace and mercy abide, since they are the true Israel of God. All this, of course, was fully determined in God's decree, accomplished by Christ, and is being applied by the sovereign Spirit.

This is confirmed by other scriptures. 'We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3). 'He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God' (Rom. 2:28-29; see also Rom. 4:12; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7,9,28-29; 5:6; 6:15). In Christ, all believers, Jew and Gentile, are 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by [better, in] putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ' (Col. 2:11). Such are now 'a holy nation, his own special people... now the people of God' (1 Pet. 2:9-10; see also Tit. 2:14; Heb. 2:17). Note the 'now' – '*now* the people of God'. Before conversion, Gentile unbelievers 'were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world'.¹² But after conversion, Gentile believers (and Jewish, of course) 'have been brought near by the blood of Christ' (Eph. 2:11-13). Christ has reversed all the negatives. Gentile (and Jewish) believers are in Christ, they are one body in Christ,

¹² Jewish unbelievers, of course, although Israelites, were without Christ, and so on, but Paul is addressing Gentiles at this point.

citizens of the true Israel, they partake of the covenants of promise, have hope and God in the world. I underline, in particular, the fact that the saints are Israelites indeed (see John 1:47; Rom. 9:6). They form ‘one new man’, ‘one body’, one ‘household’, ‘one ‘building’, one ‘temple’, one ‘dwelling place’ of and for God (Eph. 2:14-22). All believers – Jew and Gentile – are Abraham’s children (Rom. 4). In truth, they are the ‘children of promise’ (Gal. 4:28), God’s adopted children, no less (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:5-7). They are, in short, the Israel of God.

‘As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and [even] upon the Israel of God’, therefore, is the climax – and a fitting climax, at that – to Paul’s letter to the Galatians. It is not a mere add-on. Moreover, Paul is not at this late stage introducing a new subject – such as some future blessing for the Jews. Far from it. He is summing up his letter, drawing the threads together. ‘The Israel of God’! All through his letter, Paul has been working towards, not the ‘Israel after the flesh’, but the ‘Israel of God’; ‘peace and mercy be upon *them*’. And, coupled with this, of course, he has been defending his readers – stirring his readers – against the attacks of the Judaisers, showing believers that holiness is not by the law of Moses (Gal. 3:2-5), but by the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:16 is not sufficient, on its own, to come to a clear decision about the believer and the law, especially in connection with Jeremiah 31:31-34. No! For that, I can only refer you, reader, to the abundant biblical evidence I have already cited. Galatians 6:16 is only one part of this, I accept. Nevertheless, it is a part! And it is all very well to say what we *cannot* deduce from the verse, but what *was* Paul saying? After all, he used the phrase, ‘the Israel of God’! He must have meant something by it! If he was not thinking of what I have said, then what was he thinking of? I contend that both parts of Jeremiah’s prophecy – ‘the law’ and ‘Israel and Judah’ – are transformed by the epochal change of covenant. The parallel use of eschatological terms in Galatians and Hebrews concerning the replacement of the law by the Spirit, to my mind clearly establishes that ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16) is not ‘Israel after the flesh’. I do not agree with the suggestion that ‘the Israel of God’ are the elect Jews, not the church. Nor do I

think that Justin Martyr (c. AD160) was the first to call the church 'the Israel of God'. I am convinced Paul used 'Israel' in this way in Galatians 6:16. And it is all of a piece with the rest of the New Testament teaching about the eschatological 'but now'.

Christ has come. It is the age of the Spirit; the age of the Mosaic law is over. No more is it Israel according to the flesh, but Israel according to the Spirit. No longer is it the bondage of Mount Sinai in Arabia, but the liberty of the spiritual Zion. The law of God is now the law of Christ.

And all this confirms the view of Jeremiah 31:31-34 which I have set out. The prophet was not speaking of the law of Moses being written on the hearts of Jews. Nor was he saying that the law of Moses would be the believer's rule under the gospel. The new covenant, of which Jeremiah prophesied, is an inward covenant, inward through the indwelling Christ, he himself being the new law, by his Spirit, 'written on the heart' of the believer. The law within the believer is nothing less than Christ living and formed within him (John 14:23; 17:23; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Rev. 3:20; 21:3). Indeed, Christ himself is the believer's covenant. As the apostle could declare to the Colossians: 'I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:25-27).

Nor was Jeremiah the only prophet to speak of the new covenant. Take God's promise through Isaiah: 'All your children shall be taught by the LORD' (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45). Again, through Ezekiel: 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God... I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you

to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them' (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:25-27; see also Ezek. 16:59-63). Nor, for obvious reasons, is the doctrine of the new covenant confined to the Old Testament!¹³

The *doctrine* of the new covenant (despite its relative rarity as a *phrase*) is written large throughout the entire Bible. It pervades everything; it is a major concept in Scripture. Take Isaiah 42, where God was addressing the Messiah, Christ (Matt. 3:17; 12:17-21; 17:5): 'Behold! My servant whom I uphold, my elect one in whom my soul delights' (Isa. 42:1). God commanded the people to 'sing to the LORD a *new* song', having addressed Christ thus: 'Behold, the *former* things have come to pass, and *new* things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them' (Isa. 42:9-10). This was a foretelling of the *new* covenant which would be established by Christ. 'Do not remember the *former* things, nor consider things of old. Behold, I will do a *new* thing' (Isa. 43:18-19; Jer. 31:22). God described this *new* thing: 'I will even make a road in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert... waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen' (Isa. 43:19-20), and 'a woman shall encompass a man' (Jer. 31:22), something unheard of! God assured his people that they would 'hear *new* things', things they had not known (Isa. 48:6), 'be called by a *new* name' (Isa. 62:2), and eventually live in a '*new* heavens and a *new* earth' (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The *new* song to be sung by the elect is a repeated theme of the Psalms (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). No wonder, since God promised to 'give... a *new* heart [to] and put a *new* spirit within' his people (Ezek. 36:26; 11:19-20), fulfilling his command that they should 'get [themselves] a *new* heart and a *new* spirit' (Ezek. 18:31).¹⁴

When the Psalmist spoke of the godly man, and recorded that 'his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night' (Ps. 1:2), naturally, he was thinking of the law of Moses. Of course he was, since he was living in the days of the old covenant. But as a prophet, was he saying that the believer in the age of the Spirit would delight in, and day and night meditate upon, the law of Moses? Or, as so many (mis)define the law, the

¹³ See also my *Psalm 119*.

¹⁴ See my *Christ* p228 for the importance of 'new' and 'heart'.

ten commandments? Reader, if you are a believer, does this describe you? When you ask God: ‘Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law’ (Ps. 119:18), and tell him: ‘Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day’ (Ps. 119:97), are you thinking only – or primarily – of the Mosaic law? Or do you read, delight in and meditate upon the entire Scripture, and especially the gospel of our (your) Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? ‘Consider *him*’ (Heb. 12:3)! Surely the staunchest advocate of Calvin’s third use of the law would not spend *all* his time in the law, would he? Nor would he spend *more* time in the Old Testament than the New, would he? And when reading and interpreting the Old, would he not do so in terms of the New? Reader, when you cite, sing or otherwise use, say, Psalm 3:4; 5:7; 18:6; 20:2-3; 24:3; 27:4-6; 48:9,12; 50:5; 51:18-19; 54:6; 65:4; 122; 128:5; 134; 141:2, what is going through your mind? If you were to be washed up on a desert island, and could have only one leaf of Scripture, would you select Exodus 20 or Romans 8? To ask such questions is to answer them.¹⁵

In all this, please do not forget this vital distinction I drew when setting out the believer’s rule in my *Christ is All* (pp218-219,483-486). This is what I said:

When, in Scripture, we meet ‘the law of God’, we must ask ourselves which covenant we are talking about. If it is the old covenant, then ‘the law of God’ is the ‘the law of Moses’. If it is the new covenant, then ‘the law of God’ is ‘the law of Christ’.

Here is where it comes into its own.

Conclusion

Calvin’s third use of the law is wrong! The ten commandments cannot sanctify. The ten commandments do not form the believer’s perfect rule. The ten commandments are not written on the

¹⁵ Believer, have you not found that you can open the New Testament anywhere and turn it into prayer without adjustment? Do you find you can do the same with, say, Deut. 28:58-68; 1 Kings 8:14-53; Ps. 18:20-24; 109:1-20? What about Isa. 58:13-14 with Ex. 35:2-3; Jer. 17:21-27? See my *Psalm 119*.

believer's heart in the new covenant. The gospel is. The law of Christ is. Christ himself is.

God demands heart obedience, heart experience, heart worship, but man cannot provide it. The good news is that God, by his grace, through Jeremiah (and others) promised that he would set up a new covenant and do this very thing, writing his new law, the law of Christ, upon his people's hearts. More than that, even better than that, at the appointed time God sent his Son into the world to establish this new covenant, to die for his people in order to redeem them, and to earn the gift of the Holy Spirit for them, and so write his law upon their hearts.

Thus the new-covenant man inevitably delights in obedience, and gives God heart worship and service, not a grudging conformity to irksome rules imposed from without. To any who object to my use of 'irksome', I can only suggest they re-read passages such as Acts 15:5,10,24; Galatians 2:4-5; 3:21-25; 4:21 – 5:1,13, noting words such as 'trouble', 'slavery', 'bondage', 'locked up', and 'prison' which are coupled with the law, and words such as 'freedom' and 'liberty' which are associated with the new covenant. The truth is, the believer serves God in Christ in glorious freedom. Why? How? Because God's Spirit enables the believer to *delight* in the law (the entire word of God, especially the gospel) from his heart, where the Spirit writes it (Ps. 1:2; 19:7-8; 37:31; Jer. 31:33; Rom. 7:22; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).

Take just one example. God commands his people to 'love one another fervently with a pure heart'. How can they do it? What grace and power does God give them to enable them to obey? Let the new covenant speak: 'Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides for ever' (1 Pet. 1:22-23). That's how believers can do it – 'having been born again'. They can do it, they will do it, because they are regenerate, because they have the Spirit of God, because they are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4), and because they are newly 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24, NIV).

So, while believers are under a far more searching regime in the new covenant, far more incisive than the Jews under the old covenant,¹⁶ while the law of Christ is far more penetrating, far more demanding than the law of Moses, Christ provides so much more than Moses. God demands all. God promises all. Christ accomplished all. Christ is all. Christ gives grace to enable his people to love and obey his law from the heart, by his Spirit, and thus glorify God.¹⁷

‘The law was given through Moses’ – BUT – ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17).

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¹⁶ See my *Christ* pp232-236,508-509.

¹⁷ In saying this, I do not imply that there were no regenerate people in the Old Testament. While the position of Old Testament believers is ‘somewhat anomalous’, Abraham (before the law was given), Moses (who was given the law), and David (after the law had been given), are typical of those who lived and died trusting in the coming Messiah, and are rightly counted among the men and women of faith (John 8:56; Heb. 11). The Psalmist spoke for all new-covenant people of both ages when he said: ‘Oh, how I love your law!’ (Ps. 119:97). ‘Love’ is a heart word. Throughout Psalm 119, note the connection between ‘law’, ‘precepts’, ‘judgments’, and so on, and such words as ‘heart’ or ‘whole heart’, ‘rejoice’, ‘delight’, ‘longing’, ‘love’, and the like. The man who prefers the law above ‘thousands of shekels of gold and silver’ shows us where his heart is (Matt. 6:21). See also Ps. 1:2; 40:8. The fact that there were new-covenant people living in the Old Testament, of course, is why I can quote their words! There is no difference between David and Paul: ‘I delight in the law of God according to the inward man’ (Rom. 7:22). As I have made clear, it is all ‘the law of God’, but in the old covenant it is ‘the law of Moses’, while in the new it is ‘the law of Christ’. In saying this, of course, I am not going back on my comments on Rom. 7:14-25; I am deliberately not defining the man in question. In all this, see my *Psalm 119*.