

The Key Passage

Of all the passages that might be chosen to make the crucial point, the key passage in serving as our guide in interpretation of Ezekiel's promise of breath-taking hope must be Jeremiah 31 as spelled out in Hebrews 8.¹⁰

First, Jeremiah's prophecy:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 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. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

Now for what the writer to the Hebrews makes of it:

Now [at this time] [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, he says: '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 when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them', says the Lord. Passages such as Romans 6 - 8, 2 Corinthians 3, Galatians, Ephesians 2, Philippians 3, Colossians 2, and so on, give us extended commentaries on this vital Hebrews passage.

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Take Galatians 3. In this critical section of Scripture, critical not only for Galatians but for the understanding of the entire New Testament, Paul teaches that the Jews were under the Mosaic law - an integral, inseparable,¹¹ part of a temporary covenant which was introduced, added by God, alongside the Abrahamic covenant, this Mosaic covenant to last only until the coming of the Seed, Christ, who would abolish it by fulfilling it and thus rendering it obsolete (Matt. 5:17-22; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:12,18-22; 8:13).¹² During the time that Israel was under the Mosaic covenant with its law, that law continued to serve as a child custodian to discipline, confine - even imprison - Israel. Such is the clear teaching of Galatians 3:15-25, especially verses 23-25. The passage has nothing to do with the idea of a schoolmaster and education!¹³ Nor does it have anything to say about personal experience of conversion.¹⁴ I raise this because so many want to establish preparationism¹⁵ based on an appalling mis-translation of Galatians 3:24, by which they miss the apostle's meaning, and badly miss it at that, thus devising an altogether unscriptural way of addressing Gentile unbelievers with the gospel, one which leads to severe collateral damage for many.¹⁶ Galatians 3:23-25 is not talking about the individual's experience. The passage has nothing to say on that score. (Nor does any other passage teach that Gentiles must have the law of Moses preached to them to prepare them for Christ. Nor is there any example of a biblical record of a preacher doing it). Rather, Paul is concerned with epochs - the epoch of the law, the time of the law, and the epoch or age of the gospel, the new covenant. The time of the law is over and done with. That age, the epoch of the law, has passed, all by God's design. Shadow has been superseded by reality and fulfilment by the bringing in of the new covenant, the better or superior covenant (Col. 2:17; Hebrews *passim*, especially Heb. 8:5; 9:23; 10:1). This is what I mean when I say that such passages as Galatians 3 serve as commentaries on Hebrews 8:6-13. The picture is so full, no one passage conveys it.

⁹ Although Dan. 2 is not concerned with the Mosaic system, Dan. 9:24-27 most definitely is.

¹⁰ I do not accept that the latter gives only an application of the former, leaving the fulfilment to a later date. Not at all. Hebrews reads as

the fulfilment of the prophet's words.

¹¹ See my 'What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable'.

¹² See my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law; Believers Under the Law of Christ*.

¹³ The Greek word is *paidagōgos*. The word is a combination of *pais* (child) and *agōgos* (leader), derived from *agō*, 'to drive, to lead by laying hold of, to conduct' with the idea of discipline. As Thayer explains: 'The name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys... The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them, before reaching the age of manhood... The name carries with it an idea of severity (as of a stern censor and enforcer of morals)'. And the child-custodian's job was not to *bring* the immature boy anywhere; rather, he had to discipline and protect the boy *until* he reached maturity. During that time, the Jews 'were held prisoners by the law, locked up' by the law (Gal. 3:23, NIV), 'kept under guard by the law', confined by the law.

¹⁴ Of course, the apostle moves on to personal experience in verse 26, but this is beside the material point here. In Gal. 4 he returns to epochs.

¹⁵ That is, that the law must be preached to sinners to bring them to the conviction of sin by the law to make them ready or 'fit' to trust Christ.

¹⁶ See my *Three Verses Misunderstood*; 'Has it Really Come to This? Comments on a Banner Article Part 2'; 'Preparationism in New England'; 'The Law and the Confessions'.

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