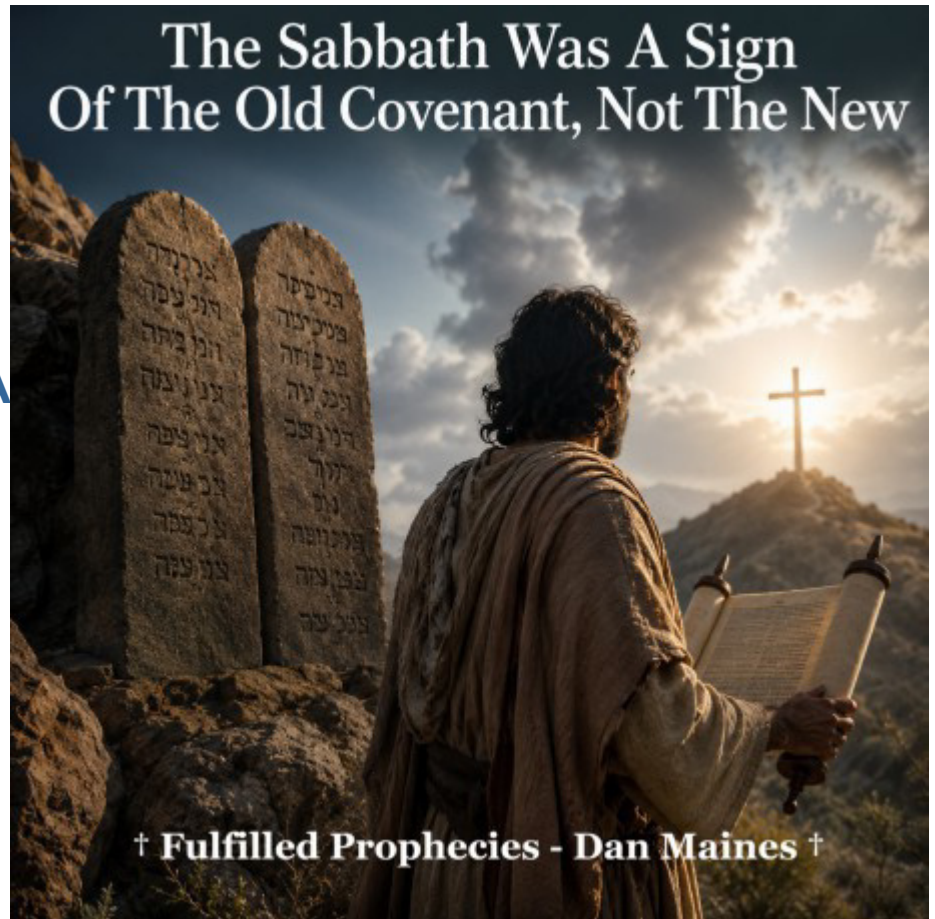


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The Sabbath Was A Sign Of The Old Covenant, Not The New



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Few subjects generate more discussion than the Sabbath. Many sincere Christians believe the weekly Sabbath is still binding today because it was established at creation and included in the Ten Commandments. Others believe Christ fulfilled the Law, including the Sabbath, and that believers now live under the New Covenant. Rather than relying on tradition, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. When we

examine the purpose of the Sabbath, who it was given to, and what Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection, the biblical evidence points to one conclusion. The Sabbath was a covenant sign between God and Israel under the Law of Moses. In Christ, believers have entered the greater Sabbath rest found in Him.

Exodus 31:13-17

Now as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You must keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant.' It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed

† The Sabbath was specifically given to "the children of Israel." The passage never extends this covenant sign to all nations.

† God identified the Sabbath as the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, just as circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. Every covenant had identifying signs. (Genesis 17:10-11)

† Violating the Sabbath carried the death penalty because it was part of Israel's covenant law. If the Sabbath remains binding today, consistency would require the same covenant penalties, something no New Testament writer commands. (Numbers 15:32-36)

† The word "perpetual" describes the duration of the covenant for which it was given. When that covenant reached its fulfillment in Christ, the covenant sign also reached its

fulfillment. (Hebrews 8:13)

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

† The Sabbath command was given as part of the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. It was one of the covenant obligations placed upon that nation. (Nehemiah 9:13-14)

† Although the Sabbath is found within the Ten Commandments, Scripture later identifies it as the sign of the Old Covenant between God and Israel. (Exodus 31:13-17)

† The command looked back to God's rest after creation, but it also served as a weekly reminder of Israel's covenant relationship with Him under the Law of Moses. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

† Christ fulfilled the Law in its entirety, including the covenant that contained the Sabbath command. Believers now find their rest in Him rather than in the observance of a particular day. (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:9-10)

Deuteronomy 5:15

And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to celebrate the Sabbath day.

† Moses gives Israel an additional reason for observing the Sabbath. It reminded them that God had redeemed them from their bondage in Egypt. (Exodus 20:2)

† This command was directed to the nation that had been delivered from Egypt. The Gentile nations were never brought

out of Egypt, showing that the Sabbath belonged to Israel's covenant relationship with God. (Exodus 31:13-17)

† The Sabbath served as a weekly memorial of Israel's redemption under the Old Covenant, just as the Lord's Supper now reminds believers of Christ's redemption under the New Covenant. (Luke 22:19-20)

† By connecting the Sabbath to Israel's deliverance from Egypt, Scripture demonstrates that it was a covenant sign for Israel rather than a universal command given to all mankind. (Nehemiah 9:13-14)

† This is one of my favorite passages on the subject because it answers the question, "Why was Israel commanded to keep the Sabbath?" Moses doesn't point to all humanity, he points to **Israel's redemption from Egypt**. That makes the covenant context unmistakable.

Nehemiah 9:13-14

Then You came down on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven;
You gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.
So You made known to them Your holy Sabbath,
And gave them commandments, statutes, and law,
Through Your servant Moses.

† Scripture says God "made known" His holy Sabbath to Israel at Mount Sinai.

† The text does not say the nations had been keeping the Sabbath since creation. It identifies Sinai as the point where God revealed it as part of His covenant law.

† The Sabbath appears alongside the commandments, statutes, and laws given through Moses, placing it within the Mosaic Covenant.

† This passage answers who received the Sabbath command. It was revealed to Israel through Moses.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone

who believes.

† Christ is the fulfillment and goal of the Law. Everything the Law pointed toward reached its completion in Him. (Matthew 5:17)

† Since the Sabbath was part of the Mosaic Law, it likewise reached its fulfillment in Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

† Believers are now made righteous through faith in Christ rather than by observing the works of the Law. (Galatians 2:16)

† The New Covenant does not return believers to the shadows after the reality has come. (Hebrews 8:13)

Matthew 5:17-18

Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished!

† Jesus did not abolish the Law by ignoring it. He fulfilled everything the Law anticipated.

† Fulfillment is not the same as cancellation. A prophecy isn't destroyed when fulfilled, it reaches its intended goal.

† Jesus declared the Law would remain until all was accomplished. The New Testament repeatedly declares that Christ completed what the Law pointed toward. (John 19:30; Romans 10:4)

† The Sabbath, as part of that covenant, reached its fulfillment in Christ just as the sacrifices, priesthood, and festivals did.

Hebrews 7:12

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

† The New Covenant required a change in the covenant law. (Hebrews 8:13)

† Christ's priesthood replaced the Levitical priesthood. (Hebrews 7:11)

† Since the covenant changed, its regulations also changed. (Ephesians 2:15)

† The Sabbath belonged to that covenantal system and

reached its fulfillment in Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

2 Corinthians 3:7-11

But if the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, came with glory so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness excel in glory. For indeed what had glory in this case has no glory, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

† Paul specifically refers to the covenant written on stone tablets. (Exodus 34:1)

† The Sabbath command was written on those same stone tablets. (Exodus 20:8-11)

† The glory of that covenant was temporary because it anticipated something greater. (Hebrews 8:13)

† The New Covenant surpasses the Old in both glory and permanence. (Hebrews 12:24)

Colossians 2:16-17

Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day - things which are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

† Paul specifically includes Sabbath days among the shadows.

† A shadow points to something greater. Once the reality arrives, believers are not judged by the shadow.

† Paul tells Christians not to allow anyone to judge them regarding Sabbath observance.

† The substance belongs to Christ. The believer's relationship is with the One the Sabbath anticipated, not merely the symbol.

Romans 14:5-6

One person values one day over another, another values every day the same. Each person must be fully convinced in his own

mind. The one who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and the one who eats, does so with regard to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God.

† Paul gives believers liberty regarding the observance of days.

† If Sabbath keeping remained a universal command, Paul could not have spoken of it as a matter of personal conviction.

† Christians are free to honor the Lord every day without being placed under the Old Covenant calendar.

† Unity in Christ is greater than disputes over special days.

Galatians 4:9-11

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again? You meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

† Paul warns against returning to the Old Covenant system after coming to Christ.

† The observance of sacred days belonged to the covenant that was passing away. (Colossians 2:16-17)

† Returning to those observances was a return to bondage rather than walking in the freedom of Christ. (Galatians 5:1)

† The New Covenant calls believers to live by faith, not by the calendar of the Law. (Romans 10:4)

Acts 15:28-29

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell

† The Jerusalem Council settled whether Gentile believers were required to keep the Law of Moses.

† The apostles did not require Gentile Christians to keep the Sabbath.

† If Sabbath observance were essential under the New Covenant, this was the perfect opportunity to command it.
† Their silence demonstrates that the Sabbath was not a requirement placed upon the church.

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† The writer declares the Old Covenant obsolete.

† The Sabbath was one of the covenant signs belonging to that covenant.

† When the covenant became obsolete, its covenant signs also passed away with it.

† Christians now live under the New Covenant established through the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 4:9-10

Consequently, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

† The writer points beyond a weekly day to God's greater rest.

† That rest is found in Christ, not in observing one particular day each week.

† Believers cease trusting in their own works and rest in the finished work of Christ.

† The weekly Sabbath anticipated the permanent rest available through the New Covenant.

Historical References

† Josephus described the Sabbath as one of the distinctive customs of the Jewish nation under the Law of Moses.

† Justin Martyr argued in the second century that Christians were not required to observe the Jewish Sabbath because Christ had fulfilled the purpose of the Law.

† The Epistle of Barnabas interpreted the Sabbath as pointing forward to the greater rest accomplished in Christ rather than

remaining a perpetual weekly obligation.

† Ignatius of Antioch wrote that Christians were no longer living according to the Jewish Sabbath but according to the life of Christ.

† Eusebius explained that the Sabbath and other ceremonial ordinances belonged to the Mosaic economy and found their fulfillment in Christ.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Our salvation does not depend upon observing a particular day but upon faith in Jesus Christ.

† We are free to worship God every day because Christ fulfilled what the Sabbath anticipated.

† Christians should never condemn one another over Sabbath observance because Scripture forbids judging believers regarding Sabbath days.

† Our true rest is not found in the seventh day but in the finished work of our Savior.

Q&A Index

Q Does this mean the Sabbath was sinful?

A No. The Sabbath was holy because God established it for Israel under the Old Covenant. What changed was the covenant, not God's holiness. (Exodus 31:13-17; Hebrews 8:13)

Q Was the Sabbath given to all nations?

A Scripture says it was given to Israel as the sign of God's covenant with them. (Exodus 31:16-17; Nehemiah 9:13-14)

Q Didn't Jesus keep the Sabbath?

A Yes. Jesus lived under the Law in order to fulfill it before establishing the New Covenant through His death. (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 4:4)

Q Does Hebrews teach Christians must keep the seventh-day Sabbath?

A No. Hebrews points to the greater Sabbath rest found in Christ Himself. (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Q Why did Paul tell believers not to be judged regarding Sabbath days?

A Because Sabbath observance belonged to the shadow, while Christ is the substance. (Colossians 2:16-17)

Q Was the Sabbath instituted for all mankind at creation?

A Genesis records God resting on the seventh day, but Scripture does not command mankind to observe the Sabbath until God gave it to Israel through Moses. (Genesis 2:2-3; Nehemiah 9:13-14)

Q If the Ten Commandments are still binding, why isn't the Sabbath?

A Nine of the Ten Commandments are reaffirmed in the New Testament. The Sabbath command is never repeated as a command for the church. Instead, believers are told not to be judged regarding Sabbath days. (Colossians 2:16-17)

Q Why do Christians often meet on Sunday?

A The New Testament records believers gathering on the first day of the week, but it never teaches that Sunday replaced the Sabbath as a new law. Christians are free to gather for worship on any day. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2)

Q Does keeping the Sabbath make a person righteous?

A No. We are justified by faith in Christ, not by observing days or the works of the Law. (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 31:13-17, Deuteronomy 5:15, Nehemiah 9:13-14, Matthew 5:17-18, Romans 10:4, Romans 14:5-6, 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, Galatians 4:9-11, Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 4:9-10, Hebrews 7:12, Hebrews 8:13, Acts 15:28-29

† Josephus, Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, Eusebius

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