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Performances and Ordinances of the Law

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And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out. And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses. (2 Nephi 25:29)

In order to understand how Christ fulfilled the law of Moses, it is necessary to examine a bit of the history of that law and its constituent parts. From the prophet Joseph Smith, we learn that the Israelites of Moses' day rejected the higher law, in consequence of which the Lord gave them a lesser law, a law of carnal commandments (D&C 84:19-26; JST Exodus 34:1-2).

To the Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore then serveth the law [of Moses]? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:19; cf. Mosiah 3:14). This suggests that the carnal law, with which the Israelites were cursed according to Joseph Smith, was superimposed atop something else they had received from God—presumably something that was part of the higher law. Because the ten commandments are authoritatively cited as the word of God in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, they must be part of the higher law that remained under the covenant made at Sinai. They would therefore not be part of the lesser "handwriting of ordinances" of which Paul said that Christ "took it out of the way,

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nailing it to his cross” (Colossians 2:14).

Christ told the Nephites, “in me is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:17; see also 3 Nephi 12:18-19, 46; 15:4-5, 8). But he seems to have suggested that only the lesser portion of that law was fulfilled when he said, “Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled” (3 Nephi 12:19).

The prophet Abinadi, while noting that salvation does not come by the law of Moses, indicated that it was, nonetheless, important to keep the commandments that were part of that law (Mosiah 12:31-33; 13:27-30; see also Alma 25:16).

In order to understand this subject, we must note that the law of Moses was comprised of three divisions, the commandments (sometimes called “law” or “testimonies”), the statutes (sometimes called “ordinances”), and the judgments.¹ These same three divisions of the law are listed in the Book of Mormon,² where the word “performances” sometimes replaces “judgments.”³ From some of the Book of Mormon passages (Alma 30:3; 2 Nephi 25:24-25, 30; 4 Nephi 1:12), we learn that it was the statutes and judgments (or ordinances and performances) that would be done away in Christ, while the commandments would remain as part of the higher law that Christ revealed during his ministry.

¹ Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 13-14; 5:28; 6:20; 26:17; 28:45; 2 Kings 17:34, 37; 2 Chronicles 19:10; 29:19; 33:8; 34:31; Nehemiah 9:13-14; 10:30; Jeremiah 32:11. There are many more passages in which just two of the three divisions are mentioned together.

² It was Avraham Gileadi who first noted this phenomenon and shared this information with the author in Jerusalem in 1972.

³ 1 Nephi 17:22; 2 Nephi 5:10; 25:25, 30; Mosiah 6:6; Alma 8:17; 25:14-15; 31:9-10; 58:40; Helaman 3:20; 15:5; 4 Nephi 1:12. As in the Bible, there are several more passages in which just two of the three divisions are mentioned together (2 Nephi 1:16; Omni 1:2; Mosiah 13:30; Alma 30:3, 23; Helaman 6:34; 3 Nephi 25:4).

CONCLUSION

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That portion of the law of Moses that was also part of the higher law rejected by the Israelites (including the ten commandments) was not abolished in Christ, while lesser elements of the law, such as animal sacrifice, were done away (3 Nephi 9:19). Christ explained to the Nephites, “Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new” (3 Nephi 12:46).