

25.06.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Israel of God

Bible Readings = 2 Corinthians 1:19-22 and Gal. 3:6-9; 3:24-29; 6:14-16

Introduction:

- (1) This week's message is the last on the Galatian series, and in some ways it acts as a sort of bridge between the materials we have been looking at over the first part of the year, to our next theme.
- (2) The issue underlying the letter to the Galatians is the matter of the believer's relationship to the Law, and under this heading, the nature and source of our righteousness.
- (3) This issue had a particular focus (in the matter of circumcision), but this itself was occasioned by the fact that the gospel was now at work among the nations, and these nations were now in union with Christ, along with believing members of God's old covenant community.
- (4) So the issue to which we will turn from next week onwards is the gospel, the nations and the plan of God. This will necessitate that we take a view of the city of man and the city of God, but the overall theme will be God's plan and purpose being outworked among the nations.
- (5) So this week acts as a conclusion of the one series, and an orientation to that which follows.

This message will bring our series on Galatians to a close. We will be looking at what it means that we are called the "Israel of God", and at the significance of this title for the Law of God on the one hand and the nations on the other.

1. Who or what is 'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16)

(1) Some translations will have 'peace and mercy upon them *and* upon the Israel of God' while others will take it as 'peace and mercy upon them, *even* upon the Israel of God'. Both are acceptable, but we need to note that at various points in the Galatian letter Paul has emphasised that *all* believers are children of promise, and, as such, children of Abraham

- Gal. 3:7-9; 3:28 compare with Romans 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God ; 4:12 to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised; 9:6f. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel Phil. 3:3 For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

(2) Elsewhere he emphasises the fundamental unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ, who is both the bond of peace and the foundation of the new covenant temple

- Eph. 2:11-22.

(3) Thus, I take Paul's statement in Gal. 6:16 to be linked to his statement in 6:15 i.e. the Israel of God is a new creation.

- Gal. 6:15 may be translated '...a new creature', or '...a new creation'. The word can do service for both, and the end point is the same. If there is a new creature it is because there is a new creation.

- Compare with 2 Cor. 5:17
- This new creation is known by faith, and looks forward to the promise of the fulfilment. We still live in the light of Promise...albeit sealed by the blood of Christ as the guarantee, but still waiting for that which is promised, the full revelation of our inheritance.
 - All the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).
 - We have received both the seal and pledge of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21f.)
- And this new creation knows peace and mercy as it walks by 'this rule' (Gal. 6:16). This rule is (a) the injunction about circumcision, but (b) the foundation of this injunction laid in Gal. 6:14 i.e. the finished work of the Cross.

2. The Israel of God and Law of God

(1) This new creation of God now stands in a new relationship to the Law of God (or perhaps better, to a *renewed* relationship to the Law of God).

- Throughout the letter the Law has been a place of slavery. To be 'under' the Law in that sense was to be under its curse, condemnation and accusation.
 - Compare Rom. 3:19-20 with Gal. 3:23; 4:5; 4:21; 5:18; etc.
- To be *under* the law is the equivalent to be in the flesh not the Spirit, to be in Adam rather than in Christ, and so on.
 - In emphasising circumcision the Judaisers were seeking to bring the new Israel of God under the curse of the Law. Cf. Peter's statement in Acts 15:6-11.

(2) So does this mean that the Israel of God is law-less? This charge was certainly levelled at Paul (e.g. Rom. 3:8; 3:31 compare with Rom. 10:4 'for Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness* to everyone who believes')

- Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (not that it had ever been this way in intention, but our sinful flesh uses the Law of God to establish a false righteousness), means that we are not righteous on the basis of our relation to the Law, but on the basis of relation to Christ.
- See Romans 3:21ff. 'apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made manifest'. Circumcision, then, was the sign of Israel's covenant relation to God, attesting to the nation that it lived under the promise of God, marking them off from the other nations as God's special possession. To this covenant nation he gave the Law, the prophets, the worship, the presence of his glory, etc.

(3) But Christ is not the end of the Law in the sense that he removes it.

- See, for example, Matt. 7:17ff.
 - How does he fulfil it? In his deeds (he actually and he alone has loved the Lord etc.), in his teaching (giving the true, spiritual meaning of the law), in his death (fulfilling its curse as well as all the aspects of the Old Testament ceremonial law which all pointed to Christ), and by his Spirit, in us!
 - Matt. 5:20 cf. Rom. 8:1ff. 'That the righteous requirement of the Law may be fulfilled in us'. Also compare with Galatians 5:16.
 - The promise is that the Law will be fulfilled in us! We *will* love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; we *will* have no other gods before him; we *will* love our neighbour as ourselves; etc.

- The Father *will* have a community of his sons conformed to the image of his son.
 - The fulfilment of the Law is the action and reality of love
 - Rom. 13:8ff. cf. Gal. 5:14; Matt. 7:12; 22:39ff.; James 2:8; etc.
- (4) The battle is familiar to us in Romans 7, but the key to walking by the Spirit in Romans 8 is the gospel of our justification in Christ, and goal is the redemption of our bodies in the resurrection.

3. The Israel of God and the Nations

(1) Here we move into the material that will launch us into the new topic, but we make some comments.

- God's old covenant people were meant to be light to the nations. See Deut. 4:5ff.
 - Compare with the self-understanding of Israel revealed in Rom. 2:17ff. Where the Law became the whip of judgement, placing ourselves on the throne of God (cf. James 4:11-12).
- The light shines before men, as in Matt. 5:3ff. poor in spirit, meek, humble, thirsting for righteousness (for oneself!); etc.

(2) So, the Israel of God lives under the rule of God, without complaint against the authorities of the land

- Rom. 13:1ff. compare with 1 Peter 2:13-17

(3) But ultimately, we live and work under the rule of God that the nations may be brought to the obedience of faith (i.e. the fullness of love that flows from faith), as in Romans 1:5f.; 16:25ff.