

## *To Whom Did God Give the Law?*

With regard to the law of Moses, Paul divides the human race into two.<sup>1</sup> All are sinners, but some have sinned ‘without law’; the rest have sinned ‘in the law’ (Rom. 2:12). This is the biblical divide – those ‘under the law’, and those ‘without law’ (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Those ‘in the law’ have the law of God; those ‘without law’ do not. Clearly, therefore, the law could not have been given to all men. If it had, Paul’s division would have been utterly meaningless; indeed, nonsensical.

Those ‘in’ or ‘under’ the law are the Jews, God having made known his entire law to Israel (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4); those ‘without law’ are, therefore, non-Jews, Gentiles. We are specifically and repeatedly told that God did not reveal his law to any other nation but Israel.<sup>2</sup> He did not deal in this way with any other people

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* pp27-37; see also pp337-341.

<sup>2</sup> Israel became a nation in Egypt (Gen. 46:3; Deut. 26:5), particularly at the exodus leading to Sinai (Gen. 12:1-2; 17:2-14; 46:3,26-27; Ex. 1:5,7; 2:24-25; 3:6-8,10,15-18; 4:5,22-23; 6:2-8; 7:4,16; 8:1; 9:1; 12:2,17; 13:3-10; 15:11-18,26; 16:22-30; 18:1; 19:3-6; 31:13-17; 32:11-14; 33:13; Deut. 4:20,34; 16:1; 27:9; 28:9; Ps. 114:1-2; Ezek. 20:5-12,20; Acts 7:14,17), and confirmed at the giving of the covenant just before entering Canaan (Deut. 26:18; 27:9). This is when God distinguished them from all other nations by starting their calendar, giving them the feasts and the sabbath as an integral part of his law. ‘What great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgements as are in all this law which I set before you this day?’ (Deut. 4:8). Deut. 4:7 shows the same in his nearness to Israel and his willingness to hear their prayers. In short, Deut. 4:32-38. Israel’s position was *unique*, not merely *special*. Now these things are clearly contrasted to the creation-gift of beasts, birds, fish, planets and the like ‘which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage’ (Deut. 4:17-19). The contrast is enforced further: ‘But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be his people, an inheritance’ (Deut. 4:20). And, as I say, one of the greatest distinctions God made between Israel and all other nations was to give his law to Israel – and to no others. The law divided, separated, Israel from all other people. See Ps. 103:7.

(Deut. 4:6-45; 5:26; 7:6-11; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 9:4). The principle underlies Romans 9:30-32. We are told expressly that the Gentiles do not have the law (Rom. 2:12-14), but that it was given to the Jews, being ‘the statutes and judgements and laws which the LORD made between himself and *the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses’ (Lev. 26:46), God immediately reiterating the point with the closing verse of Leviticus: ‘These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses *for the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai’ (Lev. 27:34).<sup>3</sup> Right from the start, while the people were camped in the wilderness of Sinai, even as Moses was called up to the mountain to receive the law, God prefaced it all: ‘Thus you shall say to *the house of Jacob*, and tell *the children of Israel*...’ (Ex. 19:3-6). God opened the ten commandments thus: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought *you* out of the land of Egypt...’ (Ex. 20:2). And after the re-giving of the law, God could declare to Moses: ‘According to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with *Israel*’ (Ex. 34:27). (See also 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 5:10; 6:11; Neh. 9:1,13-14; *etc.*).

Nor was it the last time Israel was reminded of the fact. Solomon called Israel to ‘take care to fulfil the statutes and judgements with which the LORD charged Moses *concerning Israel*’ (1 Chron. 22:13). When Israel was removed from the land and taken into captivity, the king of Assyria replaced the children of Israel in Samaria with foreigners. These foreigners, it is recorded, brought their own gods, and their own ‘rituals’. Rejecting the law of the Hebrews, they did not ‘follow *their* statutes or *their* ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded *the children of Jacob*, whom he

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to be confined to the so-called ‘ceremonial law’ – see my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408. For now, notice how this blanket description in the closing verse of Leviticus includes at least the second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth and ninth commands (Lev. 19:3,4,11-13,16,30; 20:9,10; 23:3; 24:10-23; 26:1,2) of the so-called ‘moral law’. As for the rest, the first commandment is implied throughout Leviticus – see in particular Lev. 26:1, the sixth in Lev. 19:16-18, and transgression of the tenth is pervasive – Paul found it so (Rom. 7:7), since the Jews thought it summed up the law, and to break it to be the root of all sins.

named *Israel*' (2 Kings 17:34). Addressing Israel, God could speak of 'the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which he wrote for *you*' (2 Kings 17:37), promising Israel they would not 'wander any more from the land which I gave *their* fathers – [but] only if *they* are careful to do according to all that I have commanded *them*, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded *them*' (2 Kings 21:8). As with the land, so with the law – both had been given to Israel, and no others. When God revealed his law to Israel, he expressly commanded them not to do as the pagans did, but to 'observe my judgements and keep my ordinances... [to] keep my statutes and my judgements' (Lev. 18:1-5,26-30). Centuries after Sinai, God had to complain that Israel had not done this: 'You have not walked in my statutes nor executed my judgements, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you' (Ezek. 11:12), they had 'conformed to the standards of the nations around' them (NIV), breaking God's law (Deut. 12:29-32).<sup>4</sup> This makes sense if, and only if, God's (and Israel's) laws were different to the laws, principles, statutes, norms, judgements and standards of the pagans.

Asaph reminded Israel that the LORD 'established a testimony in *Jacob*, and appointed a law in *Israel*, which he commanded *our* fathers' (Ps. 78:5). Daniel, when praying for the children of Israel, could speak of God's 'laws, which he set before *us* by his servants the prophets' (Dan. 9:10-13). God reminded Hosea, concerning Israel: 'I have written *for him* the great things of my law' (Hos. 8:12). And 'God, the one of Sinai... God, the God of *Israel*' (Ps. 68:8, NIV), commanded Israel to 'remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb *for all Israel*, with the statutes and judgements' (Mal. 4:4). In Numbers 15, God said the law applied to the Jews, and those who would be reckoned Jews – proselytes and sojourners.

***To say that the law applies to the entire human race, is to render these statements and demands utterly superfluous and***

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<sup>4</sup> If Ezek. 5:5-7 translation is right – but see footnote (NKJV, NIV) – Israel was worse than the pagans (Ezek. 16:47).

***meaningless. What is more – and a glance at the passages quoted above will confirm it – we are talking about the law, the law of God, the law of Moses, the whole law, the law in its entirety. The law was given to Israel, for Israel, to distinguish Israel from all others.***

Nor was this a mere quirk of history. As I have noted, God treated the Jews as special, showing special regard for them in giving them his law. This was his *purpose*. He gave his law to the Jews *in order to* distinguish them from all others. Division was God's intention in giving the law to the Jews. Division! Separation! Distinction was God's great concern for Israel (Lev. 20:24,26).<sup>5</sup> And it was the law that especially marked the Jews out from the Gentiles, serving as a dividing wall, a partition, a demarcation between them and the pagans (Gal. 3:23-25 – note the 'we' and 'our'; Eph. 2:11-16). The law regulated their national and personal life in every respect. Finally, it was a temporary measure confining Israel until the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

Moses, when repeating God's law in Moab, made it plain to whom it was given, declaring: 'Hear, O *Israel*... The LORD our God made a covenant with *us* in Horeb... He said: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"' (Deut. 5:1-2,5-6). God said 'Israel', and he meant Israel, and only Israel. It was only Israel whom he had delivered from Egypt.<sup>6</sup> But not only was the preface to the ten commandments peculiar to Israel. The fourth commandment concerned the sabbath which was a special sign for Israel (Ex. 31:13,16-17; Ezek. 20:12,20),<sup>7</sup> and the fifth commandment referred to the land promised to Israel. In addition, the overwhelming bulk of the hundreds of other commandments contained in the law were spelled out in terms which belonged only to Israel. In short, Gentiles were not brought out of Egypt –

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<sup>5</sup> God's presence also distinguished them from all other people (Ex. 33:16).

<sup>6</sup> The exodus from Egypt continued to preface references to the law. See 2 Kings 17:36, for instance.

<sup>7</sup> See my *Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray*.

in fact many of them (that is, the Egyptians) perished in Egypt or the Red Sea.<sup>8</sup> Gentiles were not given the sabbath as a special sign that they were the people of God. Gentiles were not given the pillar of cloud and fire. Gentiles were not given the manna. Gentiles were not given the promised land – the truth is, they had to be removed from it. Gentiles were not given the ordinances of the tabernacle. And so on. As just one example of how these things are linked, take Nehemiah 9:5-15.

Sadly, all this has too often been forgotten, and the law which was given uniquely to Israel, and applied only to them, has been mistakenly applied to Gentiles in the gospel age, to the confusion of both law and gospel.<sup>9</sup>

What is more, not only did God at Sinai give his law to Israel, and only to Israel, but prior to Sinai, nobody had the law – not even the patriarchs (Deut. 5:3; Rom. 5:13).<sup>10</sup> Notice how explicit Moses was at the repetition of the law in Moab, when reminding the Israelites of the first giving (and its re-giving) of the law at Horeb (Sinai): God did not make the covenant ‘with our fathers, but with us’ (Deut. 5:3). Who were these ‘fathers’? and who were the ‘us’? The ‘fathers’ were the patriarchs and their descendants who had died before the giving of the law at Sinai; God did not give his law to them. The ‘us’ were the Israelites – the people (with their children) who, having been delivered from Egypt, were gathered as the nation of Israel at Sinai – it was to them that God originally gave the law, and it was to their children that he was now renewing it in Moab. That generation of Hebrews at Sinai, therefore, was the first to receive the law. The patriarchs – the ‘fathers’ – who lived before the children of Jacob even entered Egypt, let alone left it – did not have the law. The song of Moses, when he ‘blessed the children of Israel before his death’, is plain: ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir... from his right hand came a fiery law for them... Moses

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<sup>8</sup> Some pagans had joined the Israelites as proselytes (Ex. 12:38,48-49; see Neh. 10:28; Est. 8:17; Isa. 56:3).

<sup>9</sup> See my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408.

<sup>10</sup> As I have said, Israel *as a nation* did not exist before the exodus and the giving of the law. The giving of the law was a vital aspect of *making* them into a nation.

commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob... Levi... shall teach Jacob your judgements, and Israel your law' (Deut. 33:1-4,8,10).<sup>11</sup> (See also Deut. 11:1-7; 29:9-15).<sup>12</sup>

That nobody had the law before Sinai is clear – since Paul expressly pointed out that the law came – ‘was added’ – 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:16-17,19). It was *revealed* at Sinai; it was not *renewed*. How can it be claimed that God gave the law to Adam at creation, or to the patriarchs? Yet many do say it! No! As Christ said, when replying to the Pharisees’ question over the divorce-certificate regulation introduced by Moses (Deut. 24:1-4): ‘From the beginning [Adam] it was not so’ (Matt. 19:7-8). The law was given to Moses 430 years *after* the promise to Abraham, not given to Adam hundreds of years *before* Abraham. In stressing this, I am not straining out arithmetical or historical gnats. To say that Adam was given the Mosaic law is to miss a point of major consequence, contradicting Paul’s argument in Romans 5 and Galatians 3.<sup>13</sup> The law was given to Moses long after God had revealed his saving purpose in and to Abraham.

This is a point of such importance, I must take a few moments to explain what I am talking about.

### ***The eschatological importance of the epoch of the law***

This point – the place of the law in salvation history, the eschatological importance of the epoch of the law – cannot be over-stressed. This word ‘eschatological’ will come again and

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<sup>11</sup> Not only did the law have a beginning on Sinai; it had an end-point also, and that by God’s intention. Paul said the law ‘entered’ the Jewish world at the time of the exodus (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:17,19), as a temporary system for the Jews, to last only until Christ came (Gal. 3:19), when he fulfilled it, thus bringing it to the end God had designed for it (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:7,11; Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 9:8-9). Right from the start, it was ‘fading away’ (2 Cor. 3:11,13, NIV). See my ‘Three Verses Misunderstood’.

<sup>12</sup> The words, ‘him who is not here with us today’ (Deut. 29:14-15), refer to the descendants of the Israelites, not to all the rest of the human race.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Christ* pp116-177,412-468. Adam, of course, was given his own commandment which he broke (Rom. 5:14).

again in these pages. Let me explain how I am using it. I am thinking of the way in which God, in time, works out his eternal decree to save his elect, and thus exalt his Son in their final glorification. I have in mind the way God arranges everything to bring about his purpose, the place every last thing has in that great plan. ‘Salvation history’ is one of the great themes (the *greatest* theme?) of the Bible. It permeates Romans 3 – 11 and Galatians 3 – 4, for example. So what is this ‘salvation history’ that I am talking about? The ‘salvation’ aspect is God’s redemption of his elect, culminating in their eternal glorification in the image of Christ. But what of the ‘history’? This needs nuancing. God decreed the redemption of his elect – the purpose, means and ends of their redemption – in eternity, but he is accomplishing it in time, as a part of history. Adam, the promise to Abraham, the law at Sinai, the coming, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, the return of Christ, and so on, are ‘milestones’ in this historical process which is divided into two great ages, two great eras, two great dispensations or epochs – before Christ and after Christ.<sup>14</sup> Everything centres on Christ and his work. He (in his death, burial and resurrection) is the watershed of the two ages, the climax of all history, including and especially salvation history.

The two ages in question are very different. Adam is the head, the founder, of one age; Christ, of the other (Rom. 5:12-19). Adam’s age is characterised by flesh, sin, law and death.<sup>15</sup> Christ’s age is characterised by the Spirit, righteousness, grace and life. All humanity is by birth united to Adam, and comes under the regime of the first age through Adam’s sin. All the elect are united to Christ (from eternity, by God’s decree; in experience, through faith in Christ), and come under the regime of the new age in, by and through Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

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<sup>14</sup> I am leaving aside the eternal age following the second coming of Christ – which lies outside history – to concentrate on ‘this present time’ (Rom. 8:18) in contrast to the age preceding it.

<sup>15</sup> I am not contradicting myself; law characterised Adam’s age even though he was not given the law of Moses. See my ‘All Men Under Law’.

It is at this point that the time element of the word ‘history’ needs nuancing. The truth is, the two ages are running alongside each other, and have done so since the beginning of salvation history. It is not that Adam’s age lasted until Christ’s resurrection; Adam’s age is still with us. That is why I am using the present tense: Adam’s age *is* characterised by flesh, sin and law. All humanity *is* by birth united to Adam and *comes* under the regime of the first age through Adam’s sin – *is* not *was*. So when I speak about salvation history, I am thinking of two ages, yes, but not merely in the sense of time. Rather, I am thinking more particularly in terms of their characteristics. I am thinking of two realms, two regimes. The old, Adamic, age or realm is the age or realm of the flesh, sin, law and death. The new, Christian, age or realm is the age or realm of the Spirit, righteousness, grace and life. The work of Christ took place in time, in history, and was the historical break-point or watershed for these two ages or realms, certainly, but for any particular individual the transformation comes at the point of saving faith. Conversion brings a change of regime, a change of age, a change of covenant. ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17). Speaking to believers, Paul could declare: ‘The Father... has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:12-13). Peter: ‘You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy’ (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

And when and what will be the culmination of salvation history? That, too, centres on Christ. The culmination will be when Christ ‘delivers the kingdom to God the Father... that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

So when I talk of the ‘eschatological significance of the epoch of the law in salvation history’, I mean the status of the law in this scheme of salvation, how it fits into God’s accomplishment of salvation – that is, its place both in time and characteristics.



The law was given at a particular time and lasted for a limited time and for a specified purpose. What was its role? What is its role today? In other words, I am speaking about the law in two senses – historical and experiential – historical, for humanity; experiential, for the individual.

Having explained what I mean by the place of the law in salvation history, let me take up my main theme once again. The law, the whole law, was given to the Jews, for the Jews, at Sinai. How fitting, therefore, for Paul to call it ‘our fathers’ law’, ‘the law of the Jews’ (Acts 22:3; 25:8).<sup>16</sup> When addressing Felix, Paul could easily link his ‘worship [of] the God of my fathers’ with ‘the law and... the prophets’ (Acts 24:14). How apt, therefore, was his reminder to the Jews – as distinct from the Gentiles – that they had the law (Rom. 2:27). How pointless if all men had it!

Think of the way in which Paul preached to the Gentiles.<sup>17</sup> Think of his experience at Lystra (Acts 14:11-18). The Gentiles were about to worship him and Barnabas. How did the brothers stop the pagans? What arguments did they use? Did they cite the first and second commandments? They did not! Instead, from nature they challenged pagan folly in trying to worship them. In effect, they asked: ‘Does not nature teach you?’<sup>18</sup> If the Gentiles had been given the law, why did Paul not quote it against them? The fact is, since the Gentiles did not have the law, Paul could not use it in his approach to them, and he made no attempt to do so. The same goes for his preaching to the Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-34). Paul used what the pagans were familiar with.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter called it ‘our law’ (that is, of the Jews, as opposed to belonging to you) when speaking to a Gentile (Acts 10:28, NIV).

<sup>17</sup> See my *Christ* pp51-63, 116-157, 348-368, 412-447, where I more fully question and probe the Reformed claim that the preaching of the law must precede the preaching of the gospel to Gentile sinners.

<sup>18</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 11:14.

<sup>19</sup> I do not say there are no Old Testament echoes whatsoever in these addresses. After all, Paul, a converted Jew, was steeped in those Scriptures, including the law. Naturally, he thought and spoke in such terms. Compare, for instance, Acts 14:15 with Ex. 20:11. But although he *thought* like this, never once in these addresses did Paul explicitly

Compare this approach with Christ addressing the rich young Jew (Matt. 19:16-22).<sup>20</sup> Think of Peter preaching to ‘Jews and proselytes’ (Acts 2:10); he was able to quote freely from the Old Testament (Acts 2:16-21,25-31,34-35). Again, when preaching to the Jews in the temple (Acts 3:11-26), he referred to Moses and ‘all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken’. In particular, he pointed them to ‘the covenant which God made with our fathers’ (Acts 3:18,22-26), and later quoted the Psalms (Acts 4:11). Think of Stephen’s approach when he was preaching to the Jews: ‘You... who have received the law’, he said (Acts 7:52-53). Likewise, Paul used the law when preaching to the Jews (Acts 13:39; 22:3,12; 23:3,5; 28:23, for instance) – as in his defence against the Jews (Acts 24:14; 25:7-8), speaking of ‘our people’ and ‘the customs of our fathers’ (Acts 28:17). *But never once did he use the law when addressing Gentile unbelievers.* Why not? Because he only used the law when he could say: ‘I speak to those who know the law’ (Rom. 7:1).

None of this was an accident. The preachers of the New Testament knew where their unconverted hearers were coming from. They knew that the Jews had the law, and therefore the gospel preachers were able to use it. The Gentiles did not have the law, so they did not refer them to it. In this, they were following Amos who, addressing the nations, Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel, reproved them for their sins (Amos 1:1 – 2:16).<sup>21</sup> Not once did the prophet mention the law when speaking to pagans, but on turning to Judah he

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quote the Old Testament – which the pagans did not know – yet he quoted a Greek poet (Acts 17:28) – which they did know. See also Tit. 1:12. Paul’s *arguments*, of course, were Christian, not pagan. Here is the lesson. A preacher must use terms which his hearers can understand – or else explain them. He has to adjust his language to suit his hearers, not the other way around. On preparationism, see my *Christ* pp51-63,116-157,348-368,412-447, and throughout my works.

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, the Reformed like to think preaching what they like to call ‘the moral law’ (the ten commandments) prepares sinners for Christ. But when addressing the rich young Jew, Christ used all the law, not just sixteen verses of it! Note his use of Lev. 19:18.

<sup>21</sup> See also Ezek. 25 – 30, for instance.

immediately complained that ‘they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments’ (Amos 2:4).<sup>22</sup>

The overtones of James’ statement in Acts 15 are unmistakable: ‘Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every sabbath’, he declared (Acts 15:21). ‘Synagogues’ and ‘sabbath’ are not Gentiles terms!<sup>23</sup> Years later, when Paul arrived at Jerusalem, James told him about the believing Jews in Jerusalem who ‘have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses’ (Acts 21:21-25). Paul did not deny it.<sup>24</sup> The implication is clear. The Jews were under Moses; the Gentiles were not.<sup>25</sup> Note further the contrast between Paul’s actions (as a Jew) and the requirements laid upon Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 21:21-25. As the apostle explained: ‘To the Jews I became as a Jew... to those who are

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<sup>22</sup> I admit Amos did not explicitly refer to the law when addressing Israel at this time, although he alluded to it. The point is, however, the prophets often reproved Israel, but never pagan nations, for breaking the law. When Isaiah spoke to the ‘rulers of Sodom’ and told them to ‘give ear to the law of our God’, and to the ‘people of Gomorrah’ concerning sacrifices (Isa. 1:10-11), he was being ironical. He was in fact addressing Judah, calling Judah a virtual Sodom and Gomorrah – as the context makes plain. ‘They declare their sin *as* Sodom’ (Isa. 3:9). As God, through Jeremiah, said of Jerusalem: ‘All of them are *like* Sodom to me, and her inhabitants *like* Gomorrah’ (Jer. 23:14). See Deut. 29:23; Amos 9:7; Rev. 11:8. Returning to Amos, while it is true the prophet did not reprove Israel specifically for breaking the law, he did speak of them as distinct from the nations in having the prophets (Amos 2:11; 3:7-8), being chosen (Amos 3:2); having the feasts (Amos 5:21-22,25), being the chief nation (Amos 6:1).

<sup>23</sup> See Acts 22:12,19; 26:11; *etc.*

<sup>24</sup> A week later, catching sight of Paul in the temple, the (unbelieving) Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd, vociferously complaining that ‘this is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place’ (Acts 21:28).

<sup>25</sup> To develop this: Would Paul tell Jews to forsake Moses, and yet – allowing for sake of argument that they were under Moses – tell Gentiles to stay under his law? Even worse: would Paul tell believing Jews to leave Moses, yet make believing Gentiles come under Moses? This is the nub of the question I address in my *Christ*.

under the law, as under the law... to those who are without law, as without law'. Why? In order to 'win the more... I do [this] for the gospel's sake' (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Acts 2:23 is very interesting in this connection. Peter, preaching Christ, told the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost: 'You have taken [him] by lawless hands, have crucified [him], and put [him] to death'. The Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ but, to do the dirty work, they used Roman hands, Gentile hands, 'lawless hands'. The NASB, translating the phrase, 'by the hands of godless men', has a marginal note: 'Lawless hands, or, men without the law; that is, heathen'. The NIV correctly notes: 'Of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)'. Christ had already foretold this is what would happen: 'The Son of Man... will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge him and kill him' (Luke 18:31-33). Peter, steeped in Jewish thought, was using the phrase, 'lawless men', in the Jewish sense. The men he was talking about were 'men without the law'. That is to say, they were law-less, outside the law of God, Gentiles. The Jews boasted of their having the law. They were the only people to have it. All the rest were 'law-less'. So, as Peter said, Christ was crucified by the Jews (who had the law) making use of the Gentiles (who did not have the law, the without-the-law people) to do the work. See also Matthew 20:18-19; and Galatians 2:15, where 'Jews by nature' are contrasted with 'sinners of the Gentiles' or 'Gentile sinners' (NIV). 'Sinners' and 'Gentiles', in such a context, means those who are law-less, lawless, outside the law, beyond the pale.

When the Jews wanted Christ put to death, they could tell Pilate: '*We* have a law, and according to *our* law he ought to die' (John 19:7; see Lev. 24:16), but the Roman governor had already told them: '*You* take him and judge him according to *your* law' (John 18:31). When the Jews of Corinth brought Paul to court before Gallio, accusing him of persuading 'men to worship God contrary to the law' (Acts 18:11-16),<sup>26</sup> Gallio refused to entertain the case, on the grounds that it was none of his business. He roundly told them he would not get involved in 'a question of

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<sup>26</sup> The law of Moses, they meant, not the law of Corinth.

words and names and your own law'; '*your own law*', I emphasise. With a dismissive, 'Look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters', he cleared the court. Claudius Lysias spoke in a similar way when writing to Felix, calling the accusation laid against Paul by the Jews, 'questions of *their law*' (Acts 23:29), no concern of his, something outside his jurisdiction, comprehension and competence. The Jews confirmed this by telling Felix they had 'wanted to judge [Paul] according to *our law*' (Acts 24:6). Festus was in the same quandary as Felix. While he was familiar with 'the custom of the Romans', he was 'uncertain of such questions' as he was now being asked, 'questions... about *their own religion*' (Acts 25:16,19-20). Paul, standing before Agrippa, was happy to think his judge was an 'expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews', including the words of the prophets. '*Our religion*', he called it (Acts 26:1-5,26-27) – with the clear implication that Gentiles generally speaking had at best only a limited knowledge of God's revelation to the Jews, and their customs, religion and *law*. All this is strange, to put it mildly, *if these Gentiles had been as much under the law as the Jews*. I realise these Gentiles were politicians as well as magistrates, soldiers or kings, and I would not treat their words as the final authority on biblical principles, but they do nothing to contradict the claim that the law was given only to the Jews.<sup>27</sup>

And what of Hebrews 7:11? We are told that 'under [the levitical priesthood] the people received the law'. While it is not easy to determine precisely what the writer meant, at the very least we may speak of a link between the levitical priesthood, the Israelites and the law. In fact, it is much stronger than this. It was *under* the levitical priesthood that Israel received the law. The NIV and the NASB use the word *basis*; Israel received the law *on the basis* of the levitical priesthood. Now who received the levitical priesthood? The Jews. The Jews and no others. No Gentiles had the levitical priesthood. Consequently, only the Jews could have received the law, since no people could have the law

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<sup>27</sup> In my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408, I deal with the objection that such passages are concerned with the ceremonial or judicial law. They are not! As I keep saying, we are talking about the whole law.

without the levitical priesthood, and *vice-versa*. The two were inextricably linked (Heb. 7:11-12,14,18-19,22,28). The two stood or fell together: ‘The priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law’ (Heb. 7:12). Under this system – unique to the Jews – the law required Levi to collect the tithe from his brothers – not all men (Heb. 7:5). And so on.

Therefore, of all nations, Israel alone received the law.

*But what about Romans 3:19?*

### ***What about Romans 3:19?***

The verse reads: ‘Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God’. Surely this teaches that all men – Jews and Gentiles – are under the law? But, no, it does not, even though at first glance it seems like it.

As I have shown, the context proves that ‘the law’ here includes at least the ten commandments, but more; it is the Old Testament as a whole. It is the law, the law in its entirety. Furthermore, note how Paul said that the law speaks to those who are under it. This ought to give pause for thought. If all men are under the law, then Paul wrote what amounts to a truism. The fact that he made such an observation at all – the law speaks to those who are under it – indicates there is something to be taken notice of. To whom was he referring? Who were those who were ‘under the law’, those to whom the law speaks? The context from Romans 2:1 and on is conclusive. He was clearly referring to the Jews. *They* were under it. It was given to *them*. The law certainly stopped their mouths. They had the law, they were under it, but since they failed to keep it, it condemned them. It took away all their excuse. Pharisees might think that *knowing* the law, *having* the law, was all that counted (John 5:39,45; 7:49; 9:28; Rom. 2:17-29), but, far from being justified by possession of the law, they would ‘be judged by the law’, ‘for’, as the apostle explained, ‘not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified’ (Rom. 2:12-13).

But what of the Gentiles in Romans 3:19? The words, ‘to those who are under the law’, imply there are others who are *not* under the law. The Gentiles, Paul explained, did not have the Jews’ advantage – they were not given the law, they were not under it (Rom. 2:12-15). Even so, some of them, at least, were living up to the light they had – and ‘by nature do the things in the law... who show the work of the law written in their hearts’ – and in this respect did better than the Jews.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean that some Gentiles by their works were free of sin and so avoided God’s wrath. No! The point is, God is impartial. The Jews who had the law will be judged, and the Gentiles who did not have the law will also be judged, and both will be judged fairly by God (Rom. 1:18 – 3:20). What is more, if the Gentiles, who never had the advantage of receiving the law, were unable to voice any excuse for their sin, how much more guilty were the Jews – who had the law, and boasted about it (Rom. 2:17-24)! The Jews had the light of God’s word (Ps. 119:130). The Gentiles did not. But even so, all sinned and were ‘guilty before God’ (Rom. 3:19,23); the Jews against the law, and the Gentiles against some sort<sup>29</sup> of moral consciousness. And both were responsible. The principle is clear: more light, more responsibility!

*This* is Paul’s argument. Whether or not men had the law, Paul had already ‘charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin’ (Rom. 3:9). As he said, quoting and citing the Old Testament (the law): ‘There is none righteous, no, not one... none... none... none... For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:9-23). And as with sin, so with salvation, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:28-31; 10:12-13). God is impartial between them. In short: ‘Now we know that whatsoever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God’ (Rom. 3:19). The Jews – who had the law – were silenced by it. The Gentiles – who did not have the law – had no excuse in any case. Hence, all the world is guilty before God. ‘God has bound all men over to

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<sup>28</sup> See the next article for a thorough examination of Rom. 2:14-15.

<sup>29</sup> I admit my expression is (deliberately) vague. I will go into it further in the next article.

disobedience' (Rom. 11:32, NIV). 'The Scripture has confined all under sin' (Gal. 3:22) – all men, 'all things' (Gal. 3:22, NASB margin), 'the creation... the creation... the creation... the whole creation' (Rom. 8:19-22). In short: 'Both Jews and Greeks... are all under sin... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:9,23).

In other words, Romans 3:19 supports the claim that the law was given to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles.

Many Reformed teachers will have none of it. The law was given to all men in Adam, they say; it was reinstated to all men through Moses; and all men are under the law today. Some go further. Men will be under it in eternity.<sup>30</sup>

These statements are wrong on several counts. Although it is claimed that men know the law of God by nature, and have done so from Adam, it is significant that such teachers never include the sabbath in trying to justify their claim. Let us think about this for a minute. Are we really to believe that pagans know they must rest from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset? Can anybody tell us of a pagan people, completely without Scripture, which keeps the sabbath? or feels guilty for not keeping it? Can anyone point to any man – including the patriarchs – before Exodus 16, who kept the sabbath?

Furthermore, the notion that the moral law was *reinstated* or *reinstated* or *restated* on Sinai because it had fallen into obscurity, is without a shred of evidence. Romans 5:20 disproves

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<sup>30</sup> A staggering – not to say, ridiculous – claim. The law is 'made', 'not... for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate' (1 Tim. 1:9-12). Will the eternal glory be populated by men and women who need a law against murder, sodomy and 'any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine', and glory in it? Reformed writers refer to 'the permanence and glory of the moral law'. My *Christ* is my attempt to write on the permanence and the glory of the *gospel*. The glory of the law was fading and passing away even as it was given (2 Cor. 3:7-18). As the New Testament expressly states, it was a temporary measure, 'added' until the Christ's fulfilment of his Father's will in his first coming, and has no glory now in comparison to the gospel since Christ fulfilled and thus abolished it (Gal. 3:19; Eph. 2:15; Heb. 7:18; 8:7-13; 9:5-10).



it: the law – the whole law – *entered* at Sinai; it was not *restated* because it had fallen into obscurity! It entered the world at that time. More of this anon. Much more!

But the simple point I wish to make in this article is that the law was given to the Jews at Sinai. It was not given to the Gentiles, either at Sinai or at creation. It was not given to the Gentiles, full stop.

*But what of those places in the New Testament where Paul addresses believers as those no longer under the law?* Since he must have been including Gentiles in at least some of the passages, does this not mean that the Gentiles *were* under the law, after all? The answer is, No! As I come to the passages, I will deal with the question in detail, but for now I simply state that on several occasions, Paul was speaking either of his own personal experience as a Jew, or else he was speaking of the Jews and not Gentiles. And even when he was clearly addressing Gentiles, he was often rebuking them for seeking to go under the law, allowing themselves to be put under it by false teachers, Judaisers, or going back to the slavery of pagan principles – this last, having nothing to do with the law of Moses at all! Christ has redeemed his people from all bondage.

Even so, reader, there are some passages where such explanations still do not satisfy. Romans 2:14-15 is the explanation of all such. In another article, I will look at those very important verses.