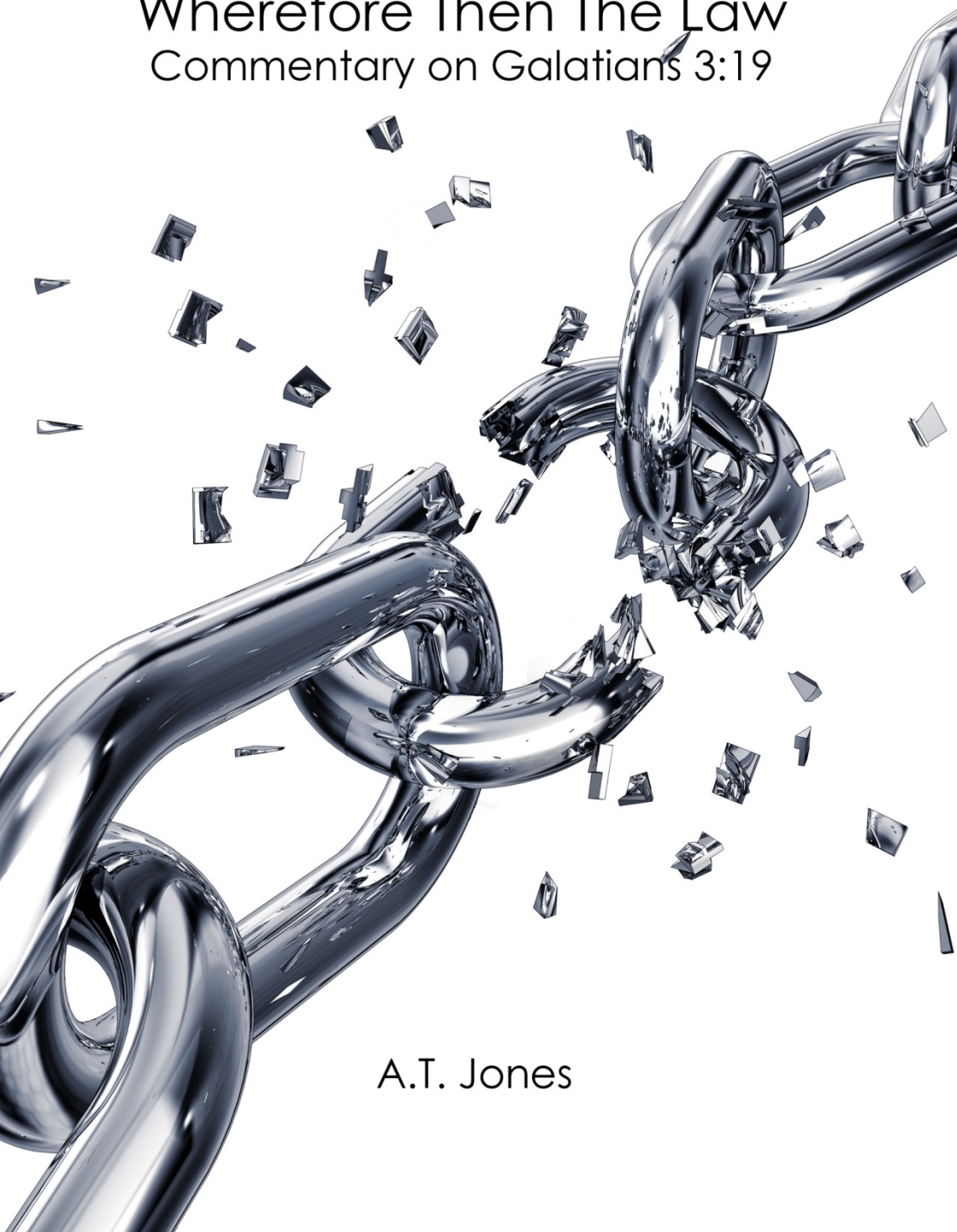


Wherefore Then The Law

Commentary on Galatians 3:19



A.T. Jones

Wherefore Then the Law
Commentary on Galatians 3:19

A.T. Jones

Taken from Review and Herald Articles
February 6, 1900 – March 13 1900

Printed by



MARANATHA
M E D I A

maranathamedia.com

March 2017

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Wherefore Then the Law?	6
Moral and Ceremonial Law	8
Misconceptions About the “Added Law”	12
The Law Spoken Because of Transgression	15
In the Hand of a Mediator.....	18
Till the Seed Should Come = Second Advent.....	21

Introduction

The question of which law was the law in Galatians was the focal point of the doctrinal battle that took place during the 1888 Bible conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Why is it so vital for us to understand the central points related to this question? The law in Galatians reveals whether we understand the everlasting covenant correctly in the details of Scripture. While it is possible to grasp the central theme of the everlasting covenant, this theme must be understood in the details of Scripture to be truly appreciated and taught from Scripture. This is particularly true concerning the writings of Paul.

As history records the issues in Galatians 3 are directly related to understanding justification by faith.

At 9 a.m. Elder Waggoner continued his lessons on the law and gospel. **The Scriptures considered were the fifteenth chapter of Acts and the second and third of Galatians, compared with Romans 4 and other passages in Romans. His purpose was to show that the real point of controversy was justification by faith in Christ,** which faith is reckoned to us as to Abraham, for righteousness. The covenant and promises to Abraham are the covenant and promises to us. "Third Day's Proceedings, Friday, Oct. 19, 1888," General Conference Daily Bulletin 2, 1 (Oct. 21, 1888), p. 1.

Ellen White confirmed that this message was justification by faith in verity.

Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, "It is the third angel's message, in verity."-- The Review and Herald, April 1, 1890.

The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God.
TM 91,92

This message was suppressed within the church as much as possible by the majority of leaders who rejected it and controlled the mediums of communication with the church at large. When A.T Jones was given the position of editor of the Review and Herald he was given the opportunity to express a carefully reasoned explanation of the 1888 message understanding of the law in Galatians. We are reproducing his commentary on Galatians 3:19 here as much of the conflict centred on this verse and when would be the fulfilment of the phrase “till the seed should come.”

I encourage the reader to study this commentary carefully. Elder A.T. Jones under the inspiration of the Spirit of God uses his characteristic razor sharp logic to present the Bible evidence that helps to underpin the key points of the 1888 message. This commentary lays the ground work to shatter the chains of the long held protestant view regarding the covenants that short circuits the power of righteousness by faith that is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, [message] and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. Rev 1:3

Wherefore Then the Law?

Review and Herald, February 6, 1900

It will be noticed that the word “serves” is a supplied word. It really adds nothing to the sense. The question stands just as strong and just as plain to read. “Wherefore then the law?” Another translation is, “Why then the law?”

This was the ready argument of “the Pharisees, which believed,” against all the gospel which was presented by Paul. And this, because the gospel presents justification by the faith of Christ, and not by any works of law. And wherever this was presented, “the Pharisees, which believed,” who had no conception of justification in any other way than by works of law, raised this inquiry, “Wherefore then the law?” “What is the use of the law?” In their estimation, this objecting question was a sufficient refutation of all that might ever be said as to justification by faith, without any deeds of any law.

And, indeed, this same argument, in this same superior, self-assertive way, is used for this same purpose by “the Pharisees which believe” today. Let the claims of the law of God, precisely as God wrote it, be presented today in any part of this whole land, or even in any other land, and immediately professed ministers of the gospel will arise, all bristling with objections, and will oppose every claim of the law of God upon them, because it “never could justify anybody.” They will single out, and search out, every expression they can find in the Scriptures, such as, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified;” and, “Whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace,” etc.; and with strong voice will ring forth and then vigorously demand, “What is the use of such a law? What is it good for? It cannot justify anybody.”

The scene here described is perfectly familiar to thousands upon thousands of the readers of the REVIEW AND HERALD, and especially to the preachers of the gospel, in the Third Angel’s Message, which calls all people to the keeping of “the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

It is worthy of notice, however, that in the ancient days this objection was never raised by the Gentiles, but only by “the Pharisees, which believed:” never by the plain, simple sinner, who knew that his works could not justify him, and who therefore longed for justification indeed; but only by those who professed to know God, and to know justification, but who knew only justification by their own works of law. And so it is even now.

Therefore, this inquiry—“Wherefore then the law?” —is present truth, and will be present truth forever. To a person whose conception of justification is altogether justification by works, such an inquiry, presented in objection, is a sufficient refutation of all the claims of the law of God; and no stronger proof could ever be given by any one that his only conception of justification is altogether by works, than that he should raise against the law of God, this objecting inquiry, “Why then the law?” “What is the use of the law?” This because such an objection certifies that in his estimation, there can be no possible use for law of any kind unless it will justify a man, even the transgressor.

But every one who knows justification in truth, which is justification by faith, knows full well, and can see with perfect plainness, that there may be abundant use for law, altogether apart from any idea of justification by it. And thus there is a place for this question, in sober inquiry.

“Why then the law?” The answer is—

1. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20): “that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13), in order that men, knowing the enormity of sin, may be able to appreciate the greatness of the salvation that God has sent in the gift of his Son.

Even so, it is said in another place. “The law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21).

2. When the sinner, having learned by the law the greatness of his sin, and having found in the Lord Jesus a salvation so great as to save him from all sin, and a righteousness so complete as to reign in him against all the power of sin, he still finds a second grand use for the law in its witnessing to the righteousness of God, which he obtained without the law. And so, it is written: “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed BY THE LAW and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:21, 22).

Such, and so far, is, “Wherefore then the law?”

Moral and Ceremonial Law

Review and Herald, February 13, 1900

“WHEREFORE then the law?” (Gal. 3:19).

This inquiry of “the Pharisees, which believed” was not limited to the law of God, although that, being the chief of all laws, was of course the principal thought in the inquiry. But from the beginning of this study of the book of Galatians we have found that there was involved not only the moral law, but also the ceremonial law—indeed all that God had given. And this, because all the service of the Pharisees was a service merely of law; since their only idea of justification was justification altogether by law, and their only idea of salvation altogether by works.

Therefore with “the Pharisees, which believed” this inquiry extended also to, Wherefore then the Levitical law? Wherefore then the sacrificial system? Wherefore circumcision? What was the use of all these, if salvation were not attained by any of them? Such was the only use they had ever made of any of these things: indeed, this was the only conception that they had of them.

They expected perfection from the Levitical priesthood; the same from circumcision; and the same from all that was given by the Lord. Their only idea of their use was that justification, salvation, came to them in the doing of these things - by the doing of them. But this was all error, and was a perversion of the true intent of all that God gave. Justification was not by any of these, nor by all of them together, any more than it was by the law of God. Justification was always by faith; and the sacrificial system, and all the services and ceremonies of the Levitical law, were only means which God gave, by which faith was expressed: the sacrifices were means of expressing faith that they already had in the great Sacrifice that God had made.

And this same query, and for the same reason, is raised today by thousands of “Pharisees which believe,” in their enmity against the truth of the gospel. For this reason alone, “Wherefore then the law?” is a live question today, and always will be a live question wherever the truth of the gospel—righteousness by faith—is preached.

But there is a greater reason, than that, as to “Wherefore then the law?” being a live question today and always. It is a true and proper question always, in the inquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus. For in the whole divine economy of the times of Israel, there is precious truth, rich instruction, and glorious light, for all who would be taught of God. This was all there for the people of Israel of old; but through carnal-mindedness and its self-justification, they missed it. And because Israel did thus miss it, thousands

of professed believers today, stumbling over Israel's failures, neglect and even reject all the great riches, which Israel missed, but which were then and are now for all people. For to the people of the very last days it is written: "Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Mal. 4:4). And "the Christian who accepts the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, will look at Bible history in its true bearing. The history of the Jewish economy from beginning to end, though spoken of contemptuously, and sneered at as 'the dark ages,' will reveal light, and still more light, as it is studied."

"Wherefore then the law" of Levitical priesthood, sacrifice, offering, burnt offering, and offering for sin, the sanctuary and its ministry? —It was all only the divinely appointed means of expressing the faith that they already had, and that had already brought to them the righteousness of God without any deeds of any law.

The Levitical priesthood was the means of expressing faith in that greater priesthood—the priesthood of the Son of God—announced in the words: "The Lord said unto my Lord . . . Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec" (Ps. 110:1-4). The sanctuary and the services of this priesthood were but means of expressing faith in the sanctuary and the services of the priesthood that is in heaven. For, of all that system, "this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. 8:1, 2).

And this whole story, as here outlined, is shown in the instruction given to the people, in the book of Leviticus. In Lev. 4:13-20 it is said that when the people had sinned through ignorance, and the thing was hid from their eyes in having "done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; when the sin, which they have sinned against it—against the law of God—was known, then the congregation should "offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation." And the elders of the congregation were to lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord, thus confessing the sin of the congregation, and laying it upon the bullock. Then the bullock must be "killed before the Lord." And the priest that was anointed brought "of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation; and dipped his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkled it seven times before the Lord, even before the vail." And he "put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar," which was before the Lord, in the tabernacle of the congregation; and poured out "all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering," which was "at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." Thus the priest made "atonement for them," and the sin was "forgiven them."

There was the law of God, and by it the knowledge of sin, showing them guilty. Then there was the sacrifice, and the laying of the sin, in confession, upon the sacrifice as a substitute. Then there was the slaying of the sacrifice and the offering of its blood in their behalf, and by it atonement made and the forgiveness of sin to them. There was by the law the knowledge of sin, and by the gospel of sacrifice the forgiveness of sin and atonement with God.

But “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Wherefore then all this law, sanctuary, service, and ceremony? Ah! It was “a figure for the time then present” “until the time of reformation.” But “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:9-12).

And with Christ and in Christ we have this day, A.D. 1900, the substance of which all that was the shadow. In the heavenly temple there is the ark of his testament, in which is the testament—his law. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” And by the Gospel of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his priestly service, and the offering of his blood in the heavenly sanctuary, there is forgiveness of sin “to every one that believeth,” and righteousness in his being made at one with God, in Jesus Christ, who is the atonement.

And the only difference between the times before Christ and these times after Christ, is that then, because Jesus had not yet come and offered himself, but was to come, faith in his coming and offering himself could be expressed only in this way; whereas, now that he has come and has offered himself a sacrifice, and has entered upon his priesthood and “ever lives to make intercession for” us, faith is now expressed in the bread and wine—the body and blood—representing that which has actually been offered. To offer a sacrifice now, and to have a priesthood and a priestly ministry on earth, would be to deny that Christ, the true Sacrifice, has yet been offered.

Thus, there was clear use, and intelligent use, for all the laws, both moral and ceremonial, which were given to Israel. And this without any purpose or thought that justification comes by any of them, or all of them together, but that justification comes always and ONLY by faith.

And this is “Wherefore the law?” as to the ceremonial law. And from the considerable and careful study of the subject, we are thoroughly convinced that in the book of Galatians, the book of Romans and the book of Hebrews meet. The letter to the

Galatians was written before either the letter to the Romans or that to the Hebrews. In the controversy raised by “the Pharisees, which believed,” which had confused the Galatian Christians, both the moral and the ceremonial law were involved; and so both are involved in the letter to the Galatians, and the whole ground is briefly covered. Then afterward the book of Romans was written, enlarging, and dwelling wholly, upon that phase of Galatians, which involves the moral law, and justification, by faith; and the book of Hebrews was written, enlarging, and dwelling wholly, upon that phase of Galatians, which involves the ceremonial law, and justification, by faith. And we believe that as the whole subject is more, and more carefully, studied, the more it will be seen that in Galatians both Romans and Hebrews are comprehended.

Misconceptions About the “Added Law”

Review and Herald, February 20, 1900

“WHEREFORE then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19).

The Greek term that is here translated “added,” is the same word that, in Heb. 12:19, is translated “spoken,” in the clause referring to the voice of God speaking from Sinai, “which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken [or added] to them any more.” It is the same word that is used also in Deut. 5:22 where it is translated “added,” in the sentence, “These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added [or spoke] no more.”

In both Hebrews and Deuteronomy the word is used with direct reference to the giving of the law of God, the Ten Commandments. This passage in Galatians, therefore, would certainly seem to suggest that the law here referred to would be the same law. And this is further sustained by the expression later, in this verse, that the law referred to was ordained “in the hand of a mediator.” Now, since there is only “one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,” it was certainly Christ’s hand in which this law was ordained. And Deut. 33:2, speaking of the same scene referred to in Deut. 5:22 and Heb. 12:20, says: “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them: he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.”

Now the Ten Commandments were not only written by the hand of the Lord himself, but they were written on tables of stone, which “tables were the work of God,” as well as the writing, which was the writing of God. And these tables were given by the hand of the Lord, unto Moses. And even when Moses had broken these tables, and had been directed to make other tables, the Lord wrote again with his hand on these tables the same law that at first he had written on the tables that he himself had made.

But this is not true of any other law. It is true that the ceremonial law—the law concerning sacrifices, offerings, the sanctuary, the whole Levitical system—was also given by the Lord to Moses; but it was not given by the hand of the Lord to Moses. It did not come forth from his hand, either in writing by his own hand, or upon tables made with his own hand. It was given to Moses by the Lord, and was written altogether by Moses, and not at all by the Lord.

Some, taking the English word “added” in this clause in Gal. 3:19, and holding it in the restricted English sense of “added,” have supposed that it is here taught that whatever law is referred to was necessarily added to something as a part of that thing, and so have held that it was added to the covenant with Abraham. But such a view as that would plainly be a mistake, because, in Gal. 3:15, it is positively stated that “though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man . . . adds thereto.” Thus it would be impossible for anything to be added to that covenant. The word translated “adds,” in Gal. 3:15, is not the same in Greek as that translated “added” in Gal. 3:19, nor are the words akin.

From the Greek word itself, in Gal. 3:19, and its use in connection with the law, in Heb. 12:20 and Deut. 5:22, as well as its further use in the Scriptures, it is plain that it is not necessarily implied that what is referred to should be literally added in the sense of a mathematical addition. One expression in which the Greek word is used is, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Here it is plain that the expression is equivalent to merely to “give”—“all these things shall be given unto you,” or “ye shall receive all these things.” Such is exactly its meaning in Mark 4:24, in which our translation is, “Unto you that hear shall more be given”—shall more be added. In Acts 12:3 our translation reads, “He proceeded further to take Peter also.” This translated, as in Gal. 3:19, would be, “He added to take Peter.” Thus the word in Gal. 3:19 could, with equal propriety be translated, “Wherefore then the law? It was spoken because of transgressions,” or, “It was given because of transgressions.” One translation of the clause is, “It was set because of transgressions.” Another is, “It was introduced,” etc. True, to translate it, “It was added,” is just as good, provided it be understood that the word “added” conveys these senses, and is not to be restricted to its special meaning of a mathematical addition, as of adding “one cubit unto his stature.”

The law, then, was given, was spoken, and was added, because of transgression. Will this statement that “it was added because of transgressions” hold in the case of the law of God, the Ten Commandments? With respect to that law as it is referred to throughout in the discussion in which the Galatian Christians were involved, that is, the law in its written form, the expression does certainly apply. This will not only be clearly seen, but it is positively stated, in a passage already several times quoted in these “Studies in Galatians;” and we here set it down again: —

“If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abrahams, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would

it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai, or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses" ("Patriarch and Prophets," page 364).

This corresponds exactly to the other expressions with reference to the entering of the law of God: "The laws entered, that the offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20). "That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13). "To bring transgressions to a head" (Farrar's translation of Gal. 3:19). "In order to bring about as transgressions the transgressions of it" (Alford).

This will be followed further next week.

The Law Spoken Because of Transgression

Review and Herald, February 27, 1900

“Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions.” From the evidences presented in last week’s study in Galatians, it is perfectly plain that the law of God, the Ten Commandments, in written form, both in tables of stone and as drawn out in its principles in the statutes and judgments of the “additional directions given to Moses,” was spoken, was given, was added, because of the transgressions of men. As men went further into darkness, the Lord followed them with added efforts, and with further details to bring them to the light. Indeed, they went so far into transgressions and darkness that the Lord actually followed them so far as to give them “statutes that were not good.” The whole story is told in the following passage: —

The law of God existed before man was created. The angels were governed by it. Satan fell because he transgressed the principles of God’s government. After Adam and Eve were created, God made known to them his law. It was not then written, but was rehearsed to them by Jehovah.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden. After God had made the world and created man upon the earth, he made the Sabbath for man. After Adam’s sin and fall, nothing was taken from the law of God. The principles of the Ten Commandments existed before the fall, and were of a character suited to the condition of a holy order of beings. *After the fall*, the *principles* of those *precepts* were *not changed*, but *additional precepts* were given to meet man *in his fallen state*.

Adam taught his descendants the law of God which law was handed down to the faithful through successive generations. The continual transgression of God’s law called for a flood of waters upon the earth. Noah and his family preserved the law. Noah taught his descendants the Ten Commandments. The Lord preserved a people for himself from Adam down, in whose hearts was his law. He says of Abraham, He “obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, my laws” (Gen. 26:5).

If the descendants of Abraham had kept separate from other nations, they would not have been seduced into idolatry.

There were but a few families that first went down into Egypt. These increased to a great multitude. Some were careful to instruct their children in the law of God; but many of the Israelites had witnessed so much idolatry that they had confused ideas of God’s law.

To leave them without excuse, the Lord himself condescended to come down upon Sinai enshrouded in glory, and surrounded by his angels, and in a most sublime and awful manner made known his law of Ten Commandments. He did not trust them to be taught by any one, not even his angels, but spoke his law with an audible voice in the hearing of all the people. He did not, even then, trust them to the short memory of a people who were prone to forget his requirements, but wrote them with this own holy finger upon tables of stone. He would remove from them all possibility of mingling with his holy precepts any tradition, or of confusing his requirements with the practices of men.

He then came still closer to his people, who were so readily led astray, and would not leave them with merely the ten precepts of the Decalogue. He commanded Moses to write, as he should bid him, judgments and laws, giving minute directions in regard to what he required them to perform, and thereby guarded the ten precepts which he had engraved upon the tables of stone. These specific directions and requirements were given to draw erring man to the obedience of the moral law, which he is so prone to transgress.

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved in the ark by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a token of pledge, they would never have gone into idolatry, nor been suffered to go down into Egypt; and there would have been no necessity of God's proclaiming his law from Sinai, and engraving it upon tables of stone, and guarding it by definite directions in the judgments and statutes given to Moses.

Moses wrote these judgments and statutes from the mouth of God while he was with him in the mount. If the people of God had obeyed the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the specific directions given to Moses, which he wrote in a book, relative to their duty to God and to one another. The definite directions, which the Lord gave to Moses in regard to the duty of his people to one another, and to the stranger, are the principles of the Ten Commandments simplified and given in definite manner, that they need not err.

The Lord said of the children of Israel, "Because they had not executed my judgments but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live" (Ezek. 20:25). Because of continual

disobedience, the Lord annexed penalties to the transgression of his law, which were not good for the transgressor, or whereby he should not live in his rebellion.

By transgressing the law which God had given in such majesty, and amid glory which was unapproachable, the people showed open contempt of the great Lawgiver, and death was the penalty” (“Spirit of Prophecy,” Vol. 1. pages 261-265). (See also “Patriarchs and Prophets,” chap. 32, pars. 1-4).

It is true that the sacrificial system was also given, added, because of transgressions. This is true as to the sacrifices originally, with Adam and Abraham: it is also true of the Levitical system given to Israel in the wilderness. This is also stated in a passage quoted in previous studies, as follows: —

“A system was then [“after the fall”] established requiring the sacrificing of beasts, to keep before fallen man that which the serpent made Eve disbelieve, that the penalty of disobedience is death. The transgression of God’s law made it necessary for Christ to die a sacrifice, and thus make a way possible for man to escape the penalty, and yet the honor of God’s law be preserved” (“Spirit of Prophecy,” Vol. 1, page 261).

“The sacrificial system, committed to Adam, was also perverted by his descendants. Superstition, idolatry, cruelty, and licentiousness corrupted the simple and significant service that God had appointed. Through long intercourse with idolaters, the people of Israel had mingled many heathen customs with their worship; therefore the Lord gave them at Sinai definite instruction concerning the sacrificial service. After the completion of the tabernacle, he communicated with Moses from the cloud of glory above the mercy seat, and gave full directions concerning the system of offerings, and forms of worship to be maintained in the sanctuary. The ceremonial law was thus given to Moses, and by him written in a book. But the law of Ten Commandments spoken from Sinai had been written by God himself of the tables of stone, and was sacredly preserved in the ark” (“Patriarchs and Prophets,” pages 364, 365).

Thus, of either the moral law or the ceremonial law it is true that it was given, added, because of transgressions. The question then is, “Which one is the law pre-eminently referred to in this clause in Gal. 3:19?” And from the specifications already noticed, as to this law having been “ordained . . . in the hand of a mediator,” and the direct association of this text with the speaking of the law of God in Heb. 12:20 and Deut. 5:22, it certainly must be the truth that the law which in this passage is pre-eminently intended, is the law of God, the Ten Commandments, in written form on tables of stone and in the Bible.

In the Hand of a Mediator

Review and Herald, March 6, 1900

“Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions . . . and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19).

This statement in Gal. 3:19 is identical in substance with that by Stephen in his last words to the Sanhedrin, as they were about to stone him to death, when he said, “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:52, 53).

This expression by Stephen, that the law was received, “by the disposition of angels,” and the expression in Gal. 3:19, that the law “was ordained by angels,” are identical; for Stephen’s word translated “disposition,” and Paul’s word translated “ordained,” are the same Greek word precisely, with simply a variation in tense. Stephen’s word is diatagas and Paul’s word is diatageis.

Now, what law could it be which, whatever else might be included, was pre-eminently the law referred to by Stephen when, in connection with the law that they had not kept, he charged them with being murderers? What law is it, which pre-eminently is not kept by a murderer? —It is the law of God—the Ten Commandments, one of which says, “Thou shall not kill.” And when the same identical word is used in Gal. 3:19, in the same identical connection, then what law alone can be referred to as pre-eminently the law there referred to, whatever other laws may be included? To have any other than the same law in both places would be simply to do positive violence to the plain scripture in its whole connection. And since there can be no possible question as to what law is pre-eminently the one referred to by Stephen, there can likewise be no question as to what law is pre-eminently referred to in Gal. 3:19, when the same identical word is used as was used by Stephen, and in the same connection and in the same sense precisely.

What, then, is the thought expressed in the words “the disposition of angels,” “ordained by angels”? The root of the two words used by Stephen and Paul is diatasso, which signifies “to arrange, ordain, establish”; “to set in order, and draw up an army” on parade, or “in battle order.” Thus, the specific statement in the two passages is that at the giving of the law referred to in the two places, the angels were drawn up in a grand array, as a king disposes his army, or a general his troops; and that, in the

presence of this grand array of the angels of God, the law in question was given by the hand of a mediator.

As was presented in a former study: Since there is but “one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,” Christ is unquestionably the Mediator in whose hand this law was ordained. And the scene is touched in Deut. 33:2; “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.” From his right hand went forth this “fiery law” in the writing upon the tables of stone, and also in the work of making the tables of stone upon which the law was written by the hand of fire. For “the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables” (Ex. 32:16).

And when those original tables had been broken by Moses, although Moses hewed out a second two tables like unto the first, he was required to take up these tables into the mount; and there, Moses says, the Lord again “wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord spoke unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the Lord gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the Lord commanded me” (Deut. 10:4, 5).

Thus the law of the Ten Commandments was given, in the most complete sense, by the hand of the “one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5); and no other law was given. Other law was given by word, or by inspiration, to Moses, which he wrote with his hand; but no other law than that on the tables of stone was given in or by the hand of the Mediator. From his “hand” went forth that “fiery law”; and from that hand went forth no other law. And when from that “right hand” went forth that “fiery law,” then thousands of saints were present. These ten thousands of saints (or “holy ones,” R.V.) were the grand and glorious array of angels ordained, disposed, set in order, by the heavenly King, to behold and to do honor to this wonderful transaction of that most wonderful occasion.

Even Christian people have never yet truly discerned the majesty and glory of the giving of the law at Sinai; and that majesty and glory are only the true measure of the importance of that event. “There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud:” “mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly:” “the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder:” “the voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook”

(Ps. 77:18). —And from the midst of that glorious and terrible scene, when “the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness” (Deut. 4:11), “the Lord spoke . . . out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice,” the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:22), “and he added no more.” And “all the people that was in the camp trembled,” and “entreated that the word should not be spoken [added] to them any more.” And then, with his hand of fire, “he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto” Moses.

“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place” (Ps. 68:17). “The angels, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, surrounded the people of God as they were assembled around the mountain, and were all above them; thus making a great living tabernacle, from which every evil angel was excluded, that not one word that was to come from the voice of Jesus should be altered in any mind, nor one suggestion of doubt or evil to a soul be made.”

Thus when the law was delivered at Sinai, the glorious Lord and all the people were surrounded with the heavenly host of angels, disposed, ordained, arranged in orderly array. Four-faced and four winged cherubim, six-winged seraphim, and bright angels in glittering golden chariots—all these by the thousands upon thousands accompanied the Majesty of heaven, the Mediator, as in love there went forth from his hand to sinful men his great fiery law of love. (Deut. 33:3). Then at the giving of the law of God, the Ten Commandments, at Sinai, there certainly has been no more majestic scene since the creation of the world. And this is the only law ever given by the hand of the Mediator.

How can there be any question or doubt that this is the law of Gal. 3:19 that was added because of transgressions, and that was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator?

Till the Seed Should Come = Second Advent

Review and Herald, March 13, 1900

“Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19).

By each particular clause of this verse, considered by itself alone, we have found that the law of God—the Ten Commandments in written form, as given at Sinai, and as in the Bible—is the law that is pre-eminently meant, and is the only one that meets all the requirements of all the specifications so far considered. What now of this one—“till the seed should come to whom the promise was made”?

There are two laws referred to in Galatians. That is settled. They were both added; and they were both added because of transgressions. But which is pre-eminently the law referred to in that place, and its connection? That is the question here.

There are also two comings of the seed, which is Christ; and it is proper and fair to ask, “Which is the coming referred to here?” Why should any one settle and firmly fix as the coming of this passage a coming that requires that a law shall also be settled and fixed as the law of the passage, which will not meet the requirements of the passage in its connection? That is what has been done; and it has been the great defect in the usual consideration of this passage of Scripture.

Those who are the enemies of the law of God in any form, and who would be glad to have it abolished in every form, but who do not know that that law could not by any possibility be abolished, have always wrung this verse in to do service in that terribly mistaken cause. These eagerly seize upon and settle it that the coming of the Seed here referred to is the first coming of Christ. They never look beyond the single clause: it is not to their interest to do so; because the only use they have for this scripture is that they may support their determination that the law of God is abolished. Thus the enemies of the law of God.

On the other hand, the friends of the law of God know that it is true that there was a law abolished at the first coming of Christ. And since here is a law that was added “till the seed should come,” these friends of the law of God allow, and even settle upon, the claim of the enemies of the law of God, that the first coming of Christ is the coming that is here meant: then, and consequently the law that was abolished is decided to be the law here referred to. But it must be confessed that this is a weak way of getting at the thing. It bears on its face more the aspect of the begging of the

question than of a real study and discovery of the truth as it is in the Word, for the truth's sake. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the passage, or anywhere in this whole connection, that suggests the abolition of any law. The subject is, "Wherefore serves the law?" What is the purpose, the object, and the aim, of the law?

But there are two comings of the Seed. There is another, the second coming of Christ as well as there was the first. Is it impossible that this second coming of the Seed should be the coming referred to in this passage? There are other similar expressions in the Scripture.

For instance, Ezek. 21:27. Speaking of the removing of the diadem and crown of the king of Judah, it says: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it; and it shall be no more, until HE COME whose right it is; and I will give it to him." What coming is this? The answer to this question can be given only by a consideration of the facts in the case, He came, but instead of receiving that crown, he received a crown of thorns; instead of being seated upon that throne, he was nailed to the cross. So we know that that was not the coming referred to in the text, but that it is his second coming "seated upon the throne of his father David, and having on his head many crowns. Then it is that the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). And this is the coming of him whose right it is, that is referred to in the text, and then it will be given him.

Again, it is written that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That Seed CAME, and did not bruise the serpent's head, but himself was bruised instead. (Isa. 53:5). And after he had come, and had thus been bruised, even to death; had risen again from the dead; and had ascended to heaven, —even thirty years after these things—it was written: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20).

In Daniel 2 it is written: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). We all know that it is generally held by the ministers of the day that this was done at the first coming of Christ: that there the stone was cut out without hands, and is to roll on, and on, and on, until it fills the whole earth. But WE know that when he was here, he said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and "not from hence" (John 18:36). And so we know that this scripture is fulfilled at his second coming.

Now, why should it be thought impossible that Gal. 3:19 should refer to his second coming? Look at the situation as it is in the text, with its context: “Till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” What promise? —The promise of the inheritance, unquestionably: as it is written: “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” Thus it is fixed by the Word itself that the promise referred to is the promise of the inheritance. And whatever law it is that is here referred to, it is given, added, till He comes to whom the promise of the inheritance was made.

Now, at his first coming did he receive any of the inheritance? —No; no more than did Abraham, to whom with him, the promise was made. He “had not where to lay his head.” And of him it was equally true, as with Abraham, that he received “none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on.

Notice, too, particularly, that the clause says, “Till the seed should come to whom,” —not concerning whom, but TO whom—“the promise was made.” That is, the promise referred to was made to HIM, personally; and not simply to somebody, concerning him. But it is fixed by the text that the promise is the promise of the inheritance. This promise was made to Abraham and to his seed, which is Christ; and this was done when the promise was made to Abraham. But, further, it was also done TO the seed himself in person, which is Christ. Read it in the second psalm: “The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Ps. 2:7, 8). Here is the promise of the inheritance made direct to the seed, which is Christ.

Now, when is this promise fulfilled? And when something should be done, make, or instituted, “till the seed should come TO whom” that promise was made, then which coming would be the true and the only logical one that could be considered? —Plainly, the coming that would be at the receiving of the inheritance REFERRED TO THE PROMISE; and with which alone the promise is concerned.

Therefore, considering what the promise is plainly in the scriptures declared to be, —the promise of the inheritance, —and considering that this promise relates and pertains particularly, and above all, to his second coming, it is evident that the second coming of Christ, rather than his first, is the one referred to in the clause “till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.

And since by every other clause of the verse, we have found that the law of God, as given on tables of stone at Sinai, and in the Bible, is the one pre-eminently referred to, and the only one that will meet all the specifications of all the clauses; and since the coming referred to in this clause is the coming in connection with the inheritance and the receiving of it, this settles it beyond all possibility of controversy that the law of God, the Ten Commandments, as given on the tables of stone and in the Bible, must remain in full force and obligation until the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. And we all know that it will not be abolished then.

It is always true that those scriptures that Satan fixes upon and uses most tenaciously to prove the abolition of the law of God are the very ones which, when truly grasped, are seen to most conclusively and most beautifully show its everlasting integrity and obligation.

Look at the subject further. The inheritance is the thing referred to in the promise. But with what is the inheritance connected? —Plainly, and only, with God’s covenant with Abraham—the everlasting covenant. Notice in the context that “the covenant [that is the covenant with Abraham, the everlasting covenant] that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise [the promise of the inheritance of that covenant] of none effect” (Gal. 3:17).

As we have seen in a former study, the inheritance is the great thing in the covenant with Abraham, the everlasting covenant. Indeed, God made the covenant with Abraham in a pledge to Abraham that he would inherit that which God had promised. For after God had promised it to him, Abraham said, “Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” And, in answer, God made with him, and entered into with him, that blood covenant, in which he pledged his life that the promise of the inheritance should never fail. (Gen. 15:8-18).

And as we also found in the former studies, all that ever came in after that covenant was made, was, in blessing men, to enable them to attain to the fullness of that covenant, and to the inheritance of which that everlasting covenant is the pledge. And this was exactly the object of the giving of the law of God on tables of stone on Mount Sinai, and in the Bible. For if men had kept that covenant, they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone.” The object of that law, thus written and given to men, bringing transgressions to a head, making sins abound, was and is that men might find the grace of Christ much more abounding, —that through him they

might attain to the fullness of that everlasting covenant with Abraham, and so to the inheritance of which that covenant was and is the pledge.

And to allow the coming of the seed to whom the promise of the inheritance was made, to be the second coming of Christ, and not his first, —this gives opportunity for the law of God, in its written form, to fulfill its grand object, which is the bringing of men, through faith in Christ, to the fullness of that everlasting covenant. The fullness of that everlasting covenant is the righteousness of God—the keeping of the commandments, and the faith of Jesus. And men must be brought to the fullness of that everlasting covenant in order that they may receive the inheritance, of which that everlasting covenant is the pledge.

That this view is the correct one, and is the truth of the matter, is emphasized by the fact that the everlasting covenant is not met in its fullness, in believers, until the second coming of Christ; that is, till the seed really comes to whom the promise of the inheritance was made.

One provision of that everlasting covenant is. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” And that provision will not be accomplished in its fullness until, by the Third Angel’s Message, men are brought to the actual keeping of “the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus;” so that the Lord, looking down from heaven upon them, can say, in perfect truth: “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Another provision of that covenant is: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb. 8:11). Although we are now living in the times of the new covenant as really as was Abraham, yet neither the world nor we have attained to that point where it is not necessary any more for any man to teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, Know the Lord. And this part of the everlasting covenant will not be met in its fullness until, through the blessing and power of God in the Third Angel’s Message, the mystery of God shall have been finished. (Col. 1:26, 27; Rev. 10:7).

It is not necessary here to take up all the clauses of the new covenant one by one. These are enough to illustrate the truth that the everlasting covenant, the new covenant, the covenant with Abraham, which is the pledge of the inheritance that is promised to the Seed, is not met in its fullness in those who accept it, till the second coming of Christ.

And if this be not plain enough by the scriptures presented, or is not convincing enough, then read the following sentences from the testimony of Jesus, which is the Spirit of Prophecy: —

“It was at midnight that God chose to deliver his people. As the wicked were mocking around them, suddenly the sun appeared; shining in his strength, and the moon stood still. The wicked looked upon the scene with amazement, while the saints beheld with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Signs and wonders followed in quick succession. Everything seemed turned out of its natural course. The streams ceased to flow. Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. But there was one clear place of settled glory, whence came the voice of God like many waters, shaking the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. The graves were opened, and those who had died in faith under the Third Angel’s Message, keeping the Sabbath, came form from their dusty beds, glorified, to hear the covenant of peace that God was to make with those who had kept his law.

“The sky opened and shut, and was in commotion. The mountains shook like a reed in the wind, and cast out ragged rocks all around. The sea boiled like a pot, and cast out stones upon the land. And as God spoke the day and the hour of Jesus’ coming, and delivered the Everlasting Covenant to his people, he spoke one sentence, and then paused, while the words were rolling through the earth. The Israel of God stood with their eyes fixed upward, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of Jehovah, and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder . . . The wicked could not look upon them [the saints] for the glory. And when the never-ending blessing was pronounced on those who had honored God in keeping his Sabbath holy, there was a mighty shout of victory over the beast and over his image” (“Early Writings,” pp. 145, 146).

The following quotation also, though concerning in substance what is in the foregoing quotation, contains statements that make it worth printing in this connection: —

“With shouts of triumph, jeering, and imprecation, throngs of evil men are about to rush upon their prey, when lo, a dense blackness, deeper than the darkness of the night, falls upon the earth. Then a rainbow, shining with the glory from the throne of God, spans the heavens, and seems to encircle each praying company. The angry multitudes are suddenly arrested. Their mocking cries die away. The objects of their murderous rage are forgotten. With fearful forebodings they gaze upon the symbol of God’s covenant, and long to be shielded from its overpowering brightness . . . In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying. “It is done.” That voice

shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake, “such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great.” . . . Graves are opened, and “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth” “awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” All who have died in the faith of the Third Angel’s Message come forth from the tomb, glorified, to hear God’s covenant of peace with those who have kept his law.

“The voice of God is heard from heaven, declaring the day and hour of Jesus’ coming and delivering the everlasting covenant to his people.

“Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour, and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of Man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it, the rainbow of the covenant” (“Great Controversy” pages 635-641).

And when the saints of God have thus attained to the fullness of the everlasting covenant, the covenant with Abraham, when the object of the giving of the law from Sinai, and in the Bible, has thus been accomplished, the law will not then be abolished, but will be kept in mind, in heart, in soul, just as it was by Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, when as yet there was “no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai, or written on the tables of stone.” Instead of being then abolished, it will be observed and lived more fully and more perfectly than ever before by men.

And this is “Wherefore serves the law?” And this is why it is that “it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise [of the inheritance] was made, and it was ordained by [the disposition, the grand array of] angels in the hand of a mediator.”

We are thoroughly convinced that more genuine study, and far more profitable study can be put upon Galatians 3:19, and the rest of the chapter, and the whole book, by Seventh-day Adventists, than has ever yet been put upon it by us or anybody else.



Wherefore Then the Law
Commentary on Galatians 3:19
A.T. Jones