

Old Covenant, New Covenant

Introduction: The Sabbath and Its Modern Misconceptions

Many in the religious world today insist that Christians must observe the Sabbath, often interpreting this as a day of rest on Sundays. However, a closer examination of Scripture reveals significant differences between biblical Sabbath observance and modern practices. The Sabbath is explicitly the seventh day of the week (Saturday), not the first (Sunday), as outlined in **Genesis 2:2-3**: *"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."* and **Exodus 20:8-11**: *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."* Moreover, the Old Testament describes not only weekly Sabbaths but also Sabbatical years (every seventh year) and Jubilee years (every fiftieth year) in **Leviticus 25:1-22**. Over a fifty-year span, a typical Jew under the Old Covenant would observe over 5,000 Sabbath days—far more than the approximately 2,600 days a modern "Sabbath keeper" might claim.

Biblical Sabbath requirements were strict. God's people were commanded to stay at home (**Exodus 16:29**: *"Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out."*), prohibiting travel for sports, visiting friends, or attending formal gatherings like church services. No cooking was allowed; all food had to be prepared in advance (**Exodus 16:23-29**). All work was forbidden, even lighting a fire (**Exodus 35:3**: *"Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."*). Violation carried severe consequences, including death (**Numbers 15:32-36**: *"...The Lord commanded Moses, 'The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.' So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses."*).

Who truly observes the Sabbath today as prescribed? Virtually no one, as modern interpretations dilute these commands. This raises broader questions: Are Old Testament practices, like animal sacrifices (**Leviticus 1-7**), still binding? What about other holy days (e.g., Passover, Feast of Tabernacles)? Is there a priesthood or clergy-laity system today? Is the church building the "house of God"? What is the relationship between the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law, or Torah) and the New Covenant in Christ?

This study, suitable for group Bible discussions or personal reflection, is valuable for those from ritualistic, traditional, or non-Christian backgrounds. It highlights the uniqueness of New Testament Christianity and addresses confusion in Christendom, particularly the claim that Jesus' followers must adhere to the Torah's ceremonial and civil laws.

Key introductory verses:

- **Colossians 2:16**: *"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."* (Paul warns against legalistic judgments based on Old Testament observances, emphasizing freedom in Christ.)
- **John 4:24**: *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."* (Jesus teaches that true worship transcends physical locations and rituals, focusing on internal transformation.)
- **Ephesians 1:1**: *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus."* (All believers are "saints" or holy ones, democratizing holiness.)
- **1 Timothy 2:5**: *"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

(Direct access to God through Christ alone eliminates human intermediaries.)

- **Colossians 2:17:** *"These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."* (Old Testament practices foreshadowed Christ; fulfilled, they are no longer obligatory.)

Two Covenants: The Superseding Nature of the New

The Bible distinguishes between the Old Covenant (given through Moses at Sinai) and the New Covenant (inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection). **Hebrews 9:15-17:** *"Therefore he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive."* (Christ's death enacted the New Covenant, rendering the Old obsolete; the Old could not redeem eternally, but the New does through Christ's sacrifice.)

The moral heart of the law—loving God and neighbor—carries over (**Galatians 5:14:** *"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*; **Matthew 22:37-40:** *"... 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"*), but the specific commandments and regulations were fulfilled and set aside at the cross. **Colossians 2:13-14:** *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."* (The "record of debt" refers to the Law's demands; Christ canceled them, freeing believers from ceremonial obligations.)

Christians are not bound to Old Testament regulations (**Acts 15:10-11:** *"Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."*). This counters claims that Jesus' followers must follow the Torah. Jesus fulfilled the Law (**Matthew 5:17-18:** *"...I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."*), ending its ceremonial role (**Galatians 3:23-25:** *"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law... But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."*).

Double Standards: Eliminated in the New Covenant

The Old Covenant created distinctions between holy and unholy, fostering inconsistent commitment. If some days are holy, others are implicitly unholy, leading to greater effort on "special" occasions. Christianity, however, demands a daily lifestyle of discipleship (**Luke 9:23:** *"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"*; **Romans 12:1:** *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*). All time is holy because Christ redeems every aspect of life.

Double standards manifest in:

- a. Holy time
- b. Holy space
- c. Holy people
- d. Holy things

The New Covenant transforms these distinctions (**1 Peter 1:15-16:** *"...As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"*).

Holy Time: Freedom from Legalistic Observance

Christians are freed from Sabbath observance (**Exodus 20:8-11**, as above; **Colossians 2:16**, as above). Attempts to justify oneself through special days lead to bondage (**Galatians 4:8-11**: *"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods... How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world...? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."*). (Paul equates reverting to calendrical observances with pagan slavery.)

The early church gathered on Sundays (**Acts 20:7**: *"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread..."*; **Revelation 1:10**: *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..."*), commemorating Christ's resurrection (**Matthew 28:1**), but Sunday is not a Sabbath.

Countering Torah observance: Jesus lived under the Old Covenant to fulfill it (**Galatians 4:4-5**: *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."*). Post-resurrection, grace prevails (**Romans 6:14**: *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."*). Observing a day is permissible if done freely (**Romans 14:5-6**: *"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike... The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord."*), but imposing it is sinful (**Galatians 5:1**: *"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."*).

Lesson: Strive for discipleship always.

Holy Space: Worship Everywhere

God cannot be confined to "holy" spaces (**Acts 7:48-49**: *"Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool...'"*; **John 4:24**, as above). The Old Covenant restricted access via the tabernacle/temple (**Hebrews 9:1-8**: *"Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness..."*), but Christ's death tore the veil (**Matthew 27:51**: *"...And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom..."*), symbolizing open access (**Ephesians 2:18**: *"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."*).

Worship is a lifestyle (**Romans 12:1**, as above). The church (people) is God's household (**Ephesians 2:19**: *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."*), but no building is inherently holy.

Countering Torah: The temple was a shadow (**Hebrews 8:5**: *"...They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things..."*). Christ's body is the true temple (**John 2:19-21**: *"...'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ...He was speaking about the temple of his body."*).

Lesson: Excel for God everywhere.

Holy People: Equality in Christ

No elite "saints"; all believers are saints (**Ephesians 1:1**, as above). Jesus is the sole high priest (**Hebrews 7:23-28**: *"...The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently... For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained..."*). All believers form a royal priesthood (**1 Peter 2:9**: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..."*), offering spiritual sacrifices.

One mediator: Christ (**1 Timothy 2:5**, as above). Praying to saints or Mary contradicts this (**Romans 8:34**: *"...Christ Jesus is the one who died... who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*). No clergy-laity divide (**Matthew 23:8-9**: *"But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven."*). All are equally committed, with varied gifts (**Ephesians 4:11-12**).

Countering Torah: The Levitical priesthood ended (**Hebrews 7:11-12**: *"...For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well."*). Torah observance perpetuates abolished divisions.

Lesson: The clergy system fosters double standards, alien to Christ (**Galatians 3:28:** *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*).

Holy Cow! Miscellaneous Holy Things

The New Covenant abolishes distinctions:

- Holy foods (**1 Timothy 4:3-5:** *"...Who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving... For everything created by God is good..."*; **Hebrews 13:9:** *"Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods..."*; **Mark 7:19:** *"...Thus he declared all foods clean."*).
- Holy altars (**Hebrews 7:27:** *"...He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily... for he did this once for all when he offered up himself."*; **Hebrews 13:10:** *"We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat."*).
- Images/icons (**Exodus 20:4:** *"...You shall not make for yourself a carved image..."*; **1 John 5:21:** *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."*).
- Vestments, holy water, censers, medals, relics, languages, formulae, crosses: These import Old Testament categories invalidly (**2 Corinthians 3:6:** *"...Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*).

Countering Torah: **Romans 7:6:** *"But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."* The Law led to Christ (**Galatians 3:19-25**).

Conclusion: From Shadows to Light

Colossians 2:17 (as above) teaches that Old Covenant elements foreshadowed Christ, the reality. The Old Testament is obsolete (**Hebrews 8:13:** *"In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."*). Much of modern Christianity mirrors Old Testament Judaism, clinging to rituals and hierarchies.

Countering Torah claims: **Ephesians 2:14-15:** *"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances..."* Jesus warned against human traditions (**Mark 7:6-8:** *"...'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'..."*). Torah observance risks severing one from Christ (**Galatians 5:4:** *"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."*).

Leave the shadows for the light of Christ, where true freedom reigns (**John 8:36:** *"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*). This empowers Spirit-led living, not ritualistic observance.