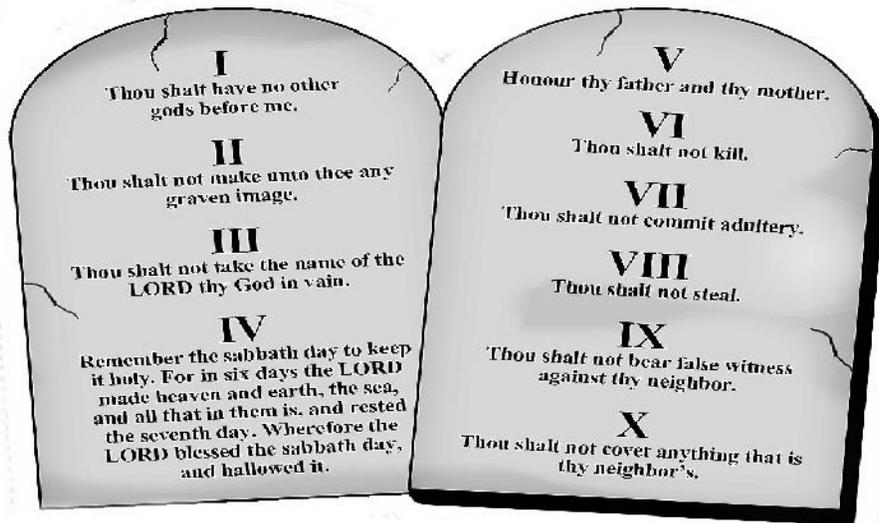




*Sabbath Law*  
*Or*  
*The Lord's Day?*



*A Scriptural Study of Whether Christians  
Should Observe the Sabbath and Keep the  
Ten Commandments*

## A STUDY OF THE SABBATH AND THE OLD LAW

Should Christians observe the Sabbath? Some believe the 10 Commandments were given for all time, to all people, and that we should still observe them.

Most people recognize that we are no longer obligated to observe certain aspects of the Old Testament (OT) such as animal sacrifices, burning incense in worship, etc. However, the 10 Commandments are often viewed differently. Some make a distinction between an eternal "moral law" consisting of the 10 Commandments, and a "ceremonial law" regulating sacrifices, etc. There is no evidence in Scripture to substantiate this distinction.

The entire Law of Moses, with the 10 commandments, was nullified at the cross of Jesus. Some of those commandments were re-established as part of the Gospel of Christ, but the Sabbath was not. For those who struggle with this premise, perhaps an example will help. The first document of governing rules for the United States was known as the Articles of Confederation. After a few years, it became clear that these articles did not meet the needs of the early colonists. They decided to replace the earlier articles with the Constitution of the United States of America. Once the Constitution was ratified, none of the laws of the Article of Confederation were binding. Some of the laws and principles of the earlier document became a part of the Constitution and it appeared they continued, but in reality they were terminated and re-established. Such is the case with some of the laws of the OT in their relationship to the New Testament (NT).

The following list shows the re-establishment of nine of the Ten Commandments (these are not all of the NT passages concerning these matters):

1-2. The first two commands, no other gods (Exodus 20:3) and no graven images/idols (Exodus 20:4-6), are closely related since idols usually represented other deities. God was also prohibiting substitute efforts to represent Him. While the NT contains no explicit affirmation of these laws, several passages speak in principle of the prohibition. (See Matthew 4: 10; Romans 1:22-25; and Acts 17:24-29).

3. Not taking the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). God did not intend to prevent anyone from pronouncing His name; but to curtail a flippant and casual use of His name. Again the NT does not explicitly make this a prohibition, but Jesus emphasizes that we will be condemned by our words (Matthew 12:34-37), which would include taking the Lord's name in vain.

4. Remember the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). No reaffirmation appears in the NT. See discussions further in this tract.

5. Honour your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12). See Ephesians 6:1-2.

6. Do not kill (commit murder) (Exodus 20:13). See Matthew 19:18 and Romans 13:9.

7. Do not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14). See Matthew 19:18; Romans 13:9.

8. Do not steal (Exodus 20:15) See Matthew 19:18; Romans 13:9.

9. Do not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). See Matthew 19:18; Ephesians 4:25-31

10. Do not covet (Exodus 20:16). See Romans 13:9; Colossians 3:5.

While the OT Law appears in a format as a codified listing, the NT generally does not list its commands that way. Certainly, the NT includes commands to be obeyed, but they usually appear in narratives and discussions so as to clarify the intent and context of their application.

The point of concern for some people is the Sabbath Law -- **what happened to it?** This question will be the focus of the following discussion.

## **I. THE SABBATH LAW WAS GIVEN ONLY TO THE HEBREWS/JEWS.**

A. There is no command to observe the Sabbath before Moses. Genesis 2:2 states that on the seventh day God rested from His creation work and hallowed the Sabbath. A careful reading reveals that it simply narrates what God did - there is no command given to anyone about what to do or not do on the Sabbath. There is no record of a command to any of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) to observe the Sabbath nor is there any evidence that they even knew about a Sabbath.

The first reference to the Sabbath after the creation is in Exodus 16:23-30. The discussion is phrased in such a way that Israel appears to have been unaware of the significance of the Sabbath -- or even that it existed.

The command governing the Sabbath is given in the 10 Commandments (Exodus

20:8-11) While its rationale is based on the symbolism of the creation week, there is no reason to assume or infer that God had earlier revealed it to anyone - there certainly is no record of such a revelation.

It is important to note that before Moses there is NO instruction on what to do with or on the Sabbath.

B. The Sabbath was a command for the Hebrews (i.e. the Jews). In the second listing of the 10 Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:1-21), Moses pointed out to Israel that God's covenant had not been made with their forefathers, but with those who were alive that day (verses 2-3). Then he repeated the 10 Commandments.

Ezekiel wrote of God's disappointment with Israel for failing to obey His commands (Ezekiel 20:10-17). He discussed their exodus from Egyptian slavery into the wilderness. There, God revealed His statutes and ordinances (verses 10-11) among which was the Sabbath Law, which served as a specific sign between God and Israel (verse 12). The Sabbath was not a sign between God and other people, but between Him and Israel!

In similar fashion, Nehemiah narrated the same message after the Babylonian exile. (Nehemiah 9:12-15). He praised God for leading Israel out of Egypt by a pillar of cloud and fire (Nehemiah 9: 12), and for leading them to Sinai where He spoke and gave them the 10 Commandments. In verse 14, he prayed explicitly that it was then that God "made known" His Sabbath, as if they had been unaware of it before. (See Exodus 19:7-24)

It should be clear to the careful reader from these passages of scripture that the Sabbath was unknown before Moses and that it was intended for the Israelites.

## **II. THE SABBATH LAW WAS INTENDED ONLY FOR THE ISRAEL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

A. As indicated above, it was a covenant sign between God and Israel.

B. God revealed that the old Law/Covenant would be terminated and replaced with a **new covenant**.

God revealed through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) that the time was coming when God would replace the covenant He made with Israel when He lead them out of Egypt. The Hebrew writer quotes from Jeremiah's prophesy to show it was

fulfilled in Jesus (Hebrews 8:7-13). He explicitly says the old covenant had become "obsolete" (verse 13).

Paul described the old covenant as "letters engraved on stones" which were "fading away" in 2 Corinthians 3:1-11. When God wrote His covenant on "2 tablets of stones", He called them the "10 commandments" (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13). The observance of the Sabbath was one of those 10 commandments. Therefore, the only safe conclusion is that the Sabbath had become "obsolete" and was "fading away" with the coming of the Messiah - Jesus.

C. The Sabbath Law was part of the old Mosaic Law and when the Law was removed, so were all of the Sabbath Law requirements.

### **III. JESUS' COVENANT REMOVED/REPLACED THE OLD COVENANT UPON HIS DEATH.**

A. The supremacy of Jesus and His Gospel and the termination of old Law (replaced by the Law of Christ.) is a major theme of the book of Hebrews.

These scriptural examples help demonstrate that supremacy. **The Levitical priesthood could not save.** This fact necessitated a new priest -- namely Jesus, who was appointed after the "order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:11-22). In turn, this new priesthood necessitated a change of the Law (Hebrews 7:12). Part of the reason for a new Law was because Jesus, as the redeeming priest, could not serve under the Law of Moses which required the priest to be a Levite. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:12-14).

All Levitical priests under the Mosaic Law would inevitably die. After Jesus was raised and ascended to Heaven, he lives forever and a change of priesthood 'is not necessary (Hebrews 7:23-25). The summary of the Hebrew writer is found in chapter 8:6 -- where he speaks of a better ministry, better covenant, and better promises.

B. Paul argues the same point -- that the Law of Moses (i.e. the "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" was removed when Jesus died on the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). **Paul warned those who would bind features of the old Law upon Christians** (Colossians 2:16-17). He mentions meats (i.e. the Kosher laws), drink, feast days (e.g. Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles/Booths), the new moon celebrations, and the **SABBATH**. He argues that these old Law observances were "shadows" of the real (Colossians 2: 17) and implies that to retreat into them is a retreat from the 'real substance (i.e. the body) of Christ.

## **IV. WHY DID JESUS AND THE APOSTLES WORSHIP ON THE SABBATH?**

Since the Bible reveals that the Sabbath was only for the Hebrews/Jews and that it was terminated for the New Testament period, why did Jesus and the Apostles worship on the Sabbath?

### **A. Jesus and His Sabbath observance.**

Jesus lived under the Old Testament Mosaic Law (10 Commandments), therefore it was His custom to attend synagogue assemblies on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). His faithfulness to His father would have come into serious jeopardy if He had failed to observe the Law of Moses -- including the Sabbath requirements. As has been previously stated in Hebrews and Colossians, it was not until Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice -- (i.e. He died on the cross) - that the Law of Moses was removed and replaced with the new covenant.

### **B. The Apostles and their Sabbath observance.**

The book of Acts frequently records the Apostles gathering with the Jews on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2-3; 18:4). The Jews were the nation to whom God had revealed Himself and His will. To them He had spoken of a Messiah. They were to be His people who, by their reception and familiarity with the Law and the Prophets, were to be prepared to receive the Messiah when He came into the world.

On the occasions listed above, the Apostles were seizing these opportunities to build upon the people's understanding of God's will and His revelation of the Messiah. If the people refused to listen and accept the new covenant, the Apostles would leave that audience and go elsewhere (Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:10-11; Acts 13:49-51).

Alternatively, the Bible reveals that the NT Christians, including the Apostles, worshipped on the "first day of the week" which was when they also took of the Lord's Supper.

## **V. GOD STILL EXPECTS A FORMAL DAY OF WORSHIP.**

God still expects Christians to devote to Him special time in worship. For the NT period - the Christian age - that day of worship is the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This is when Christians gather to share the Lord's Supper. This' special day

is nowhere referred in the Bible as “the Christian Sabbath.” John refers to it as the “Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10). What more appropriate day than the day of the resurrection of the Son of God – Jesus the Saviour?

The Hebrew writer expressed concern over some who made a habit of being absent from the assemblies of God's people (Hebrews 10:24-25). For a Christian to think that it is unnecessary to assemble regularly with God's people on the first day of the week is a grave mistake. By such absence, the Christian removes himself from the assembly of encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25), from an assembly of mutual edification (1 Corinthians 14:26), and from an assembly of worship and praise to the Father (Ephesians 5:18-20).

## CONCLUSION

1. The Bible teaches that the entire Mosaic Law was removed when Jesus died on the cross.
2. The Bible teaches that the Mosaic Law was intended for the children of Israel of the OT.
3. The Bible teaches there is much value in studying and learning how God dealt with people and what kind of responses He expects of us (Romans 16:4; 1 Corinthians 10; Hebrews 2:1-4), but the Laws themselves are no longer binding -- including the Sabbath Law.
4. The Bible teaches that many of the OT Laws have been re-established in the Gospel and deserve just as much respect and obedience (and even more) as God expected from the Israelites.
5. The Bible teaches the formal day of worship has shifted from the 7th Day to the 1st Day of the week.
6. The Bible teaches that Christians should always remember that God is deserving of our devotion every day of the week.

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