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Conducted by  
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"Recently I have been studying Paul's teaching in Romans and Galatians concerning the law and transgressions. In particular, the scriptures in ROM.4:15 and GAL.3:19 prompt the question: 'how can it be that there is no transgression when there is no law, if the law was added because of transgressions. Can you please comment?'"

THIS question sets us delving into the deep and fundamental truths of God. It takes us right back into history and brings us face to face with God's dealings with Abraham and Moses. It brings us forward from that time to the beginnings of Christian history, and because of man's misunderstanding of the teaching it impinges on the present also. In order to answer the question we shall need to consider the time from Adam to Moses; the covenant promise to Abraham; the establishment of the law of Moses; and the import of the teaching in Paul's Roman and Galatian letters. And even when we have finished our inquiry we may have to echo the words of Peter in respect of Paul's letters "... in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 PET.3:16). Nevertheless, we must always strive to understand what God is saying to us, and I feel sure that He will bless this study.

#### Adam to Moses

It is quite evident that sin was in the world before the Mosaic law. We are told about the advent of sin into the world but nothing about sin prior to that. Adam violated an express command of God, and as Paul says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (For until the law sin was in the world . . .)" (ROM.5:12, 13). So sin *entered* the world as the result of disobedience to a direct command of God, but Paul goes on, "Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come" (ROM.5:14). Now we have the scene. Adam transgressed. This transgression opened the floodgate of sin and brought terrible consequences upon the human race. Sin and death followed all; even those whose sins did not resemble the sin of Adam. How, then, did others sin who did not disobey direct commands of God as Adam did?

I think Paul supplies the answer to the Jewish critics of his day. In his reasoned argument he says, "For as many as have sinned without law (in ignorance of the Mosaic, or any other law) shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (ROM.2:12). This seems to be a very far-reaching statement. What Paul seems to be saying is that the heathen who sin will be lost, not because they do not have the Mosaic law, but because they do not keep *the law which they have*. In explanation of this, he goes on, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (2:14). So Paul says that the natural law, modified by some knowledge of God in the conscience, could at some points agree with the Mosaic law; when this happens, and they do right, they become "a law unto themselves". But the conscience would not be right *all the time*, otherwise there would have been no need for a Saviour, hence Paul, "For if righteousness come by the law (any law), then Christ is dead in vain" (GAL.2:21). Indeed, Paul shows the variability of conscience, "Which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile *accusing* or else *excusing* one another" (ROM.2:15). Conscience is exercised as a faculty when man passes judgment on his own actions; it acts according to the light it has.

So here, between Adam and Moses, we have a picture of sinful man exercising his conscience in the government of his conduct; sometimes he agrees with and sometimes he transgresses a law which does not exist but which is in the mind of God. At this point he doesn't know how sinful his sin is, and how deep his transgressions are. He is waiting for God to speak directly again.

### The Covenant promise to Abraham

The certainty of justification by faith is attested to by Paul in spite of the bitter opposition of the Jews. His arguments are both cogent and precise. He states quite categorically that the gospel was preached to Abraham, "And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (GAL.3:8). Now the essence of the gospel is Christ, and Christ was the seed, promised to Abraham through which all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Abraham believed this promise, and his faith was "put to his account" as righteousness.

The Mosaic law could not supersede or alter the promise in any way, no matter how fervently the Jews might argue. Paul explains, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the 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 of none effect" (GAL.3:16, 17).

So now we have a situation where sin and death have passed to all men. During this period God makes a covenant with Abraham which rests in faith and not on the works of the law. The Mosaic law cannot change the covenant, so we must now turn our attention to the question, "Why was the law added?"

### The Mosaic law

Seventh Day Adventists, and others, make a distinction between the "law of Moses" and what they term the "law of God". They teach that the law of God is the Ten Commandments and still in force today. They agree that the law of Moses was done away, but they argue that the Ten Commandments were not the law of Moses. But what does Paul teach? "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in the newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law said, Thou shalt not covet" (ROM.7:6, 7). Now in what law was the command, "Thou shalt not covet"? In the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, of course. Paul says, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held . . ." So the law of Moses is dead; the law which is dead is the Decalogue; the Decalogue is the law of Moses. I would rather believe Paul than the Adventists, wouldn't you?

The Decalogue represented the O.T. system as defined to Moses. The old system was abrogated in Christ, that salvation might be by faith and not by the works of the law.

### Why the Mosaic law?

After Paul had stated that the inheritance was by promise to Abraham, and not by the law, he asks the question, "Wherefore serveth the law" (GAL.3:19). Having posed the question, he supplies the answer, "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained in the hand of a mediator." In the phrase, "It was added because of transgressions," I think we understand that Paul is not saying that the law created transgressions, but rather that the law made it easier to perceive and find out the extent of the transgression so that man could understand how exceedingly sinful his sin ac-

tually was. For example, a man might have stolen from his neighbour before the law came, and probably thought very little of it; but when the law came and said, "Thou shalt not steal," and, "Thou shalt not covet they neighbours wife and goods," then he would see the extreme wrong in that which he had taken for granted. (Read also Romans ch.7).

Furthermore, Paul teaches that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (GAL.3:24). The word for schoolmaster is PAIDAGOGOS, and means literally "a tutor." The slave employed by the better class Greek and Roman families to take charge of a boy from about six to sixteen years of age, was known as the paedagogue. The paedagogue watched the boy's behaviour when he was at home and attended him when he went from home to school. He never *taught* the boy anything, but kept watch over him. Paul teaches that the law was the paedagogue that kept watch over people till they came to Christ. When Christ came, the paedagogue was dismissed. The child was now in the school of the Master. The fatal mistake that the Jews made was in thinking that the law taught them the way to salvation; that is why they were so meticulous in keeping it. But the law never taught anything of that nature; it kept watch over people till the seed should come, which was Christ. If Paul had meant that the law was the teacher to bring people to Christ, then he would have had introduced an idea which was totally foreign to his argument. The covenant with Abraham was by promise, that it might be by faith.

In view of what we have said, Paul's argument in Romans 4:14, 15, becomes somewhat clearer. He teaches that if legalists are heirs of the Messianic promise to Abraham, then faith is meaningless, and the promise idle (v14). He goes on to say that the law only worked wrath, the wrath being apparent, of course, when there was disobedience to the commandment. Paul further argues that a non-existent law cannot be violated, so when there was no law, responsibility for violation of it could not be placed. However, we have seen that sin and transgression *did* occur *before* the law was given; what the law did was to make the transgression palpable.

The study of the law and justification by faith, particularly in the Roman and Galatian letters is fascinating and I would commend it to everyone. I thank the questioner for bringing this into focus.