

## QUESTION 98

### The Old Law

We next have to consider the Old Law—first, the Law itself (question 98) and, second, its precepts (questions 99-105).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Was the Old Law good? (2) Was the Old Law from God? (3) Was the Old Law from God through the mediation of angels? (4) Was the Old Law given to everyone? (5) Did the Old Law oblige everyone? (6) Was the Old Law given at an appropriate time?

### Article 1

#### Was the Old Law good?

It seems that the Old Law was not good:

**Objection 1:** Ezechiel 20:25 says, “I gave them precepts that were not good, and judgments in which they shall not live.” But a type of law is called good only because of the goodness of the precepts it contains. Therefore, the Old Law was not good.

**Objection 2:** As Isidore points out, part of the goodness of a law consists in its promoting the common welfare (*communis salus*). But the Old Law did not bring salvation (*non fuit salutifera ...*) and brought death and harm instead (*sed magis mortifera et novica*). For in Romans 7:8-10 the Apostle says, “Without the Law sin was dead. And I lived some time without the Law. But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” And in Romans 5:20 he says, “The Law entered in that sin might abound.” Therefore, the Old Law was not good.

**Objection 3:** Part of the goodness of a law is that it is possible to observe it in a way that accords with both nature and human custom. But the Old Law lacked this characteristic; for in Acts 15:10 Peter says, “Why are you trying to impose on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” Therefore, it seems that the Old Law was not good.

**But contrary to this:** In Romans 7:12 the Apostle says, “And so the Law is indeed holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.”

**I respond:** There is no doubt that the Old Law was good. For just as a teaching (*doctrina*) is shown to be true by the fact that it is consonant with right reason, so too a law is shown to be good by the fact that it is consonant with reason. But the Old Law was consonant with reason. For as is clear from the commandment laid down in Exodus 20:15, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods,” the Old Law curbed concupiscence, which is opposed to reason. It likewise prohibited all the sins that are contrary to reason. Hence, it is clear that it was good. And in Romans 7:22 the Apostle’s argument (*ratio*) is this: “I am delighted with the Law of God, according to the inward man”; and, again, “I consent to the Law, because it is good.”

However, notice that, as Dionysius points out in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, the good admits of different degrees. For some goods are perfect and some are imperfect. In the case of things that are ordered toward an end, perfect goodness consists in a thing’s being such that it is sufficient *per se* to induce the end, whereas an imperfect good is such that it contributes something toward the acquisition of the end but is not sufficient to induce the end. For instance, a perfectly good medicine is one that cures a man, whereas an imperfect medicine is one that helps a man but is unable to cure him.

Now note that the end of human law is distinct from the end of divine law. For the end of human law is temporal peace within the political community (*temporalis tranquillitas civitatis*), and human law achieves this end by curbing exterior acts that involve evils capable of disturbing the peaceful state of the political community. By contrast, the end of divine law is to lead a man to the end of eternal happiness,

and this end is impeded by any sin whatsoever—not just the exterior acts, but the interior acts as well. And so what suffices for the perfection of human law, viz., that it prohibit sins and mete out punishments, does not suffice for the perfection of divine law. Rather, divine law has to make a man totally fit for participation in eternal happiness.

Now this can be brought about only through the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which the charity that fulfills the law is diffused in our hearts. For as Romans 6:23 says, “The grace of God is eternal life.” But the Old Law was unable to confer this grace, since this was reserved to Christ. For as John 1:17 says, “The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Hence, the Old Law is good, to be sure, but it is an imperfect good—this according to Hebrews 7:19 (“The Law brought nothing to perfection”).

**Reply to objection 1:** The Lord is speaking here about the ceremonial precepts, which are called “not good” because they did not confer the grace through which men are washed of sin—even though precepts of this sort did show men to be sinners. That is why the verse expressly says, “and judgments in which they shall not live,” i.e., judgments through which they cannot acquire the life of grace, “and I polluted them in their own gifts,” i.e., I showed them to be polluted “when, because of their sins, they offered everything that opened the womb.”

**Reply to objection 2:** The Law is said to have killed not as an *efficient cause* but as an *occasion*—and this because of its imperfection, viz., insofar as it did not confer the grace through which men would be able to fulfill what it commanded or to avoid what it forbade. And so this occasion was not given, but was instead taken by men. Hence, in the same place the Apostle says, “For sin, taking the occasion, seduced me through the commandment, seduced me, and by it killed me.” It is for this same reason that he says, “The law entered in that sin might abound,” where ‘that’ implies succession rather than causality—viz., insofar as men, taking the occasion from the Law, sinned more abundantly, both because their sin was more grave after it had been prohibited by the Law, and also because concupiscence increased, since we desire all the more what is forbidden to us.

**Reply to objection 3:** The yoke of the Law could not have been obeyed without the help of grace, which the Law did not give. For Romans 9:16 says, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs”—i.e., to will and to run within God’s precepts—“but of God who shows mercy.” Hence, Psalm 118:32 says, “I have run the way of Your commandments, since You enlarged my heart”—i.e., through the gift of grace and of charity.

## Article 2

### Was the Old Law from God?

It seems that the Old Law was not from God:

**Objection 1:** Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “The works of God are perfect.” But as was explained above (a. 1), the Old Law was imperfect. Therefore, the Old Law was not from God.

**Objection 2:** Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, “I have learned that all the works which God has made persevere forever.” But the Old Law did not persevere forever; for in Hebrews 7:18 the Apostle says, “There is indeed a setting aside of the former commandment, because of its weakness and unprofitableness.” Therefore, the Old Law was not from God.

**Objection 3:** It is a function of the lawmaker’s wisdom to remove not only evils but the occasions of evil. But as was explained above (a. 1), the Old Law was an occasion of sin. Therefore, it was inappropriate that God—who, as Job 36:22 puts it, “is such that none is like Him among the

lawmakers”—should hand down such a law.

**Objection 4:** 1 Timothy 2:4 says, “God wills all men to be saved.” But as was explained above (a. 1), the Old Law did not suffice for the salvation of men. Therefore, it was inappropriate for God to make such a law. Therefore, the Old Law is not from God.

**But contrary to this:** In Matthew 15:6 our Lord, in speaking to the Jews, to whom the Old Law had been given, says, “You have made void the commandment of God because of your traditions.” And just before this we find, “Honor your father and your mother,” which is clearly contained in the Old Law (cf. Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16). Therefore, the Old Law is from God.

**I respond:** The Old Law was given by the good God, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the Old Law ordered men toward Christ in two ways.

First, it ordered men toward Christ by bearing witness to Christ. Hence, in the last chapter of Luke, verse 44, He Himself says, “All things had to be fulfilled which were written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms.” And in John 5:46 He says, “If you believed Moses, you would perhaps believe me also; for he wrote about me.”

Second, the Old Law ordered men toward Christ in the manner of a disposition, since by drawing men back from idolatry, it enveloped them within the worship of the one God by whom the human race was to be saved through Christ. Hence, in Galatians 3:23 the Apostle says, “Before the faith came, we were guarded under the Law, enclosed for that faith which was to be revealed.” But, clearly, the one who disposes things to the end is the same as the one who leads them to the end, and by ‘the same’ I mean either through himself (*per se*) or through those who are subject to him. For the devil would not have given a law by means of which men might be led to Christ, through whom he himself was going to be cast out—this according to Matthew 12:26 (“If Satan casts out Satan, then his kingdom is divided”). And so the Old Law was given by the same God by whom the salvation of men was effected through the grace of Christ.

**Reply to objection 1:** Nothing prevents a thing from being imperfect absolutely speaking and yet perfect with respect to a given time. For instance, a boy is not said to be perfect absolutely speaking, but is said to be perfect for his age (*secundum temporis conditionem*). So, too, precepts that are given to children are perfect for the condition of those to whom they are given, even if those precepts are not perfect absolutely speaking. The precepts of the Old Law were like this. Hence, in Galatians 3:24 the Apostle says, “The Law was our teacher (*paedagogus*) in Christ.”

**Reply to objection 2:** The works of God that persevere forever are the ones which God made in such a way that they should persevere forever, and these are the ones that are perfect. By contrast, the Old Law was set aside at the time of the perfection of grace—not as something bad, but as something weak and unprofitable for that time. For as is added [in the cited passage], “The law did not bring anything to perfection.” Hence, in Galatians 3:25 the Apostle says, “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the teacher.”

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 79, a. 4), God at times allows some men to fall into sin in order that they might thereby be made humble. So, too, He willed to give a Law that men could not fulfill by their own power in order that men, in relying on themselves, might discover themselves to be sinners and, having been humbled, might have recourse to the assistance of grace.

**Reply to objection 4:** Even though the Old Law did not suffice for the salvation of man, there was nonetheless another sort of assistance which God offered to men along with the Law and by which they were able to be saved, viz., faith in the Mediator—a faith through which the ancient patriarchs were justified in the same way that we ourselves are justified. And so God did not remove Himself from men in the sense of not giving them the means to salvation.

### Article 3

#### Was the Old Law given through the mediation of angels or was it given directly by God?

It seems that the Old Law was given directly (*immediate*) by God and not through the mediation of angels (*per angelos*):

**Objection 1:** *Angel* means *messenger*, and so the name ‘angel’ implies ministry and not dominion—this according to Psalm 102:20-21 (“Bless the Lord, all you His angels ... His ministers (*ministri*)”). But the Old Law is said to have been given by the Lord; for Exodus 20:1 says, “The Lord spoke these words ...” and later adds, “For I am the Lord your God.” And this same manner of speaking is frequently repeated in Exodus and in the succeeding books of the Law. Therefore, the Law was given directly by God.

**Objection 2:** As John 1:17 says, “The Law was given by Moses.” But Moses received it directly from God; for Exodus 33:11 says, “The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend.” Therefore, the Old Law was given directly by God.

**Objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 90, a. 3), it is the role of the ruler alone to make law. But God alone is the ruler of the salvation of souls, whereas the angels are “ministering spirits,” as Hebrews 1:14 puts it. Therefore, since the Old Law was ordered toward the salvation of souls, it was inappropriate for it to be given through the mediation of angels.

**But contrary to this:** In Galatians 3:19 the Apostle says, “The Law was given through the angels at the hand of a Mediator.” Again, in Acts 7:53 Stephen says, “You have received the Law under the direction of angels.”

**I respond:** The Law was given by God through the mediation of angels. In addition to the general reason that Dionysius gives in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 4, viz., that “it is appropriate for divine realities to be brought to men by the mediation of angels,” there is a special reason why the Old Law had to be given through the mediation of angels.

For it was explained above (a. 1-2) that the Old Law was imperfect and yet disposed men for the perfect salvation of the human race that was going to come about through Christ. But it is evident in the case of all ordered powers and crafts that the one who ranks higher performs the principal and perfect act by himself, whereas it is through the mediation of his helpers (*per suos ministros*) that he does the things that dispose [the patient] for the ultimate perfection. For instance, a ship-builder puts the ship together by himself, but he prepares the materials through the mediation of his assistant craftsmen.

So it was fitting that the perfect law of the New Covenant should be given directly by God Himself made man, but that the Old Law should be given to men through the mediation of God’s ministers, viz., the angels. And it is in this way that the Apostle, at the beginning of Hebrews, establishes the preeminence of the New Law over the Old Law; for in the New Testament God “has spoken to us in His own Son,” whereas in the Old Testament “His word was given through the angels.”

**Reply to objection 1:** As Gregory notes at the beginning of *Moralia*, “The angel who is described as having appeared to Moses is variously called ‘the angel’ and ‘the Lord’. He is called ‘the angel’ by reason of the fact that he served by speaking exteriorly, whereas he is called ‘the Lord’ because, presiding interiorly, he administered the power of speaking.” Hence, the angel was also, as it were, speaking in the person of the Lord.

**Reply to objection 2:** As Augustine points out in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, Exodus 33:11 says, “The Lord spoke to Moses face to face,” and a little later adds, “Show me Your glory.” Therefore, Moses was sensing what he saw and desiring what he did not see. Therefore, he did not see the very essence of God, and in this sense he was not directly instructed by God.

Therefore, when Scripture says, “He spoke to him “face to face,” it is speaking in accord with the opinion of the people, who thought that Moses and God were speaking with their mouths, because God was speaking to him and appearing to him through creatures subject to Him, i.e., through the angel and through the cloud.

An alternative reply is that “seeing God’s face” refers to a certain preeminent and intimate contemplation that falls short of the vision of God’s essence.

**Reply to objection 3:** It is the role of the ruler alone to institute law by his own authority, but he sometimes promulgates an instituted law through others. And so God instituted the Law by His own authority, but He promulgated it through the angels.

#### Article 4

##### Was it fitting for the Old Law to have been given only to the Jewish people?

It seems that the Old Law should not have been given only to the Jewish people (*solī populo Iudaeorum*):

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 2-3), the Old Law disposed men to the salvation that was to come through Christ. But this salvation was going to take place in all the nations (*in omnibus gentibus*) and not just among the Jews—this according to Isaiah 49:6 (“It is a small thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to convert the dregs of Israel. Behold, I have given you to be the light of the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth”). Therefore, the Old Law should have been given to all the nations and not just to one people.

**Objection 2:** As Acts 10:34 says, “God is not a respecter of persons (*acceptor personarum*), but in every nation, he who fears Him and does works of justice is acceptable to Him.” Therefore, He should not have opened the way of salvation more to one people than to the others.

**Objection 3:** As has been explained (a. 3), the Law was given through angels. But God has always granted the ministry of the angels to all the nations and not just to the Jews; for Ecclesiasticus 17:14 says, “Over every nation He set a ruler.” He likewise gave temporal goods to all the nations—and God is less concerned with temporal goods than with spiritual goods. Therefore, He should likewise have given the Law to all the peoples.

**But contrary to this:** Romans 3:1-2 says, “What advantage then does the Jew have? Much, in every way. First, because the words of God were committed to them.” And Psalm 147:20 says, “He has not done thus for any other nation, and He has not made known His judgments to them.”

**I respond:** One reason that could be invoked for why the Law was given to the Jewish people rather than to the other peoples is that while the others had fallen into idolatry, the Jewish people alone remained steadfast in the worship of the one God. And so the other peoples were unworthy to receive the Law, lest what is holy should be given to the dogs (cf. Matthew 7:6).

However, this argument seems inappropriate. For the Jewish people fell into idolatry even after the Law had been given—which was a more grievous sin, as is clear from Exodus 32 and from Amos 5:25-26 (“Did you offer victims and sacrifices to me in the desert for forty years, O house of Israel? But you carried a tabernacle for your Moloch and the image of your idols, the star of your god, which you made for yourselves.”) Again, Deuteronomy 9:6 says explicitly, “Know that it is not because of your acts of justice that the Lord your God gives you this excellent land for your possession; for you are an utterly stiff-necked people.”

Instead, the correct reason is given in the preceding verse: “... in order that the Lord might fulfill

His word, which He promised by an oath to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In Galatians 3:16 the Apostle shows which promise had been made to them, saying, “To Abraham were the promises made and to his seed. He does not say, ‘and to your seeds’, as of many, but ‘and to your seed’, as of one, who is the Christ.” Therefore, God gave the Law and other special benefits to that people because of the promise He had made to their fathers that the Christ would be born of them. For it was fitting that the people from whom the Christ would be born should be enriched with a special sanctification—this according to Leviticus 19:2 (“You will be holy, because I am holy”).

Again, it was not because of the merits of Abraham himself that such a promise was made to him; rather, it was because he was gratuitously elected and called (*ex gratuita electione et vocatio*). Hence, Isaiah 41:2 says, “Who has raised up the just one from the East, has called him to follow Him?”

So, then, it is clear that the patriarchs received the promise solely because of a gratuitous election, and that the people that descended from them received the Law—this according to Deuteronomy 4:36-37 (“You heard His words out of the midst of the fire, because He loved your fathers, and chose their seed after them”).

However, if one were to ask again why He chose this people in order that the Christ might be born from them, then the response that Augustine gives in *Super Ioannem* is the right one: “Why did he choose this one and not that one? Do not look for an answer, if you do not want to be mistaken.”

**Reply to objection 1:** Even though the future salvation through the Christ had been prepared for all the nations, it was still necessary for the Christ to be born from one people, who because of this had prerogatives in preference to the others. Accordingly, Romans 9:4-5 says, “... to whom [read: the Jews] belongs the adoption as of children of God, and the testament and the giving of the Law ... to whom belong the fathers and from whom comes the Christ, according to the flesh.”

**Reply to objection 2:** Respect for persons or favoritism (*acceptio personarum*) is possible in the case of things that are given because they are [in some sense] owed, but there is no question of favoritism in the case of things that are conferred gratuitously. For one is not playing favorites if out of generosity he gives something of his own to one person and not to another. By contrast, if he were responsible for dispensing communal goods (*si esset dispensator bonorum communium*) and did not distribute them equitably according to the merits of the relevant persons, then he would be playing favorites.

Now it is out of His graciousness (*ex sua gratia*) that God confers salvific benefits on the human race. Hence, there is no favoritism if He confers these benefits on some in preference to others. This is why Augustine says in *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*: “All those whom God instructs are such that it is by His mercy (*misericordia*) that He instructs them; and those whom He does not instruct are such that it is by His justice (*iudicium*) that He does not instruct them.” For this stems from the condemnation of the human race because of the sin of the first parent.

**Reply to objection 3:** The gifts of grace are taken away from man because of sin, but his natural gifts are not taken away. Among the latter is the ministry of the angels, which is required by (a) the very ordering of natures, so that the lowest beings should be governed by middle-level beings, as well as by (b) the corporeal gifts that God grants not only to men but also to beasts—this according to Psalm 35:7 (“Men and beasts You will preserve, O Lord”).

## Article 5

### Were all men obliged to observe the Old Law?

It seems that all men were obliged (*obligarentur*) to observe the Old Law:

**Objection 1:** Anyone who is subject to a king must be subject to that king’s law. But the Old Law

was given by God, who is “the king of all the earth,” as Psalm 46:8 puts it. Therefore, all the inhabitants of the earth were obliged (*tenebantur*) to observe the Law.

**Objection 2:** The Jews were unable to be saved unless they observed the Old Law; for Deuteronomy 27:26 says, “Cursed be he that abides not in the words of this Law, and fulfills them not in his works.” Therefore, if other men were able to have been saved without observing the Old Law, then the Jews’ situation would have been worse than that of other men.

**Objection 3:** Gentiles were admitted to the Judaic rites and to the observance of the Law; for Exodus 12:48 says, “If any stranger is willing to dwell among you, and to keep the Passover of the Lord, all his males shall first be circumcised, and then shall he celebrate it ritually, and he shall be like one that is born in the land.” But it would not have made sense for the foreigners admitted by God’s ordinance to observe the Law if they could have been saved without observing the Law. Therefore, no one was able to be saved unless he observed the Law.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 9, Dionysius says that many Gentiles were led to God by the angels. But it is clear that the Gentiles did not observe the Law. Therefore, some were able to be saved without observing the Law.

**I respond:** The Old Law made manifest the precepts of the law of nature and added certain precepts of its own.

Therefore, as regards the precepts of the law of nature that were contained in the Old Law, all men were obliged to observe the Old Law—not because these precepts belonged to the Old Law, but because they belonged to the law of nature.

However, as regards what the Old Law added to the law of nature, the only ones obliged to observe the Old Law were the Jewish people. The reason for this is that, as has been explained (a. 4), the Old Law was given to the Jewish people in order that they might acquire a certain privilege of holiness out of reverence for the Christ, who was to be born of that people. But statutes established for the special sanctification of certain people oblige no one but them. For instance, clerics, who are set aside for divine ministry, have certain obligations that lay people do not have; similarly, religious are bound by their profession to certain works of perfection that seculars are not bound to. In the same way, the Jewish people had certain special obligations that other peoples did not have. Hence, Deuteronomy 18:13 says, “You shall be perfect and without stain before the Lord your God.” It is for this reason that they made use of a type of profession, as is clear from Deuteronomy 26:3 (“I profess this day before the Lord your God ...”).

**Reply to objection 1:** If someone is subject to a king’s rule, then he is obliged to observe the law that the king proposes for everyone in general. But if the king institutes certain laws to be observed by his closest ministers, then the others are not obliged to observe these laws.

**Reply to objection 2:** The more a man is conjoined to God, the better his situation becomes. And so to the extent that the Jewish people were bound more closely to the worship of God, they were better off than other peoples. Hence, Deuteronomy 4:8 asks, “What other nation is there so renowned that has ceremonies, and just judgments, and the whole of the Law?” Similarly, on this score clerics are in a better situation than lay people, and religious are in a better situation than seculars.

**Reply to objection 3:** Gentiles attained salvation more completely and more surely under the observances of the Old Law than under the natural law alone, and that is why they were admitted to these observances. So, too, even now lay people pass into the clerical state and seculars pass into the religious state, even though they can be saved without doing this.

## Article 6

### Was it appropriate for the Old Law to have been given at the time of Moses?

It seems that it was not appropriate for the Old Law to have been given at the time of Moses:

**Objection 1:** As was explained above (a. 2-3), the Old Law disposed man for the salvation that was to come through the Christ. But man needed the remedy of this sort of salvation immediately after his sin. Therefore, the Old Law should have been given immediately after his sin.

**Objection 2:** The Old Law was given for the salvation of those from whom the Christ was going to be born. But as Genesis 12:7 says, the promise concerning “the seed, i.e., Christ” (cf. Galatians 3:16), was first made to Abraham. Therefore, the Law should have been given right away at the time of Abraham.

**Objection 3:** Just as Christ was not born of any descendants of Noah other than Abraham, to whom the promise was made, so too He was not born of any sons of Abraham other than David, to whom the promise was renewed—this according to 2 Kings 23:1 (“The man to whom it was appointed concerning the Christ of the God of Jacob said ...”). Therefore, the Old Law should have been given after David, just as it was in fact given after Abraham.

**But contrary to this:** In Galatians 3:19 the Apostle says, “The Law was set because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom He made the promise, being ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator”—i.e., “being given in an orderly way,” as a Gloss puts it. Therefore, it was fitting for the Old Law to have been handed down in that particular temporal order.

**I respond:** It was utterly appropriate for the Old Law to have been given at the time of Moses. We can cite two reasons for this, given that there are two kinds of men on whom any law, whatever it might be, is imposed. For some of those on whom a law is imposed are stubborn and proud, and these men are restrained and subdued by the law; and a law is also imposed on those who are good, and these men, instructed by the law, are aided in fulfilling what they intend.

Therefore, it was fitting for the Old Law to be given at a time appropriate for conquering men’s pride. Man is proud with respect to two things, viz., knowledge and power. He is proud with respect to knowledge in the sense of thinking that natural reason can suffice for his salvation. So in order that man’s pride on this score might be conquered, he was left to the guidance of his own reason without the support of a written law, and man was able to learn that he suffered from deficiencies of reason—and he learned this from experience, in virtue of the fact that by the time of Abraham men had fallen into idolatry and into the most shameful vices. And so it was necessary for the written Law to be given after that time as a remedy for human ignorance; for as Romans 3:20 says, “The knowledge of sin comes through the Law.”

But after man had been instructed through the Law, his pride was conquered in his weakness (*infirmitas*), when he was unable to fulfill the Law which he now knew. And so, as the Apostle concludes in Romans 8:3-4, “What the Law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done by sending his own Son ... so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

On the other hand, as far as the good men are concerned, the Law was given to assist them. This was especially necessary for the people at a time when the Law had begun to be obscured because of the excesses of their sins. However, assistance of this sort had to be given in a certain order, so that they might be led by the hand through what was imperfect to perfection. And so the Old Law had to be given in the time between the law of nature and the law of grace.

**Reply to objection 1:** It was not fitting for the Old Law to be given immediately after the sin of the first man, both because man, confident in his own power of reason, did not yet recognize his need for

the Law, and also because the dictates of the law of nature had not yet been obscured by habitual sinning.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Law should be given only to a people, since, as was explained above (q. 96, a. 1), a law is a communal precept (*praeceptum commune*). And so certain of God's familial and, as it were, domestic precepts were given to men at the time of Abraham. But afterwards, when Abraham's posterity had multiplied to such an extent as to constitute a people and had been liberated from slavery, the Law could appropriately be given. For as the Philosopher says in *Politics* 3, slaves are not part of a people or political community, and it is to a people or political community that law is appropriately given.

**Reply to objection 3:** Since it was necessary for the Law to be given to a certain people, the Law was received not only by those individuals from whom Christ was born but by the whole people marked with the seal of circumcision, which was the sign of the promise made to Abraham and believed in by him, as the Apostle puts it in Romans 4:11. And so the Law had to be given to this people, now already gathered together, even before David.