

Sabbath and the New Covenant

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Is literal rest on the seventh day Sabbath a part of the “new covenant” experience to be enjoyed by Christians today? An answer to this question is reached through biblical exegesis which investigates the Sabbath’s scope of applicability.

The following interrelated sub-questions delineate the main sections of the paper:

1. Is the seventh day Sabbath a *universal* institution, or was it only for the literal Israelites?
2. Does the seventh day Sabbath have an *on-going* literal application, or was it a temporary type which lost its literal significance when it met its antitype?
3. Does the seventh day Sabbath have *theological significance* for the present phase of the divine covenant, i.e. the “new covenant,” or did it only have theological significance as part of the obsolete “old covenant”?

Following consideration of these questions in order, I will conclude by formulating an answer to the overall question. Note that English quotations of biblical passages are from the NRSV translation unless otherwise indicated. I do not endorse the NRSV more than any other translation, but it is convenient for me to copy because I have it in my computer.

Universal Sabbath or Only for Israelites?

This section explores the first sub-question: Is the seventh day Sabbath a *universal* institution, or was it only for the literal Israelites?

My short answer to this question is: The seventh day Sabbath is universal because it was instituted at Creation for the benefit of all human beings, before the nation of Israel existed. This answer is based upon exegesis of Genesis 2:2-3, which reads:

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2:2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

2:3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

God rested, i.e. ceased¹ His work at the end of the Creation week because His work was done, not because He was tired (cp. Isa 40:28; Ps. 121:3-4).² On the seventh day He stopped to celebrate what could be regarded as the “birthday” of the world.

There is evidence that God intended not only to celebrate, but also to provide an example for human beings. Exodus 31:17 refers to God being “refreshed” as a result of His rest on the seventh day of Creation. The verb translated “refreshed” here, i.e. *npš*, is used only three times in the Hebrew Bible (all Niphal stem): Exod 31:17; 2 Sam 16:14; and Exod 23:12. In 2 Samuel 16:14, the verb *npš* describes David and his people recovering from fatigue induced by their flight from Absalom (2 Sam 16:14). Exodus 23:12 reiterates the Sabbath command given in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8-11):

23:12 Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

In this context, rest (verb *nwh*) on the seventh day Sabbath clearly relieves the fatigue of human beings and animals (cp. Deut 5:14) and refreshes (verb *npš*) them. Now the question arises: If the verb *npš* describes relief from fatigue in Exodus 23:12 and 2 Samuel 16:14, why does Exodus 31:17 use the same word with reference to God being “refreshed”? The answer lies in the purpose of Exodus 31:12-17, which is to have God’s people follow His example by resting on the seventh day of the week (Cassuto: 1967: 245,404; Sailhamer 1992: 309).

¹The Hebrew word translated “rested” here is the verb from the root *šbt*, which means “cease,” “desist,” or “rest” in the sense of desisting from labor (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 991-992; cp. Skinner 1930: 36-37). Although the precise etymological relationship between this verb and the noun *šabbōt*, “Sabbath” is elusive, the two words are used in biblical Hebrew as if they are from the same root (Hasel 1982:24). Exod 20:11 uses another Hebrew verb, *nwh*, to refer to God’s rest on the seventh day of Creation. While this word is sometimes used with reference to rest from weariness or pain (see e.g. Isa 14:3; 28:12; see further below), this meaning is not necessarily present. The basic meaning of the word seems to be the idea of settling down (see e.g. Gen 8:4; Num 11:25-26; 2 Sam 21:10). Thus, Exodus 20:11 refers to God’s repose at the end of Creation, but does not express the idea that he was weary (cp. Robinson 1980: 33-37; Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 628).

²The idea that God does not sleep (Ps 121:3-4), which affirms the constancy of His care, appears to be contradicted in the Bible by the idea that He can be called upon to arise from sleep (Ps 7:6, 35:23, 44:23, 59:4). However, Bernard Batto has pointed out that the sleeping deity is an image which expresses the omnipotence of God, who can sleep because he has supreme authority. Batto finds this to be the essential significance of Jesus sleeping in a boat on the Sea of Galilee during a storm (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:23-27; Batto 1987: 21-23).

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Even though God did not need rest from fatigue, the Bible here speaks of Him anthropomorphically³ as receiving some kind of refreshing benefit (Sarna 1991: 202) in order to show people how to rest on the seventh day, as a result of which *they would* gain relief from fatigue (Exod 23:12).

Lest it should seem strange that God would do something as an example for human beings, consider two similar cases:

1. In the Israelite ritual system, the blood of a sacrificial animal was drained out and applied to the outside or horns of the altar in the courtyard (see e.g. Lev 1:5; 4:25) or to the area of the outer sanctum and the horns of the incense altar (Lev 4:6, 7) with the remainder disposed of by pouring it out at the base of the outer altar (Lev 4:7). The blood did not go up to God in smoke along with the meat as a “pleasing aroma” (see e.g. Lev 1:9). Why not? Because the meat constituted a “food gift” to God (cp. Num 28:2)⁴ and God had commanded the Israelites not to eat meat without draining out the blood because the blood represents the life (Lev 17:10-12; cp. Gen 9:4). By not eating blood with their meat, the Israelites acknowledged that they did not have ultimate control over life. But God did have such control. So why didn’t He show it by accepting blood with His meat? Apparently because He wanted to be an example to His people, thereby practicing what He preached.

2. Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, but John recognized that Jesus did not need baptism (Matt 3:13-14). Baptism symbolizes purification from sin (Rom 6:1-5), but Jesus was sinless (Heb 4:15). Nevertheless, Jesus insisted that John baptize Him, saying to him:

“Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15).

So Jesus went through the motions of baptism because it is part of a righteous human life, even though the righteousness which He already possessed transcended the fallen state and did not require baptism.

Thus far, we have found that God’s rest served as an example for human Sabbath observance. But did this example begin to operate thousands of years after Creation, or did God intend for human beings to follow His example from the beginning? Jesus succinctly answered the question by declaring that “the sabbath was made for humankind . . .” (Mk 2:27). He viewed the original purpose of the Sabbath as providing benefit to human beings. This means that

³I.e., ascribing human characteristics to the deity.

⁴The word translated “offering by fire” in Lev 1:9 and elsewhere is better rendered: “food gift.” On this interpretation of the Hebrew word *’iššeh*, see Milgrom, 161-162. The rendering “offering by fire” is not appropriate for several reasons, including the fact that some offerings given this designation are not burned (Lev 24:6, 9—“bread of the presence”). Furthermore, the “purification offering” (so-called “sin-offering”) which is burned is never given this designation. Compare also Deut 18:1; Josh 13:14; and 1 Sam 2:28, where priests eat the Lord’s “food gifts.” They could not eat an “offering by fire” because it would be burned up on the altar.

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when God rested on the seventh day of Creation, He did not simply intend to benefit Himself.

It is true there is nothing in the text of Genesis 2 that explicitly tells us the Sabbath was made for human beings, as Jesus later declared. Nor does Genesis state that the Sabbath is to be an on-going, cyclical event, occurring on each seventh day. However, Genesis did not need to explicitly state these things because the context makes them clear. Consider the following contextual factors:

1. According to Genesis 2:3, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Gen 2:3). Thus, God must have endowed this day with a special relationship to Himself, who alone is intrinsically holy (1 Sam. 2:2). But how can a day be holy? A day is a unit of time, which is not a material substance, so it cannot be made holy by application of a holy substance, such as anointing oil (Lev 8:10-12). It must be consecrated *in relation to* beings who are affected by it. The only way for intelligent beings to make/treat time as holy is by altering their behavior. Thus, God altered His behavior on the seventh day of Creation, the archetype of the weekly Sabbath (cp. Hasel 1982: 23), and proclaimed the day holy. Skinner points out, regarding the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3: “. . . it is not an institution which exists or ceases with its observance by man; the divine rest is a fact as much as the divine working, and so the sanctity of the day is a fact whether man secures the benefit or not” (1930: 35).

But what sense would it make to say that God *blessed* the day if He intended this unit of holy time to benefit only Himself? Elsewhere in the Creation story, God’s blessings were outgoing, for the benefit of His creatures (Gen 1:22, 28). So could we imagine that on the seventh day God rested and admired His handiwork while man toiled in the garden (cp. Gen 2:15)? The blessing must be for created beings living in the world where the seventh day operated (see Skinner 1930: 35). In order to receive the blessing, these beings would consecrate the day as God did, by altering their behavior (see Doukhan 1991: 156). The blessing results from activity which acknowledges the consecration. As Skinner put it: “. . . the Sabbath is a constant source of well-being to the man who recognises its true nature and purpose” (1930: 38).

2. God made human beings in His image (Gen 1:26-27) and commissioned them to continue the work of creation by being fruitful and multiplying (vs. 28). He also gave them the work of having dominion/responsibility over the earth (verses. 26-28; 2:15). If human beings are made in God’s image and are to *emulate God* by working on their level as God worked on His (cp. Lev 19:2), it would stand to reason that they should also emulate God by resting from their work as God rested from His (cp. Sailhamer 1992: 96-97).

3. On each of the first six days of creation, God did something which had *on-going* results for our world. Thus, we expect that what He did on the seventh day would also have earthly on-going results.

4. God set up cyclical time even before man was created (Gen 1:3-5, 14-18). According to Genesis 1:14, God made heavenly luminaries, chiefly the sun and

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moon (vs. 16), to mark earthly time as “signs,” “seasons,” i.e. appointed times, days and years. So when Genesis 2:3 says that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, this blessing and consecration could be on-going in a *cyclical* sense, applying to each subsequent seventh day. In fact, the seventh day Sabbath provides a plausible explanation for the origin of the week, which is not defined by the movement of heavenly bodies (cp. Cassuto 1967: 244).⁵

The Creation story does not contain a command for human beings to observe the Sabbath. But neither does it contain commands to abstain from idolatry, adultery, murder, or any of the other Ten Commandments (cp. Exod 20). In Genesis 1-2 God was concerned with setting up the ideal order of relationships rather than commanding protection of existing relationships. For human beings, He instituted the Sabbath, marriage, and work (Robertson 1980: 68-81). These three institutions embody principles which were later expressed in the Ten Commandments (cp. Exod 20:3-17).

According to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve showed disrespect for God’s lordship by eating the fruit of a forbidden tree (Gen 3:6), their marriage and work suffered as a result of the Curse of sin (Gen 3:16-19). But there is an important omission in Genesis 3: the Sabbath is not affected by any curse resulting from the Fall. Unlike the other two Creation institutions, the Sabbath remains a little piece of Paradise. As such, its value is enhanced by the deterioration around it. Now that work is exhausting, ceasing from labor on the Sabbath provides needed rest. More importantly, now that human beings are cut off from direct access to God, they need a reminder of His lordship even more than they did before the Fall.

While the Fall made marriage and labor difficult and reduced their joy, it did not take away human responsibility with regard to any of the Creation institutions or the principles which they embody. When Cain murdered Abel, showing disrespect for the life which had been given by God through the marriage of Adam and Eve, God held him accountable (Gen 4:9-15). Genesis does not say that the sixth commandment was formulated as such before Cain killed Abel, but Cain was a murderer anyway because he violated the order God had set up. Just as we cannot say that the obligation to abstain from murder could not exist before the sixth of the Ten Commandments was given to Israel, so we cannot say that the Sabbath could not exist as a human responsibility before the fourth commandment was given.

⁵Nahum Sarna points out the significance of the Sabbath’s uniqueness as a unit of time and delineator of the weekly cycle: “There is nothing analogous to it in the entire ancient Near Eastern world. This is surprising since seven-day units of time are well known throughout the region. Yet the Sabbath is the sole exception to the otherwise universal practice of basing all the major units of time—months and seasons, as well as years—on the phases of the moon and solar cycle. The Sabbath, in other words, is completely dissociated from the movement of celestial bodies. This singularity, together with Creation as the basis for the institution, expresses the quintessential idea of Israel’s monotheism: God is entirely outside of and sovereign over nature” (1991: 111).

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It is true that the Pentateuchal narratives do not mention the seventh day as a day of ceasing from work between the time God rested on the seventh day of Creation (Gen 2:2-3) and the time He commanded the Israelites to observe Sabbath in the wilderness on the way to Mt. Sinai (Exod 16:23-30). But neither do the early Pentateuchal narratives record the specific obligation to refrain from taking God's name in vain. This is stated in the third of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:7) and illustrated in a later narrative (Lev 24:11-16, 23). The early silence does not constitute evidence that God did not expect people to do these things which were implied by the Creation order.

To summarize thus far, I have found the context of Genesis 2:2-3 to indicate that when God ceased/sabbathed on the seventh day of the Creation week, He did not abruptly stop setting up on-going life for human beings on planet Earth and start doing something *ad hoc* exclusively for Himself. By His own example He created the Sabbath as the capstone and delineator of the on-going weekly cycle for human beings. He had created the world, vegetation, and non-human life by speaking. He had created human beings by forming dust, breathing His breath into nostrils, and using a rib (Gen 2:7,21-22). And then He created the blessed and holy Sabbath by "sabbathing" Himself (cp. Hasel 1982: 22-26).

It is clear that God instituted the Sabbath for all human beings on planet Earth because He instituted it in the beginning, long before Israel existed, along with basic elements of human life such as marriage and labor. The fact that the Sabbath shows up as one of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel at Sinai does not negate the universality of the Sabbath, but rather supports it because the other nine commandments are universal principles applicable beyond the boundaries of the literal Israelite nation (cp. e.g. Rom 7:7).

My interpretation of the Sabbath in Genesis 2 agrees with that of O. Palmer Robertson, a Presbyterian scholar, who wrote:

His blessing of this day had a significant effect on the world. Furthermore, the reference to God's blessing the day should not be interpreted as meaning that God blessed the day with respect to himself. It was with respect to his creation, and with respect to man in particular that God blessed the Sabbath day. As Jesus indicated pointedly, "the Sabbath came into being (*egéneto*) for the sake of man (*dià tòn anthrōpon*) (Mark 2:27). Because it was for the good of man and the whole of creation, God instituted the Sabbath.

Neither antinomianism nor dispensationalism may remove the obligation of the Christian today to observe the creation ordinance of the Sabbath. The absence of any explicit command concerning Sabbath-observance prior to Moses does not relegate the Sabbath principle to temporary legislation of the law-epoch. The creational character of God's sabbath-blessing must be remembered. From the very beginning, God set a distinctive blessing on the Sabbath . . .

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God blessed man through the Sabbath by delivering him from slavery to work . . . (Robertson 1980: 68-69).

God invested the Sabbath with additional significance when He reaffirmed it for the Israelite nation. In addition to its function as a reminder of Creation (Exod 20:11), the Sabbath became a reminder of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt (Deut 5:15). The latter event is thematically related to the former. God delivered His people from Egypt because they were His, by virtue of His creative power, which was displayed in the ten plagues on Egypt and in His miraculous protection and provision for the Israelites in the wilderness. Thus, God's deliverance was a manifestation of the on-going divine creative power which Daniel proclaimed to King Belshazzar: "the God in whose hand is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways" (Dan 5:23).

Because of its importance, the Sabbath was honored in the worship system of the Israelites. This is to be expected. It would be surprising if the Sabbath were not honored in this way. Additional sacrifices were offered at the Israelite sanctuary/temple on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10). The "bread of the presence" on the golden table inside the sacred Tent was changed every Sabbath "as a covenant forever" (Lev 24:8). This bread is the only offering at the sanctuary which is referred to in this way as an eternal covenant. It is no accident that it was renewed every Sabbath. The only other reference to an "eternal covenant" between God and the Israelites as a whole during the wilderness period is in Exodus 31:16-17, where the Sabbath, the memorial of Creation, is called an eternal covenant. Thus, the "bread of the presence" offering, consisting of twelve loaves plus frankincense, was placed upon the golden table every Sabbath to acknowledge the dependence of the twelve tribes of Israel upon God as their resident Creator-Provider (Gane 1992).

The fact that the Sabbath was an important part of Israelite worship does not mean that it is only for the Israelites. It is true that the earthly sanctuary/temple and its rituals have given way to Christ's glorious heavenly ministry (Heb 7-10). It is also true that for most Christians, the Sabbath does not represent the redemption of their literal ancestors from Egypt. But the honored place of the Sabbath in the worship system of Israel at a particular phase of the divine covenant does not wipe out its significance for people living at other times and places.

On-Going Sabbath or Temporary Type?

The second sub-question is: Does the seventh day Sabbath have an *on-going* literal application, or was it a temporary type which lost its literal significance when it met its antitype?

My short answer to this question is: The on-going applicability of the Sabbath, which God instituted at Creation, has not ceased because the Sabbath has never functioned as a temporary type.

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If God instituted the Sabbath for human beings before the Fall (Genesis 2:2-3; see above), the function/applicability of the Sabbath cannot be dependent upon its belonging to the system of temporary types which God set up after the Fall in order to lead human beings back to belief in him. That is to say, the Sabbath cannot be a temporary type because it pre-existed the need for temporary types.

Even if the Sabbath had originated as a human institution when God gave it to the Israelites, it would not necessarily follow that the Sabbath functioned as a temporary type to be superseded by the Christian “rest” experience. It is true that in Hebrews 4, Sabbath rest is used to symbolize a life of peaceful rest, involving all days of the week, which results from believing in God. Perhaps it could be said that as a microcosm of such a life, the Sabbath in a broad sense “typifies” such a life.⁶ This idea is simply an extension of the significance which the Sabbath has had since Creation. But this does not mean *a priori* that the Sabbath is a temporary, historical/horizontal kind of type like the Israelite sacrificial system. Nor does the fact that human beings imitate God by keeping the Sabbath indicate that the Sabbath is a temporary vertical type like the Israelite sanctuary. Examination of the biblical evidence yields the conclusion that the Sabbath is neither a historical/horizontal type nor a vertical type. As such, the Sabbath is fundamentally different from the Israelite festivals, on which rituals functioning as types constituted the essence of observance.

Sabbath as a Historical/Horizontal Type?

A historical/horizontal type consists of something which prefigures something in the future which constitutes its antitype. When the antitype commences, the type becomes obsolete. Thus, for example, the levitical priesthood was superseded by the greater Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb 7-10). The levitical priesthood functioned as a type in one era and ceased to function when its antitype, Christ’s priesthood, began to function in the next era. Another example is the ritual of Passover, which Christ fulfilled and therefore superseded when He died on the cross (see Jn 19:14). Sacrificing literal sheep at the time of Passover can no longer point forward to Christ’s death because that event is now in the past.

In the case of a historical/horizontal type, the type has significance, and then the antitype replaces it. The type and antitype do not function at the same time. A crucial test of whether or not the Sabbath functions as a historical type of a God-given life of “rest” is: Can the Sabbath function *at the same time* as the life of rest? The answer which arises from Hebrews 4 is: yes. In this chapter, God’s “rest” has not suddenly become available for Christians; it was available all along and was not fully appropriated in Old Testament times only because of

⁶Richard M. Davidson, of the Old Testament Department of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University, agrees (personal communication).

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unbelief. Because the life of rest was available in Old Testament times, at the same time when the Sabbath was in operation for the Israelites, the Sabbath cannot be a historical type of the life of rest. The following paragraphs provide the exegetical basis for the conclusion that in Hebrews 4 the life of rest was available in Old Testament times.

Hebrews 4:3, 5 quotes Psalm 95:11, where God said of the rebellious generation who left Egypt and rebelled at Meribah (Exod 17:2-7): "They shall not enter my rest." The reason why the ancient Israelites did not enter God's rest was not because such rest was available only to future Christians when type met antitype, but because they did not believe (Bruce 1964: 73-75).⁷ If they had believed, they would have entered God's rest. James Moffatt comments on this aspect of Hebrews 4: ". . . the reason why these men did not gain entrance was their own unbelief, not any failure on God's part to have the Rest ready" (1924: 51). The next generations could also have entered God's rest, but because of unbelief they stopped short of completely subduing Canaan and therefore failed to enjoy peace from striving against their enemies (Judg 1-3).

Hebrews 4:8 says: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day." Although rest was available as a result of the Conquest under Joshua, it was not attained then because of unbelief, and God had to make a later appeal through the Psalmist (Ps 95:7-8), which is quoted in Hebrews 4:7: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." If God's rest would only become available when the seventh day Sabbath and the Israelite

⁷F. F. Bruce makes this interesting comment: "It was not because the 'rest' of God was not yet available that the wilderness generation of Israelites failed to enter into it; it had been available ever since creation's work was ended. When we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made' (Gen. 2:2), we are to understand that He *began* to rest then; the fact that He is never said to have completed His rest and resumed His work of creation implies that His rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to His overtures with faith and obedience. This interpretation which views the divine sabbath as beginning from the moment when creation's work came to an end and going on to the present time is paralleled in Philo and is implied by our Lord's words in John 5:17, 'My Father worketh even until now, and I work'. It differs from another interpretation which was widespread in the early Church, according to which the seventh day of Gen. 2:2f. is a type of the seventh age of righteousness which is to follow six ages of sin's domination. The identification of the rest of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews with a coming millennium on earth has, indeed, been ably defended; but it involves the importation into the epistle of a concept which in fact is alien to it" (1964: 74-75). While I agree with Bruce that the divine spiritual rest experience described in Hebrews 4 has been available to human beings since they were created, I find that he has not clearly defined the relationship between literal rest *on* the seventh day and the continuous rest experience which *begins on* the seventh day. Genesis 2:2-3 says that God rested *on* (Hebrew preposition *b*) the seventh day. This passage does not say God *began to* rest on the seventh day. Thus, Genesis 2:2-3 defines the seventh day as a unit of time during which rest occurs. It is true that God has not resumed His work of creation in the sense described in Genesis 1-2, but He does work, as shown by John 5:17, which is cited by Bruce. Therefore, I interpret Genesis 2:2-3 as describing God's literal seventh day rest, which serves as an example of literal rest to human beings. But this literal rest symbolizes a continuous "rest" experience available to human beings ever since the first Sabbath.

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worship system would lose their significance, why would God appeal to the Israelites through the Psalmist to have this rest experience?

Hebrews 4 does not contradict the fact that there were some Old Testament people who believed and *temporarily* enjoyed God-given rest. Joshua 23:1 says of the Israelites in the later years of Joshua “. . . when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around . . .” 2 Samuel 7:1 says of David: “Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him.” But this rest for the Israelites and for David did not last because of their failure.

Of course, permanent rest in the ultimate sense will come only when God abolishes the present evil era (Rev 20-22). This rest is still future; it did not commence at the beginning of the Christian era (Moffatt 1924: 53). But although Hebrews 4 refers to several kinds or aspects of rest, it emphasizes a rest which human beings can begin to enjoy in the present era:

The emphasis, therefore, seems to be on that “rest” that comes when the life is submitted to God. The whole discussion is reminiscent of the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 11:28, R.S.V.: “Come to me . . . and I will give you rest” . . . through the experience of personal salvation the individual might enjoy that “rest” here and now through grace while preparing for the full experience ultimately in the kingdom of glory (Graham 1982: 344).

Hebrews 4 appeals to Christians to succeed where people in Old Testament times failed. The condition for entering and remaining in God’s rest is belief, and that is still true during the Christian era or Hebrews 4 would not need to make its appeal to “make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.” It is those who have believed who are entering⁸ God’s rest (Heb 4:3). The Christian era does not change the basic dynamic of entering God’s rest through belief (cp. Eph 2:8-9).⁹

To summarize my discussion of Hebrews 4, we do not find in this passage the kind of discontinuity between the Old Testament and New Testament eras which we find in connection with the Israelite levitical priesthood or the sacrifices officiated by that priesthood (see above). While the idea of divine rest belongs both to the seventh day Sabbath and the “rest” experience given by God to those who believe, the Sabbath and the rest of believers can function in the same era. If the Israelites had believed, the rest experience and the Sabbath would have

⁸*Eiserchómetha*, present tense in Greek.

⁹Harold Attridge overlooks the basic continuity between the rest available in Old Testament times and the rest available to Christians when he attempts to establish a type-antitype relationship between the Exodus generation and the Christian community (1980: 284). It is true that the Exodus generation serves as a negative *example* to Christians and a warning that Christians may also fail because of unbelief. But just because history has the potential of repeating itself through an analogous group of people does not mean that a type-antitype dynamic is present.

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functioned together at the same time. The fact that this was possible shows that the Sabbath did not function as a temporary type which could only be fulfilled when the Christian era commenced.

The Sabbath and God's "rest" are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they are complementary. Insofar as keeping the seventh day Sabbath expresses and helps maintain belief in God (see below), it contributes to the experience of entering God's rest. Therefore, when God offered His "rest" to the Israelites, He offered the Sabbath along with it. The Sabbath was supposed to be part of God's "rest," and there is no indication in the Bible that this has changed.

At first glance, Colossians 2:16-17 could appear to contradict the conclusion which I reached from exegesis of Hebrews 4. Colossians 2:16-17 reads:

2:16 Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths.

2:17 These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

In verse 17, "shadow" means "temporary type." So does this mean that the "sabbaths" mentioned in verse 16 functioned as temporary types?

The issue here is ritual observance of special holy days. "Festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" inverts the order found in Numbers 28-29, where the calendar of ritual offerings on holy days includes offerings on Sabbaths (Num 28:9-10), new moons (Num 28:11-15) and festivals (Num 28:16-29:40). These offerings were part of the Israelite worship system. But it was the rituals performed on the days, not the days themselves, which functioned as the types. Notice that in Colossians 2:17, the pronoun "These" identifies the shadowy things as the list in verse 16: "food and drink or of *observing* festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" in verse 16. Along with food and drink, which in this context must be religious in nature because they have typological significance, it is ritual *observance*¹⁰ of the festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths which constitutes the "shadow"/type; it is not the days themselves. There is no evidence that new moon days, for example, had typological significance of their own; it was the special sacrifices offered on new moon days (Num 28:11-15) which served as a "shadow."

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul affirms the same basic message which was decided at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15): People do not need to practice the Jewish rituals in order to be Christians. The rituals were historical types pointing forward to the better, truly efficacious ministry of Jesus Christ, which has already begun and to which our focus should be directed.

So what about the prohibition of labor on the Sabbath, which is part of the Ten Commandments? Was this part of the ritual system which functioned as a shadow of things to come? No. It is true that the ritual system honored the Sab-

¹⁰The word translated here by the NRSV "of observing" is the combination (preposition + noun) *en mérei*, "in the matter of," literally "in the part of" (Arndt and Gingrich 1979: 507).

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bath, but Sabbath rest itself is not a historical shadow/type (see above), and abstaining from work on the Sabbath existed before any ritual system was needed (see also above). Moreover, even for the Israelites keeping Sabbath rest was never dependent upon the operation of the sanctuary/temple or its services. It could be observed wherever God's people found themselves.

By recognizing the temporary nature of the Israelite ritual element which had been added by God to the Sabbath, Paul implied an affirmation of the underlying universality of the Sabbath, which can be kept by anyone apart from the Israelite ritual system. Paul did not touch the original function of the Sabbath itself. If he had, we can be sure there would have been a major uproar in the Christian church, calling for a council like the one in Jerusalem which dealt with the controversy over circumcision (Acts 15; Specht 1982: 111).

Sabbath as a Vertical Type?

If the Sabbath does not function as a temporary historical/horizontal type, is it possible that it functioned as a temporary vertical type, like the Israelite sanctuary on earth which served as a copy of God's temple in heaven above (Exod 25:9; Heb 8:5; cp. Ps 11:4)? Could human, earthly rest on the seventh day be a copy of divine heavenly rest? The following factors, taken together, indicate that the Sabbath was not such a temporary vertical type:

1. Just because human beings imitate God in some respect does not indicate the existence of a *temporary* vertical type. In Leviticus 19:2, for example, God commands the Israelites to be holy as He is holy. The fact that the rest of Leviticus 19 consists of laws governing divine-human and human-human relationships indicates that the aspect of holiness which is in view is that of character. This call to emulate God's character is repeated in 1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 19:2. It is clearly a timeless command.

2. In Genesis 2:2-3, God rested on the seventh day in connection with His creation of this world. There is no indication that the Sabbath was originally a heavenly institution which was then copied on earth in the same way that the earthly sanctuary was a copy of an original heavenly temple.

3. If the Sabbath were a temporary vertical type, we would expect some indication in the Bible regarding the end of its typical significance as we have in the case of the earthly sanctuary. The earthly temple lost its significance when the original heavenly temple took the place of the earthly as the location toward which worship should be directed (Heb 7-10). But there is no such indication that a similar dynamic applies to the Sabbath.

Sabbath and the Israelite Festivals

If literal observance of the seventh day Sabbath does not function as a temporary type and therefore should be maintained, should we also be obliged to keep elements of the Jewish festivals which do not function as temporary types?

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My short answer is: no. It is true that not every activity connected with the Israelite worship system functioned as a temporary type. For example, the priestly blessing (Num 6:23-27) and prayers and music offered at the temple (1 Sam 1:10-11; 2:1-10; 1 Kgs 8:22-54; 1 Chron 6:31-46; 16:4-37, 41-42; 25:1-31) were simply part of the on-going religious experience and did not function as types. But the rituals, which constituted the essence of observance of the festivals, did function as historical temporary types. According to the Bible, all of the Israelite spring festivals met their antitypes at the beginning of the Christian era. Christ died as the antitype of the Passover lamb (John 19:14). Christ rose as the “first fruits of those who have died” (1 Cor 15:20), i.e. as the antitype of the festival wave sheaf (Lev 23:11).¹¹ The Feast of Weeks, known as Pentecost, when the first fruits of wheat were harvested, met its antitype in the early Christian harvest of souls through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

If the spring festivals were temporary types, it stands to reason that the autumn festivals, when even more sacrifices were offered (see Num 29), also functioned as temporary types. There is no room in the present paper to identify the antitypes of the autumn festivals, which would require more discussion than the antitypes of the spring festivals. However, I have made the point which is relevant to this paper: Unlike the Sabbath, the essence of festival observance is constituted by ritual which functions as type.

Even if the Feast of Booths (so-called Feast of Tabernacles), which was the last of the autumn festivals (Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-38), has not yet met its antitype, this does not mean that Christians should be required to keep it today. According to the New Testament, Christian worship is directed toward Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 7-10) rather than toward the resident Shekinah in an earthly sanctuary having human priests and a yearly cycle of national festivals. This shift in the focus of worship is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Israelite festivals were part of and owed their existence to the Israelite worship system. This system was grounded in the experience of the Israelite nation within its historical and agricultural context and limited to that phase of the covenant in which election of literal Israel operated.

We cannot, of course, fully keep the biblical festivals even if we want to because that would require us to make pilgrimages to a temple in Jerusalem, where sacrifices would be offered (Exod 23:14-17; 34:22-24; Lev 23; Num 28-29). Following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., the Jews developed adapted versions of the festivals which do not require sacrifices or pilgrimage. In this way, the Jews can continue to keep the festivals. These observances are based on important elements of the biblical festivals, to which post-biblical traditional liturgical and didactic elements have been added.

¹¹See Lev 23:11—“the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.” Christ rose on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1).

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If a modern Christian wishes to participate in a Jewish festival occasion such as the Passover Seder, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), or Sukkot (Booths), he/she may find personal enrichment and edification, as I have on a number of occasions in Israel and in the United States. But we should not confuse the Jewish postbiblical adaptations with the mandatory biblical forms of the ancient Israelite festivals, which no longer exist.

The Israelite festivals have been carried on by the Jews because these observances commemorate the historical events which formed their nation, thereby keeping their heritage alive. As Christians, we share their heritage in the sense that we recognize the way God used the Israelites to reveal Himself and His purposes to the world. However, biblical events such as the Exodus from Egypt, which is remembered in the Passover service, did not happen to our ancestors. Those events were limited to the experience of a particular people. But that limited Exodus pointed forward to a universal Exodus which belongs to all human beings equally: our Exodus from sin and the control of Satan through the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). To keep this universal Exodus alive, Jesus gave all Christians the Communion service, a Christian Passover which replaces the biblical Israelite Passover (Matt 26:26-29; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Since the Communion service utilizes only bread and wine and does not require a human priest officiating at a temple, it can continue to function following the destruction of the Second Temple.

Jesus created the Christian Passover on the occasion of the biblical Passover, while the Second Temple was still standing, well before the Jews adapted the festivals for their own purposes. If Christ meant for Christians to keep altered forms of the festivals other than Passover, we would expect him to have taught us what to do, as He did at the Last Supper.

There is a fundamental difference between Israelite and Christian worship. The center and focus of the Israelite worship system was God dwelling among His people on earth, the resident Shekinah enthroned above the cherubim in the holiest apartment of the sanctuary/temple (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15, etc.). The sacrifices, festivals, songs, and prayers of the Israelites were directed toward God in His earthly dwelling place. They knew, of course, that God also lives in heaven (Ps 11:4) and that an earthly building cannot contain him (1 Kgs 8:27; cp. Isa 6:1) but their worship reached heaven via the earthly sanctuary/temple. Notice the wording in Solomon's dedicatory prayer:

Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they
pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place;
heed and forgive (1 Kings 8:30).

So Israelites prayed horizontally toward the temple, and from there the prayers went vertically to heaven. Notice that Daniel prayed horizontally toward Jerusalem even when the temple lay in ruins (Dan 6:10).

Unlike the Israelites under the Sinaitic covenant, Christians under the "New Covenant" are to orient their worship directly to the heavenly temple, where

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Christ ministers as their high priest (Heb 7-10). Christians do not need an earthly temple or mediation by earthly priests. By faith in the mediation of Christ, we can send our prayers vertically from wherever we are directly to God's "throne of grace" (Heb 4:16).

To conclude this section, there is a basic difference between the Sabbath and the Israelite festivals (cp. Cole 1996). The festivals were limited to the Sinaitic/Israelite phase of God's covenant by several factors:

1. The essence of festival observance involved rituals functioning as temporary historical types.
2. For their full observance, the festivals were dependent upon continuation of the Israelite ritual system.
3. The festivals were rooted in the particular national religious experience of the Israelite people.

By contrast, observance of the seventh day Sabbath is not subject to any of these limitations. It is not a temporary type, it is not dependent upon continuation of the Israelite ritual system, and it is universal in origin (see above). Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the Sabbath was restricted to the Sinaitic phase of God's covenant.

Sabbath as Part of the "New Covenant"?

The third sub-question is: Does the seventh day Sabbath have *theological significance* for the present phase of the divine covenant, i.e. the "new covenant," or did it only have theological significance as part of the obsolete "old covenant"?

Whereas the previous sub-question challenged the present applicability of the Sabbath on the basis of typology, the present question challenges its continuing relevance on the basis of covenant theology.

My short answer is: As a sign of the on-going dependence of human beings upon their Creator and His work, the seventh day Sabbath continues to have significance for the "new covenant." The fact that the Sabbath functioned during the "old covenant" period does not mean that the Sabbath became obsolete with that covenant. Rather, there is a sense in which the significance of the Sabbath is restored under the "new covenant."

When God reaffirmed the Sabbath for Israel, the Sabbath was more than a commandment; according to Exodus 31:13, 17 (cp. Ezek 20:12), the Sabbath functioned as a sign of the covenant relationship by which He sanctified the Israelites. This function applied to Israel a principle which had been inherent in the Sabbath since Creation. On the seventh day of Creation, God sanctified the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3), a unit of time. Why? In order to affect those who observe this special time. How would they be affected? They would emulate their holy Creator and acknowledge their on-going connection with him. Because they would belong to God, who is intrinsically holy, they would gain holiness from Him. In other words, the Sabbath would be a sign that God makes people holy,

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just as God explicitly said in Exodus 31:13 with particular reference to the Israelites. From the beginning, His desire has been for all people to enjoy a holy relationship with Him.

The divine-human relationship signified by the Sabbath is one in which human beings are dependent upon God and His work. Thus, those who rest on the Sabbath acknowledge “that I, the LORD, sanctify you” (Exod 31:13) and “that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth” (vs. 17). The Sabbath is not simply the immovable “birthday of the world,” it recognizes the dependence of the world, and more particularly the human beings who have dominion over the world, on God who created the world.

Our dependence on God is not only based upon what He did for us thousands of years ago. According to the Bible, He continues to sustain His creatures. Speaking to King Belshazzar, Daniel referred to “the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways” (Dan 5:23; cp. Ps 114:14-15; 145:15-16; Job 12:10).

God will always be our Creator and Sustainer. Therefore, the basic meaning of the Sabbath, which encapsulates this divine-human relationship (cp. Cassuto 1967: 244), is timeless; it cannot become obsolete as long as human beings inhabit planet Earth.

It is true that God expressed the Sabbath to the Israelites in the form of a law. It is also true that the Israelite phase of the covenant, which emphasized law, was defective and had to be replaced by the “new covenant.” But this does not mean that the Sabbath became obsolete along with the Israelite “old covenant.” This conclusion is based upon examination of the relationship between the “old” and “new” covenants. The “old covenant” was defective because Israel’s response to God’s covenant initiative was defective, not because God gave the “old covenant” to Israel as a faulty means of salvation by works.

There was nothing wrong with the covenant God offered to Israel. Like earlier phases of the covenant, it was based upon grace. This is shown by the fact that God first saved Israel by grace, and then He gave His commandments to them. In Exodus 20, obedience to the Ten Commandments (verses 3-17) is a response to the prior grace of “the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (verse 2).

Earlier Old Testament covenants were also based upon grace. God first saved Noah from the flood (Gen 7:1-8:19) and then formally inaugurated the covenant by giving Noah an on-going covenant promise (8:21-22), blessings and commandments (9:1-7), and a sign of the promise (9:8-17). God first gave Abraham a military victory, keeping him safe as He saved Lot from His captors (Gen 14), and then God formally inaugurated the covenant with him (Gen 15,17).

To Israel, as to Noah and Abraham, God offered salvation by grace through faith, as in the Christian era (Eph 2:8). There has never been a different way of salvation. The divine covenants are unified and function as phases of cumulative

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development in God's overall plan (Robertson 1980: 27-52; Walton 1994: 49-50).

It is true that Christ has eclipsed the Mosaic law in the sense that He is a more glorious revelation of God's character (2 Cor 3). But this means that Christ's revelation sheds greater light on the divine principles which constitute God's law. Christ magnified God's law (cp. Matt 5:17-48); He did not replace law as a means of salvation because God has never offered salvation on that basis.

While no amount of our own works can purchase our salvation (cp. Isa 55:1-3), our works are a necessary part of the faith response which accepts the gift of salvation which God freely gives to us. Real, living faith works through love (Gal 5:6). If faith does not have works, it is dead faith (James 2:26), not the kind of faith through which we can be saved by grace (Eph 2:8). Living in harmony with God's principles results from forgiveness. As Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11).

Doesn't the idea that obedience to God is necessary contradict the dynamic of salvation by grace (Eph 2:8)? No, because obedience is a gift of grace. According to Romans 5:5, the Holy Spirit pours love into our hearts. Thus, God gives us love, the principle upon which law-keeping is based (Matt 22:36-40), as a gift. The fact that the Holy Spirit was available to people in Old Testament times (see e.g. Neh 9:20) indicates that the gift of love by the Spirit is not restricted to the Christian era.

Deuteronomy 6 informs us that God wanted the Israelites to respond to His prior grace by having an internalized, heart relationship with him. He commanded them: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart" (Deut 6:5-6). Upon this principle of love for God and upon the principle of love for fellow human beings (Lev 19:18) all of God's Old Testament commandments were based (Matt 22:36-40). Only by accepting these principles and the more specific commandments which flowed from them would the Israelites accept God's lordship through which they would continue to be saved. This explains why God said: "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD" (Lev 18:5).¹²

So God offered to the Israelites a covenant of grace and internalized love. But it takes two parties to make a covenant. The good covenant became a defective "old covenant" because the divine-human relationship became dysfunctional

¹²In Galatians 3:12, Paul referred to Leviticus 18:5 in order to show that "the law does not rest on faith." Paul then went on to say that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . ." (v. 13). Paul was not attacking the law as such (cp. Rom 3:31; Rom 7:7-12); he was opposing the idea that law functions as a means of salvation. The law functions to reveal God's character, and in the process it shows people how far short of the divine standard they really are (Rom 3:20; cp. James 1:22-25).

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due to human failure to have a heart relationship with God. This is clear from Jeremiah 31:31-34, which first mentions the “new covenant”:

31:31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

31:32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

31:34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

From this passage we can see that the difference between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” is not the difference between “law” and “grace.” Rather, it is the difference between failure to internalize God’s law, resulting in disobedience, and successful internalization of God’s law, resulting in obedience. It is harder to break the law when it is internalized; sin against law in the heart would be a “myocardial infraction.”¹³

When the Israelites were disobedient and failed to receive sanctification from the Lord, any Sabbath-keeping they did would have been a hypocritical outward form (cp. Isa 58). But by accepting God’s grace and internalizing His law, including the Sabbath, the people could become holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2). Thus the Sabbath could be a true sign of a real sanctification experience (Exod 31:13; Isa 58). Jacques Doukhan points out:

In obeying the fourth commandment, the believer does not negate the value of grace. On the contrary, the awareness of grace is implied. Through obedience to God’s law, the believer expresses faith in God’s grace. This principle is particularly valid when it applies to the Sabbath, because in it not only the divine law but also divine grace are magnified (1991: 155).

By restoring sanctification, the “new covenant” restores the Sabbath to its true significance. Instead of being a hypocritical “tour de farce,” the Sabbath

¹³The key to the success of the “new covenant” is found in verse 34: “. . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” The “new covenant” is based upon forgiveness. It is the sacrificial atonement of the incarnate Christ which draws all men to Him (see John 12:31), demonstrating the supreme love of God (John 3:16) and the utter dependence of human spiritual life upon divine grace. Whereas Israel at Sinai began covenant life with a clean slate, as a neonatal nation (cp. Ezek 16), “new covenant” people begin from the humbling posture of accepting forgiveness. Such people know their weakness because they know they have fallen.

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points to a living reality: People who are allowing God to sanctify them keep the sanctified day.

During His ministry, Jesus showed Christians how to live under the “new covenant” (see Specht 1982: 105). He didn’t wait to begin teaching Christians how to live until He had officially inaugurated the “new covenant” era with His broken body and spilled blood. So Jesus’ example regarding the seventh day Sabbath has prime relevance for Christians today. Luke 4:16 says:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

If Jesus had simply participated in Jewish worship on the Sabbath, the significance of His example would be limited.¹⁴ But the fact that He took so much trouble to restore the Sabbath to its rightful place shows that it was of great importance for him and therefore should be important for Christians. Jesus risked controversy and danger by healing people on the Sabbath (see e.g. Mark 3:1-6; John 5:2-18; 9:1-41), thereby stripping away hypocritical human tradition and showing by example the purpose of the Sabbath as it was originally created by God’s own example (Gen 2:2-3; see above): “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mk 2:27).

It is no accident that Jesus made a point of healing people on the Sabbath (Doukhan 1991: 152), thereby lifting their burdens and giving them rest from their suffering. His healing was a manifestation of His on-going divine creative power. When Jesus was persecuted for healing on the Sabbath, He responded: “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (John 5:17). Because of the divine creative work, human beings can have rest (cp. Ps 121:3-4). Moreover, according to Philip Yancey, Jesus’ miracles provided “snapshots” of God’s ideal for the world as He created it and to which He will restore it:

Some see miracles as an implausible suspension of the laws of the physical universe. As signs, though, they serve just the opposite function. Death, decay, entropy, and destruction are the true suspensions of God’s laws; miracles are the early glimpses of restoration. In the words of Jurgen Moltmann, “Jesus’ healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly ‘natural’ things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded” (Yancey 1995: 182-183).

Under the “new covenant” phase of the divine covenant, God restores the world and human beings to the sinless ideal He had for them in the beginning (Rev 21-22). Since the Sabbath was part of the “covenant of Creation,” before human sin arose, it is appropriate that the Sabbath continue into the sinless “new earth.”

¹⁴Compare His circumcision, done to him when He was eight days old (Luke 2:21). The Jerusalem Council, guided by God, determined that circumcision was no longer relevant when Gentiles could become Christians directly without first becoming Jewish.

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Evidence that the Sabbath will continue as a day of worship into the eschatological era is found in Isaiah 66:22-23:

66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain.

66:23 From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.

The context of these verses shows that Isaiah envisioned the Eschaton through the lens of God's plan to use literal Israel to gather all nations to Himself at Jerusalem (cp. Isa 66:18-21). As shown by comparison with the book of Revelation, God will still gather all nations to Himself (Rev 7:9-10). Since the Sabbath was universal from the beginning, there is no reason why it should be regarded as an obsolete element in Isaiah's eschatological description.

Isaiah 66:23 mentions on-going eschatological worship on new moon days along with worship on sabbaths. Like sabbaths, new moons were honored by extra sacrifices in the Israelite ritual system (Num 28:11-15). But this does not mean that new moon days cannot be worship days apart from the ritual system (see the same point above regarding the Sabbath). According to Genesis 1:14, before sin or the ritual system existed, God created and appointed the sun and the moon "to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." The term translated "seasons" here is *mô^{ca}dîm*, which refers to "appointed times" (see Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 417). In passages such as Leviticus 23:2, 4, 37, 44, this word refers to regular, cyclical times of worship. In Genesis 1:14, the term could not include the Sabbath because the weekly cycle is not marked by movements of the sun or moon in relation to the earth as are days, months, and years. But new moons would fit well into the category of *mô^{ca}dîm* in Genesis 1:14. Thus, eschatological observance of regular worship at new moons could revive a potential which was recognized at Creation.¹⁵ But we must make two qualifications here:

1. Isaiah 66:23 mentions sabbaths and new moons as days of worship. But whereas sabbaths by definition are days of rest, new moons are not. Sabbaths are constituted as sabbaths by cessation of ordinary weekly activity. New moons are constituted as such by the position of the moon in relation to the earth (see Gen 1:14). So Isaiah 66:23 does not inform us that new moons will be observed as eschatological days of *rest*.

2. Since God sanctified the Sabbath and instituted cessation of labor on this day by His example (Gen 2:2-3), which He subsequently reinforced by His command (Exod 20:8-11), the Sabbath is naturally a day of worship. But the Bible does not give us this kind of indication that we should observe new moons as days of worship in the Christian era. It is true that new moons were honored by additional sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary (Num 28:11-15), but

¹⁵Compare the monthly cycle of the tree of life (Rev 22:2).

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that appears to be all the attention they received. In fact, while the cultic calendar of Numbers 28 includes new moons because it lists the sacrifices, the list of cyclical appointed worship times in Leviticus 23 passes directly from seventh day sabbaths (verse 3) to yearly festivals (verses 4ff), without mentioning new moons at all. The implication seems to be that the new moons did not function as special days of worship except for the addition of some sacrifices.

To summarize this section, the “old covenant,” as opposed to the “new covenant,” was not a different means of salvation established by God during Old Testament times, but rather, it was a relationship with Israel which was defective due to failure of the human party. So the “new covenant” does not supersede the “old covenant” by abolishing all aspects of what God offered to the Israelites, including His re-affirmation of the Sabbath. Rather, the “new covenant” fulfills the only ideal God has ever had for His people: a heart relationship with him. As an important sign of the divine-human relationship, the Sabbath is restored to its full significance under the “new covenant.”

Conclusion

The seventh day Sabbath as a day of rest was given to the human race at Creation, before there was a nation of Israel and before humanity needed redemption from sin. Therefore, the applicability of the Sabbath is not limited to the Israelite worship system or to the period of salvation history during which ritual observances functioned as temporary types. The Sabbath is for all human beings, whether or not they are sinners and whether or not they are Israelites. The Sabbath did not become obsolete along with the elective covenant with Israel, which became dysfunctional due to human failure. To the contrary, the Christian “new covenant” restores the significance of the Sabbath when God’s people have the experience of which the Sabbath has always been a sign: sanctification by God, the Creator who sanctified the Sabbath in the first place.

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