

# Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?

Anthony Buzzard

For fourteen long years, I kept the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days. This caused no end of disruption in my family and antagonized my parents and friends. It cut me off from many activities. Now that I have been freed from this burden, I would like to discourage others from observing the Sabbath. There are several reasons why I believe that the seventh day is not binding on Christians:

1. First, it cannot be demonstrated that the Sabbath was in force before Exodus 16. Note that Deuteronomy 5:15 gives the reason for Sabbath-keeping: it is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. “Remember that you were a slave in 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 keep the Sabbath day.” It is also a reflection of the rest God enjoyed at creation. Please note, however, that Exodus 20:11 does not say that God blessed every subsequent Sabbath from creation; only that He rested on the seventh day, and then later required Israel under the Law to copy His original single-day rest by resting every Saturday. Those who say the reason for keeping the Sabbath is the creation of the Sabbath as a permanent rest for all mankind contradict Deuteronomy 5:15 which specifically (“therefore”) calls the Sabbath a memorial of the Exodus.
2. There is no biblical proof that the Sabbath and Holy Days were binding on Adam. How could he have kept the Passover?
3. In Exodus 16:23 Israel first hears about the Sabbath as “a time of cessation from work, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.” It is not an already existing, well-known Sabbath, because it is first being revealed as a permanent weekly rest for Israel.
4. The Sabbath was given to *Israel*, according to Nehemiah 9:14. Moreover, in Nehemiah 10:29-33 we learn that the Law was revealed through Moses — the weekly Sabbath, the New Moons, the Holy Days and the seventh-year Sabbath.
5. This whole Sabbath system — weekly, monthly, annual, every 7 years, and every 49 years (Jubilee) — was a single system. Only one part of it is mentioned in the Ten Words given at Sinai, but that is a summary of the whole system.
6. Some Christians are enchanted with the Ten Commandments. Let us see if they are the final word for all time. First of all, the covenant which God made with Israel, with the ten commandments at its heart, “He **did not** make with our fathers.” This we read in Deuteronomy 5:3. Therefore it was something new. This includes the Sabbath.
7. In the New Testament Paul warns very strongly against going back under the Sinai Covenant. People who want to be under the Law “observe days, months, seasons, and years” (Gal. 4:10). What days? Paul goes on: The covenant at *Sinai* (summarized by the ten commandments) is like Hagar, the slave woman who bore a slave according to the flesh (Gal. 4:23). The church is like Isaac, born free of the free woman Sarah, according to the promise. This is quite different from Sinai. Therefore Paul is replacing the Law of the ten commandments with something higher.
8. Notice that in the Temple (we are a spiritual temple), Sabbath keeping is superseded even in the Old Testament. The priests are not bound by the Sabbath when they are doing service for the Temple (see Matt. 12:5). We may therefore break the letter of the law of Sabbath-keeping since we work in the “temple.”
9. Colossians 2:16-17 warns against people disturbing the church by trying to impose rules about keeping annual Sabbaths (feasts), monthly rests (New Moons), and weekly Sabbaths. These things, Paul says, are a single *shadow* of the reality of Christ who has now come. What possible point can there be in observing the shadow when the substance (Christ) is available to us? It is not right to

insist that people observe a shadow. This would seem to apply that Christ is of no effect. If Jesus is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), could he not also be our Sabbath?

10. In Hebrews 10:1 we read that the Law with its sacrifices was a *shadow* (same word). That *shadow* has now been replaced by the *body* (person) of Christ's sacrifice. "A body You have prepared for me... We have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Messiah once and for all" (Heb. 10:5, 10). If Christians would not think of reinstating the shadow sacrifices, then why do they insist on observing the *shadow* Sabbaths when Paul says the *body* is Christ's?
11. The two tablets of stone have been replaced by something better and higher. The ten commandments are the center of the Mosaic covenant, which, according to Paul, is fading away (2 Cor. 3:11). The Gospel of the coming glory of the Kingdom cannot be mixed with the old covenant.
12. Christians are to have a continuing "sabbatizing" or rest (Heb. 4:9). This is a cessation from our own wicked works. The seventh day Sabbath rest of God foreshadowed this Christian rest (Heb. 4:3). The "day" which God speaks about for Christians in Hebrews 4:8 is not a single day of the week but a rest from sin (now and in the Kingdom). If Joshua had given them rest (not the seventh day!) then God would not have spoken of another rest (also not a day of the week) but a "sabbatizing" — a spiritual rest in Christ. This is the sabbath that we should be keeping every day.

So what should we do if we want to live in the spirit? We must love God and man. We do not need to be circumcised *physically*, but *spiritually*. We do not need to offer *physical* sacrifices but *spiritual* sacrifices of prayer and giving. Christ is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), so we don't offer a lamb every year, because *the lamb* has been offered. The Jewish Passover contains no memorial of the resurrection, so we must celebrate that in the Lord's Supper, which is kept frequently. Jesus is our Sabbath, so we must rest in him: "Come to me and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Sunday is the proper day for meeting to celebrate the resurrection (see Luke 24:21: Sunday is the third day since the crucifixion, the day when they were expecting the resurrection to happen — and it had!). New Testament Christians sometimes met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

Some say, however, that Jesus came to magnify the Law and so did not change it. In response, I would say that Jesus did change the Law of Moses in regard to divorce (Matt. 19:8-9), as well as the law of circumcision through Paul. Remember that circumcision was a critically important part of the Law even before Moses. On the eighth day the faithful were to be circumcised. Did Jesus, through Paul, change this Law? I think we all agree that he did. The eighth day of a male child's life now has no particular significance. But under the Law it was critically important.

What then is the meaning of the Fourth Commandment today? It is obviously a shadow (Paul says it is) of which the substance is the rest we find in Jesus through the cessation of our own works — the "sabbatism" of Hebrews 4:9. We are to be constantly working in the in spiritual temple where there can be no Sabbath breaking, since the priests break the Sabbath and are innocent (Matt. 12:5). We are not under the Sabbath law given to Israel under the old covenant.