

The Role of God's Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the "New Covenant"¹

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Many Christians today believe and teach that when the "old covenant" of the Old Testament gave way to the "new covenant"/New Testament of Christianity, the entire "old covenant" law became obsolete.² Since the seventh day Sabbath was part of that law, it is logical to conclude that literal Sabbath observance is no longer relevant or required. This approach has been adopted by a broad spectrum of Christians, from those (especially evangelicals) who hold that Christians are not bound to keep any particular day³ to others (including Pope John Paul II) who slide aspects of the Old Testament Sabbath over to Sunday in order to make it a Christian "Sabbath."⁴

The line of reasoning just described is logical: "Old covenant" law, which includes seventh day Sabbath, is replaced by "new covenant." Therefore seventh day Sabbath comes to an end. However, this logic is founded on an assumption, namely, that the Bible teaches such a sharp break between "Old" and "New" Testament religion that there is no continuity between the covenants that they represent. This assumption has a profound effect upon the nature of Christianity, so that many Christians reject the divine authority and value of much or all of the Old Testament.⁵

If we examine the crucial assumption that there is no continuity between the "Old" and "New" Testament cov-

enants, we find that it is based on a misunderstanding of biblical proportions that fails to take sufficient biblical (including New Testament) evidence into account. When we look at the Bible in a more thorough and balanced way, we find that there is continuity as well as discontinuity: *Cumulative phases of God's unified "everlasting covenant" bring wave upon wave of gracious divine initiative throughout Old Testament times and on into the New Testament, where the comprehensive culmination in the ultimate revelation and only truly effective sacrifice of Jesus Christ washes over the human race with a tidal wave of grace.*

In the present study, we will first examine biblical evidence for relationships between phases of the divine covenant. Secondly, we will investigate the function of law within those phases. Thirdly, we will consider the place of the seventh day Sabbath in biblical law. Fourthly, we will ponder the role and meaning of the Sabbath in the "new covenant" era.

Relationships Between Phases of the Divine Covenant

The word for "covenant" (Hebrew *b'erit*), meaning "a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties,"⁶ first appears in the Bible with reference to God's covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18; compare ch. 9). Later the

1. I am grateful for numerous suggestions from members of the Biblical Research Institute Committee.

2. See e.g. the views of Wayne Strickland and Douglas Moo in a multi-authored volume: Greg Bahnsen, Walter Kaiser, Douglas Moo, Wayne Strickland, and Willem VanGemeren, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Counterpoints; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 276-9, 343, 375-6; see also the website of the "New Life Bible Chapel" in Allendale, Michigan: <http://www.nlbchapel.org/About.htm>. I am grateful to Jan Sigvartsen, my research assistant, for these references and many others cited in the course of this paper.

3. See e.g. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 400, 403-4; Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids/Dayton: Eerdmans/Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989) 81; Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (revised ed.; Glendale, Arizona: Life Assurance Ministries, 1995).

4. See e.g. Gary G. Cohen, "The Doctrine of the Sabbath in the Old and New Testaments," *Grace Journal* 6 (1965) 13-14; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Lord's Day," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 3:159; Pope John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Catholic Church on Keeping the Lord's Day Holy" (www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/; July 5, 1998).

5. For Samuele Bacchiocchi's critique of the "New Covenant" theology published by Joseph Tkach, Jr., Pastor General of the World Council of Churches (*The Pastor General Report*, titled "The New Covenant and the Sabbath"), and by Dale Ratzlaff (*Sabbath in Crisis*), see Bacchiocchi's *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments* (Biblical Perspectives. 14; Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, 1998) 104-20.

6. Roy Gane, "Covenant of Love" (unpublished syllabus for a Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary course on "Covenant-Law-Sabbath"), interacting with other interpretations of Hebrew *b'erit*, such as that of Moshe Weinfeld, "*b'erit*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 2:253-5.

Lord established major covenants with Abraham (Gen 15, 17) and then the Israelite nation at Sinai (Exod 19-31), after which he instituted the “new covenant” (Jer 31; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11; Heb 9). Within the framework of the Sinai covenant, the Lord made subordinate covenants with two individuals: Phinehas the priest (Num 25) and David the king (2 Sam 7; Ps 89). Through these two covenants, God pledged that the descendants of Phinehas and David would continue to fill their institutional positions.⁷

The covenants just listed are commonly accepted because the Bible calls them covenants. However, O. Palmer Robertson points out that covenant dynamics already functioned in God’s relationship with Adam and Eve.⁸ Aside from the fact that some biblical passages “appear to designate the order established by creation as covenantal” (Jer 33:20, 21, 25, 26; Hos 6:7),⁹ the essential ingredients of “covenant” appear in the Lord’s relationship with the first human couple both before and after the Fall into sin (see especially Gen 2:15-17; 3:15).

It is true that establishment of the Creation covenant differed from that of later covenant phases in that God was setting up the world order and his pronouncements created relationships rather than solidifying existing relationships.¹⁰ Another difference that carries prime importance for our study of the Sabbath is the fact that the Creation covenant preceded the need for redemption from sin and mortality. Nevertheless, Robertson is right when he concludes: “The extent of the divine covenants reaches from the beginning of the world to the end of the age.”¹¹

Unity and differences between the successive phases of God’s covenant

In the Bible, the divine covenants are unified and function as phases of cumulative development in God’s overall plan.¹² That is to say, they really form sub-covenants

of one grand, overarching Covenant. It is clear that “each successive covenant builds on the previous relationship, continuing the basic emphasis which had been established earlier.”¹³ For example, the covenant set up at Sinai fulfilled God’s promises to Abraham regarding his Israelite descendants.¹⁴ At each covenant stage, the divine-human relationship could be summarized “I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.”¹⁵

Especially after the Fall, the divine covenants complement each other in revealing God’s character of love (1 Jn 4:8) to the human race:

Each is a part of a single, unified program of revelation. The enactment or primacy of one does not mean the nullification or subordination of another. None of these covenants replaces the one before it—each supplements what has come before.¹⁶

The unified divine covenants demonstrate God’s consistent attitude toward human beings. He wants the best for us, especially including an intimate, intelligent, knowledgeable relationship of love with him. While he does not change (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8) and therefore is utterly dependable, he approaches different people at different times in different ways due to their changing circumstances and needs.

Throughout biblical history, God’s covenant initiatives provide fresh waves of grace and divine self-revelation to advance his purposes in the world after transitional periods of decline in divine-human relations:¹⁷

- Covenant with Adam/Pre-Flood Period
Transitional Period: The Flood
- Covenant with Noah/Immediate Post-Flood Period
Transitional Period: Dispersion from the Tower of Babel

7. Roy Gane, *Leviticus/Numbers* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming). Against the common assumption that the covenant with David was on the same level. For a series of points indicating the subordinate role of the Davidic covenant, see Gane, “Covenant of Love.”

8. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 18.

9. *Ibid.*, 19.

10. John H. Walton is overly affected by the idea that covenants affirm *existing* (i.e. pre-existing) relationships (*Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 14-15). However, it is also true that a covenant can create a new reality, without a pre-existing relationship. For example, an “arranged marriage” (e.g. Gen 24) can create a covenant bond between two people without a pre-existing relationship.

11. Robertson, 25.

12. *Ibid.*, 28 and Walton, 49-50.

13. Robertson, 28.

14. *Ibid.*, 29.

15. See e.g. Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 31:33; Ezek 36:28. Robertson calls this the “Immanuel” (“God is with us”) principle of the covenant (45-6). The formula “I shall be your God, and you shall be my people” follows the pattern of an ancient declaration of marriage or parental acceptance (cf. Hos 2:16; 1:10; 2:23), the opposite of a formula of divorce or parental rejection (cf. 1:9).

16. Walton, 49. Walton begins with the Abrahamic covenant because he includes election as part of his definition of “covenant.”

17. *Ibid.*, 63-77 from the covenant with Abraham onward. I have added the periods before that.

Covenant with Abraham/Patriarchal Period

Transitional Period: Egyptian Sojourn

Sinai Covenant/Conquest and Judges

*Transitional Period: Ark in Exile*¹⁸

Davidic Covenant/Monarchy to Continue the Sinai Covenant

Transitional Period: Exile, Post-Exilic and Intertestamental Periods

New Covenant/Christ and Church

From this outline, it is plain to see that the biblical covenants form the skeletal structure of all Scripture, including both Testaments.

The main differences between the covenant phases are in terms of emphasis.¹⁹ Thus, for example, the covenant with Noah emphasized preservation (Gen 6-9), which is also involved in other covenants.²⁰ The covenant with Abraham highlighted promise (Gen 12-22), which is also a component of other covenants.²¹ The covenant with Israel at Sinai stressed law (Exod 20-Num 10), which belongs to other covenants as well.²²

What is the role of the “new covenant” in relation to the earlier covenant phases?

In the “new covenant” prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, all of God’s covenant purposes—including preservation, promise, and law—climax in Jesus Christ,²³ who is Priest (Heb 7-10; like Phinehas) and King (Rev 19:11-16; like David). Christ can pull everything together to reintegrate divine-human relationships (Jn 17:20-23) because he is Immanuel, “God is with us” (Matt 1:23 quoting Isa 7:14),²⁴ possessing both divine and human natures (e.g. Lk 1:35). To win the victory for us, he became a battleground in the Great Controversy between sin/selfishness and holiness/love (e.g. Jn 3:14-17; 2 Cor 5:21). He is the ultimate revelation of God’s character (2 Cor 3).

The “new covenant” established by the incarnate Christ, who is the Ladder between heaven and earth (Jn 1:51), is the ladder/bridge between the present sinful world and Eden restored (Rev 21-22). Like the covenants with Adam

and Eve and with Noah, but unlike the covenants of “election” with Abraham and the Israelites, the “new covenant” is universal: God offers it directly to all people (Gal 3:28-29) rather than using an elect, chosen ethnic group as a channel of divine self-revelation through which to bless all nations (Gen. 12:1-3, etc.).

Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophesied the “new covenant” for Israel and Judah as a national, non-universal covenant of election. However, it became universal soon after its ratification by Christ’s death on the cross (Heb 9:15-28; compare Matt 26:27-28; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), when the Gospel was given directly to the Gentiles. Following the Jerusalem council, the Gentiles did not need to become Jewish (as attested by circumcision) in order to join the “new covenant” (Acts 15), although the apostles commanded them to keep the non-ceremonial, moral principles prohibiting idolatry, eating meat from which the blood is not drained at slaughter, and sexual immorality, which were required by Leviticus for non-Israelites (Acts 20-21, 28-29, referring to Lev 17-18).²⁵ Notice that the apostles did not need to explicitly reaffirm weekly Sabbath observance, which in Exodus 20:10 and 23:12 was also for the benefit of the non-Israelite resident alien, because the discussion at Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 concerned ritual matters related to circumcision (Lev 12:3), which are concentrated in Leviticus. From the Jerusalem council onward, a distinction between “ethnic Israel” and other people is no longer relevant for the overall dynamics of the “new covenant” community (see Gal 3:29). So Jews and Gentiles together may receive fulfilment of the “new covenant” promises as spiritual heirs of Abraham (Gal 3:26-29).

While the Sinai covenant emphasized an externalized summation of God’s will in the form of law as the condition for enjoyment of the covenant blessings, the “new covenant” emphasizes internalization of God’s law on the basis of his forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34; compare Ezek 36:25-27). It is true that God offered his people an internalized, heart relationship with him under the covenant with Israel at Sinai (Deut 6:5).²⁶ But in the “new covenant” the overwhelming glory of God’s love as shown through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself (2 Cor 3; compare Jn 17:4-

18. 1 Sam 4 to 2 Sam 6.

19. Robertson, 61.

20. See e.g. Gen 15:1; Exod 19:4; Rev 7:14.

21. See e.g. Gen 3:15; 6:18-20; Exod 19:5-6; Lk 24:49.

22. Gen 9:4-6; 17:1; Matt 5:17-48.

23. Robertson, 63.

24. In Hebrew the name is a nominal/verbless sentence with “is” understood, expressing an assertion, rather than “God with us,” which is merely a description.

25. Jacques Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2002), 20-21.

26. Cf. Fredrick Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change — Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 86—“‘Heart religion’ has always been at the center of Israelite faith.”

5) breaks through the hardness of human hearts.²⁷ Forgiveness was also possible under the Sinai covenant through faith in divine mercy²⁸ and the realities foreshadowed by animal sacrifices (Lev 4-5, etc.), but now the Forgiver has come in human form (Jn 1:14) and has offered himself as the once-for-all sacrificial Victim (Heb 9:28). Human beings can better relate to a Person and a completed historical event than to a prophetic ritual system using token animals.

Contrary to common misconception, the difference between the Old Testament covenant phases and the “new covenant” is not the difference between salvation through law in the former and salvation through grace in the latter. Paul’s distinction between “under law” and “under grace” in Romans 6:14-15 has to do with states of persons who are “under condemnation by the law” or “freed from condemnation through Christ.”²⁹ This is not a distinction between two different dispensations.³⁰ Both of these states could characterize people within the Old Testament *or* New Testament eras.

The “new covenant” is like the earlier covenants in that it has law/stipulations. Jesus said to his disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34)³¹ While Jesus called this a “new commandment,” he had earlier affirmed that love for God and for other human beings, as commanded in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively, was the basis of “the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:37-40). “It was new in the sense that the ‘old’ truth always required a fresh rediscovery, a new commitment.”³² The fact that Jesus summarized the law in terms of love does not mean that he did away with the law: “a summary does not abrogate or discount what it summarizes.”³³ Paul emphasizes that the law = love (Rom 13:8-10), so a distinction between Old Testament law (= love) and New Testament love (= law)

artificially introduces a false dichotomy.

Jesus’ command to love one another was not new in the sense that God had never before required his people to love each other. What was new was the degree/quality of love that he called for his followers to show one another: “just as I have loved you...” By requiring love in this way, Jesus by no means lowered the standard. Rather, he raised it to a remarkable level: “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:12-14).

Although Jesus’ law of love does not take up much space in the Bible, it is more comprehensive than any list of do’s and don’ts that could possibly be devised to govern relationships between people. There may be loopholes in lists, but there are no loopholes in the kind of love that Christ has demonstrated and that he gives to us as a gift through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

Christ’s simple law of love is similar to God’s comprehensive covenant command to Abram: “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). Scholars who maintain that the divine covenant with Abram/Abraham was unconditional have missed the impact of this command, which the Lord gave him in the process of ratifying the covenant.³⁴ There was no long list of laws, as with the national covenant charter at Sinai (Exod 20-23). But “Walk before Me, and be blameless” embraced everything that God had commanded Abraham or would ever require of him in the future.

Just as law is integral both to the Old Testament covenants and to the “new covenant,” the same is true of grace: Like the “new covenant,” the Old Testament covenants were based on grace rather than law. To begin with, God gave Adam and Eve a perfect world *before* he warned them not to eat the fruit of one tree (Gen 1-2). When they

27. Cf. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 204-5.

28. Cf. Holmgren, 88-9.

29. Cf. Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 199-201; J. H. Gerstner, “Law in the NT,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 3:88 on Jn 1:17.

30. Against e.g. Cohen, 13-14, who is off target when he criticizes Seventh-day Adventists and others for claiming that Rom 6:14 “means that the believer is not *under* the ceremonial law but still *under* the moral law (i.e., the Decalogue including the Fourth Commandment—according to the Adventists)... The New Testament frees the believer from ‘the law’ without qualification (Rom 6:14; 7:1-6; Gal 2:19; 3:13; etc.). They err in their reasoning that not being under the moral law would mean that the believer would absurdly be free to break the Ten Commandments, and therefore to sin at will... Not being *under* the law does NOT mean that the believer is free to sin (Rom 6:15); free from all duties and obligations (Rom 6:16-18); free to commit those acts forbidden in the nine non-sabbatical commandments of the Decalogue (for these still represent violations of Christ’s will, and the New Testament specifically prohibits their commission, e.g., Eph 6:1-3; 4:28; 5:3-6; Rev 22:15...)”

31. NASB here and elsewhere in this paper unless otherwise specified.

32. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church*, 21.

33. Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 120.

34. Gen 17 records the second phase of covenant ratification, including the covenant sign (circumcision). The first phase, involving the covenant sacrifice, was in ch. 15.

fell into sin, the Lord pointed out the dire consequences and promised the “seed” of the woman, rather than law, as the remedy (Gen 3). Before the great Flood, God promised Noah a covenant of deliverance (Gen 6:18). Then he delivered him, and only *after* Noah and his family were saved did the Lord formalize/ratify the covenant, in the process of which he stated some stipulations/laws (Gen 8:20-9:17). So the laws were for people who were *already* saved by grace, after God had delivered on his promise. It is true that Noah’s deliverance had required him and his family to engage in a major construction project for more than a century, but this was not righteousness/salvation accomplished by works. Rather, it was cooperation with the Lord to receive his gift of salvation, for which they were utterly dependent upon him.

The pattern of deliverance through grace preceding covenant stipulations continues. God began the ratification of his covenant with Abram through a ritual (Gen 15:18) after reminding him, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you” (v. 1). This was a promise for the future, but it was based on what had happened in the previous chapter: The Lord had protected Abram when he fought to free Lot from foreign kings (Gen 14). Again, God demonstrated his grace before asking for a permanent, binding relationship, just as there is an engagement before a wedding. Unlike human politicians, God has his covenants inaugurated on the basis of solid historical actions that he has already accomplished on behalf of his people, rather than simply upon promises.

Similarly, formalization of the covenant with Abraham’s descendants at Mt. Sinai did not begin with proclamation of stipulations/laws. Rather, like other ancient Near Eastern treaty formulations, it commenced with a reminder of what the superior party (in this case God) had already done for the inferior party (in this case Israel):³⁵

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:3-6).

To reinforce the idea that divine law is for saved people, the Lord introduced his Ten Commandments with the words, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (20:2).

It is clear that ever since the Fall, the only way to salvation has been by grace through faith (Eph 2:8) in the “seed”/posterity of Eve (Gen. 3:15), i.e. Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). Christ has been at the center of all the covenants.³⁶ The “new covenant” builds on the earlier covenant phases, but it does not supersede them in terms of introducing a different way of salvation. The “new covenant” is an everlasting covenant (compare Jer 50:5), but so were the earlier covenants, which continue, merge into, and are continued by the “new covenant” within one overall divine Covenant.

Essential to a full appreciation of the distinctiveness of the new covenant is an awareness of its everlasting character. Indeed, this characteristic had been assigned to previous divine administrations. The Abrahamic covenant is characterized as everlasting (Gen. 17:7; Ps. 105:10), as is the Mosaic (Exod. 40:15; Lev. 16:34; 24:8; Isa 24:5) and Davidic (II Sam 7:13, 16; Ps 89:3, 4; 132:11, 12). But the everlasting character of the new covenant seems to imply an eschatological dimension. It is not only the new covenant; it is the last covenant. Because it shall bring to full fruition that which God intends in redemption, it never shall be superseded by a subsequent covenant.³⁷

If the Old Testament covenants were based upon grace, how do we interpret Leviticus 18:5, referring to the laws of the Sinai covenant—“So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD”? This does not mean that law was regarded as a means of salvation from sin under the Sinaitic covenant. The obedience to which this verse refers is predicated upon pre-existing grace because it is addressed to people who are already in a covenant relationship with the deity who has delivered them. Within the context of Leviticus 18, the words “by which a man may live” are a conditional promise that refer to continued life in the Promised Land, which the Canaanites had forfeited (vv. 3, 24-28). The idea is the same as in Deuteronomy 5:33: “You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be

35. For a convenient summary of treaty formats in the ancient Near East, see John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Library of Biblical Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 101-5.

36. As implied by Robertson’s title: *The Christ of the Covenants*.

37. Robertson, 277. God also gave Noah an everlasting covenant (Gen 9:16).

well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess” (compare Exod 20:12; Deut 8:1). God’s people can enjoy his Land only if they conduct their lives in harmony with his principles. Otherwise they would misrepresent him.

Jesus reaffirmed Leviticus 18:5 when he responded to a lawyer who summarized the Old Testament Torah as love for God and man, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live” (Lk 10:28).³⁸ Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 to illustrate the point that obedience to the law cannot, and never could, justify a sinner before God: “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them’” (Gal 3:11-12). Paul held that while true practice of God’s law was necessary to maintain life in the Land (Lev 18:5), the same dynamic of cause and effect does not apply to the need for a remedy from past failure, which no amount of law-keeping can ever provide. Forgiveness in order to receive eternal life only comes by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9). This does not mean that there is anything wrong with God’s law (compare Rom 3:31; 7:7-12). Especially including the Ten Commandments, his law plays a crucial role in revealing the divine standard to which all are accountable, thereby convicting people of sin and bringing them to realization of their need for salvation. However, it cannot achieve the purpose of justification from sin, for which it was never intended (3:19-20; Gal 3:19-25).³⁹

To illustrate Paul’s point, when the Israelites apostatized during the period of the “judges,” fell into the hands of their enemies, and cried out to the Lord, it was only his grace/mercy, received by faith, that saved them (Judg 2:11-23; 3:9ff, 15ff; 4:3ff; 6:7ff; 10:10ff, etc.). Subsequent obedience, which demonstrated that faith was living and real (compare James 2:26; Gal 5:6), was simply fulfillment of the requirement that had existed all along; it was not a “bonus” that they gave to God. So it could never make up for what they had done wrong. Likewise in modern times, no amount of marital fidelity can atone for adultery, and even the greatest display of respect for life cannot undo murder. Any forgiveness is a gift.

Now we are ready to understand the “old covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Whatever it is, it is not a covenant in which salvation is based on human works. We have found that at Sinai, as elsewhere, God offered a relationship based on grace through faith. So there was nothing

inherently wrong with what God offered the Israelites at Sinai. As the colloquial expression goes, God don’t make no junk. Then what is the defective “old covenant” in Jeremiah 31, which must be replaced by a “new covenant”? It is true that Jeremiah connects the “old covenant” to the Israelites at Sinai, when the Lord “took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (v. 32), but the “old covenant” was not the relationship as God offered it. Rather, it was “‘My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD” (same v.). So although God did his part, his people were unfaithful and therefore the covenant relationship was faulty.

As in a human marriage, it only takes failure on the part of one or the other partner to spoil a relationship. The spoiled relationship constituted the “old covenant,” which God wanted to replace with the “new covenant,” i.e. really a “renewed covenant” of fresh commitment to the God of Sinai.⁴⁰ The latter would restore the kind of internalized heart relationship he had offered at Sinai, but on an even stronger basis of forgiveness (v. 34).

The Function of Law Within the Divine Covenant Phases

Law regulates behavior according to standards, but it is more than external control:

Law is the order of justice and right to which individuals and groups should conform and which judicial authority should enforce. Rules will necessarily play some role in this order, but there also will be principles and values which form a consistent system, cover all possible situations, and belong to the collective conscience of the community. By this definition, explicit rules—laws—are only the tip of the iceberg of the phenomenon of Law.⁴¹

That which distinguishes biblical law from other bodies of law (e.g. Hammurabi’s law code, English Common Law, United States law) is its source and authority: the God of the Bible, who wants people to live according to his principles and thereby emulate his holy character (Lev 19:2). So the ultimate ethical standard is the character of God, as reinforced by comparison between 1 Jn 4:8—“God is love” and Matt 22:36-40, where love for God and man is the basis of “the whole Law and the Prophets.”

38. Holmgren, 60-61.

39. On the law in Gal 3:19-25 as including especially the moral law, see Willmore Eva, “Why the Seventh Day? Part 2,” *Ministry* (September, 1999) 5.

40. Cf. Holmgren, 73-81, 86-95. Note that the Hebrew word *úadaÁ*, “new” (as in “new covenant”; Jer 31:31) can also mean “renewed” (e.g. Lam 3:23; cf. the Hithp. verb of the same root *údaÁ* in Ps 103:5).

41. Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985) 4.

The Place of the Seventh day Sabbath in Biblical Law

Categories of biblical law

To understand the place of the seventh day Sabbath in biblical law, it is helpful to investigate categories that modern interpreters apply to this body of law. First, we should recognize that biblical laws do not make sharp distinctions between religious and secular categories as modern people do. Since every aspect of Israelite life came under divine jurisdiction, Pentateuchal laws relating to the religious and secular domains often appear together (see especially Lev 19).⁴⁷ In the ancient Near East, only in biblical law collections “are moral exhortations and religious injunctions combined with legal prescriptions; elsewhere ... these three distinct spheres are found in separate independent collections.”⁴⁸

Traditional Christian distinctions between “moral,” “ceremonial,” “civil,” and “health” categories of law are interpretive classifications not explicitly stated in the Bible. However, Walter Kaiser has pointed out that within the Pentateuch there are some terminological and conceptual indications of such differences between kinds of laws.⁴⁹ These categories can be quite helpful, *provided that* they are defined and applied carefully and accurately. The usual simplistic approach can lead to erroneous results with far-reaching consequences.

The four categories are distinguished from each other by the ways in which their laws are believed to apply. A common approach is to regard moral laws as timeless and universal principles governing relationships with God and with other human beings. Ceremonial laws were applicable only to the Israelite ritual system. Civil laws were applicable only to ancient Israelite life under their government, especially under the theocracy. Health laws are

The purpose of biblical law is to protect human beings and their relationships. God’s law is “the wall that He has placed around His chosen ones for their protection, and obedience to whose precepts of justice, truth, and purity is to be their perpetual safeguard.”⁴² Whereas legalists have attempted to build walls of protection around God’s law in order to protect it, thereby overlooking its intended purpose (e.g. Matt 23), the law was made for man, not man for the law (compare Mk 2:27—“The Sabbath was made for man...”).

Both within the Bible and elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern covenants and treaties, “covenant” is the larger category and “law” operates within this framework.⁴³ Thus the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-30 place legal stipulations within the covenant context as conditions to enjoyment of the covenant blessings.

Regarding the function of “law” within “covenant,” Walton states: “The most significant function of the law is not as a judicial tool for society (as such, it is in many ways obsolete), but as a revelation of the character of God (cf., 1 Peter 1:13-15...).”⁴⁴ This idea is supported by comparison with the prologue to the law code of Hammurabi, which makes it clear that the purpose of this code was to express the king’s justice.⁴⁵ Robertson explains the importance of explicit law within the Sinai covenant: “To this point, God’s dealing had been with a family. Now he covenants with a nation. Such a national covenant would be impossible without externally codified law.”⁴⁶

Within God’s covenants of grace, his law is not “legalistic” and obedience to it is not “legalism.” *People* are legalistic when they fail to see that God’s law is much bigger than the external bottom line and attempt to place their limited obedience in place of divine grace as the means of salvation (Lk 18:9-14, 18-29). Without true love, which is the foundation of God’s law and flows only from his grace (Rom 5:5), external obedience is worthless (see 1 Cor 13).

42. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1943) 678.

43. Robertson, 170-71; Patrick, 26—“Every series and code preserved in the Pentateuch is anchored in a covenant-making account...” Cf. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, regarding ancient Near Eastern treaties, which included stipulations (101-5).

44. Walton, *Covenant*, 65.

45. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 164-5; Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 76-81.

46. Robertson, 186-7.

47. Cf. the fact that the religious laws of Exod 22:20, 28a-30; 23:10-19a are placed within the context of laws primarily relating to secular life.

48. Shalom Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Vetus Testamentum Supplements 18; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 43.

49. Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 44-8. Against Roy L. Aldrich, who argues: “The unity of the Mosaic law leaves only two alternatives—either complete deliverance from or complete subjection to the entire system” (“Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 116 [1959] 325).

timeless and universal because human bodies continue to function in the same way.

The stakes are exceedingly high. Whether or not we believe that we should keep a divine command today depends upon the category in which we place it. For example, if the command to observe the seventh day Sabbath is a ceremonial law, as many Christians believe, it is no longer binding. Notice the potential danger of circular reasoning: An assumption regarding whether or not a law is binding can influence the way we classify it, which in turn determines whether or not we believe that it is still applicable. This approach, in which conclusions are largely or wholly determined by presuppositions that are set in place before actual inquiry begins, is conducive to apologetic dogmatism, but it should not be confused with valid investigation. Since we are dealing with divine commands that can vitally affect our daily lives, our exegesis is no casual matter. Here is a call for “handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15)!

We can describe and critique each of the four categories of biblical law as follows:

1. *Moral law* can be a helpful designation if it is qualified to refer to those laws that express universal and timeless principles governing relationships. Obviously a person living at any given time has a moral responsibility to keep any applicable divine command, so in a broader sense all divine commands constitute what could be called moral laws. The Ten Commandments (Exod 20; Deut 5) are an extremely important expression of moral law in that they summarize or exemplify essential broad principles that are basic for the health of divine-human and human-human relationships, including the need to acknowledge God for who he is, respect for parents, respect for life, sexual purity, respect for the property of others, etc. However, the Ten Commandments are not the only expression of moral law in the Bible. For example, another moral law based on love appears in Exodus 23:9—“And you shall not oppress a stranger.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, we should keep in mind that because moral law is as timeless as the character of God that it reflects, such law existed long before the Ten Commandments.⁵¹

2. *Ritual/ceremonial law* regulated the ancient Israelite ritual system, through which human beings interacted with things that were ordinarily inaccessible to their material

domain, such as God (by giving offerings/sacrifices) or ritual impurity (through purification rituals).⁵²

3. While Christians routinely dismiss Mosaic *civil law* as no longer relevant, many of these supposedly obsolete laws are applications or exemplifications of universal and timeless moral principles based on love. As such, they are applicable today to the extent that circumstances remain the same as they were in the Israelite theocratic community. Consider, for example, the following civil law: “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death” (Exod 21:12). This applies the principle of respect for life that is expressed in the sixth of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not murder” (20:13). There are two important differences between the two formulations, i.e. Exodus 21:12 and the sixth commandment: First, the scope of Exodus 21:12 is limited to murder by striking (excluding strangling, poisoning, drowning, etc.). Secondly, this verse attaches a penalty, namely, capital punishment, making it a civil law to be administered by the Israelite court system. While a modern court may or may not impose the same punishment for this offense, modern courts would all agree that murder by striking is a crime, a moral violation. The civil law encapsulates a timeless moral principle.

4. Modern people see a category of *health law* because we understand that matters such as diet (e.g. Lev 11; Deut 14) and sanitation (e.g. Deut 23:12-14) affect human bodies, which should be cared for because they are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and therefore are holy (Rom 12:1). However, when the Pentateuch provides motivations for laws relevant to physical wholeness, they are other kinds of reasons. For example, abstaining from eating meat from which the blood is not properly drained at the time of slaughter is based on respect for life (Gen 9:4-6; Lev 17:10-12). A person afflicted with scaly-skin disease (so-called “leprosy”) or a genital discharge is quarantined outside the Israelite camp to prevent *ritual* (not microbiological) defilement of the camp where God’s sanctuary is located (Num 5:2-3).⁵³ Disposal of human waste outside the camp is to avoid disgusting God (Deut 23:12-14). Nevertheless, the Lord promised his people freedom from sickness if they would observe *all* his commands (Exod 15:26). Wholistic health comes from harmony with God, not simply from a self-help program that targets some areas (e.g. muscles and cardiovascular system) but neglects

50. See also Leviticus 20:13, prohibiting the practice of homosexuality, which is not covered under the literal formulation of Exod 20:14 (“You shall not commit adultery”).

51. Aldrich, “Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?” 325, 332, 335.

52. Roy Gane, “Ritual Dynamic Structure: Systems Theory and Ritual Syntax Applied to Selected Ancient Israelite, Babylonian and Hittite Festival Days” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1992); Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999) 52-6; Gane, *Leviticus/Numbers on Lev 1*.

53. See e.g. Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990) 33-4, 345-6; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (Anchor Bible 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 817-20.

others (spiritual wellness, including freedom from guilt that can tear down health).

When we attempt to categorize a biblical law, it is crucial to recognize that a given law may fit in more than one category. For example, we have found that “civil” laws can encapsulate moral principles. Also, while abstaining from improperly slaughtered meat is a moral requirement based on respect for life, which explains why Acts 15:20, 29 regards it as timeless and applicable to Gentile Christians, we also understand that there is a health benefit.⁵⁴

How to determine whether an Old Testament law applies to Christians today

If we accept God as the authority behind the whole Bible, it stands to reason that the laws promulgated by him in the Old Testament should at least in some way inform our ethical conduct. The question is, how? There are different answers, depending on the natures of the various kinds of laws.

Some laws, such as the Ten Commandments, “health laws,” and many of the “civil laws” (e.g. Deut 22:8—protect people from falling off your flat roof) can be applied today in a straightforward or fairly straightforward manner, except that church discipline (e.g. disfellowshipping) replaces the civil penalties (including corporal and even capital punishments) formerly administered under the ancient Israelite judicial system, which no longer exists.⁵⁵ Many laws are applicable in principle even when the culturally dependent specifics do not apply to us.⁵⁶ For example, although a hole we dig may not endanger somebody’s ox or donkey (e.g. Exod 21:33-34), we may be liable for property damage to a car if it falls in our inadequately marked excavation.

It is crucial to keep the role of culture in proper perspective. Culture never overrules timeless principles established by God, but such principles are worked out in various cultural contexts. So the two extremes of bending principles to fit culture and rigid, unthinking, knee-jerk “obedience” that is insensitive to cultural contexts are both wrong. The former can ultimately justify anything by a

process of relativization and rationalization, and the latter ignores Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). An inaccurate “workman” who attempts to interpret biblical statements in a cultural vacuum will end up ashamed if he consistently applies his approach, which would demand, for example, that the law of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5 be literally applied today.

There are some biblical laws that we cannot keep if we no longer have the social institutions they were designed to regulate, such as levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10), bonded servitude (Exod 21:2-11, 20-21, 26-27), and ancestral land ownership (Lev 25:8-55—Jubilee law).⁵⁷ However, we can learn much about God’s approach to society by studying such laws in light of their cultural context.

The ritual laws, which were dependent and centered upon the function of the earthly sanctuary/temple as the dwelling place of God, can no longer apply because that institution is gone. There is simply nothing for these laws to regulate. Since the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, our worship is focused toward God’s sanctuary in heaven, where Christ has been ministering for us (Heb 8-10). However, we can greatly enrich our comprehension of God’s relationship to human beings through study of the Old Testament ritual laws.⁵⁸ Christians have some rituals instituted by Christ and the New Testament, such as baptism, communion, and anointing the sick, but these are not dependent upon the function of a sanctuary/temple.

Although circumcision was a ritual law (Gen 17), it pre-dated the sanctuary/temple system and was not dependent on it. So loss of the Temple in the first century A.D. does not remove the possibility that circumcision could be an ongoing requirement. Cessation of this requirement is based on another principle: Membership in the “new covenant” phase no longer requires membership in ethnic Israel, the core of which consisted of Abraham’s physical descendants (Acts 15).

To summarize our discussion regarding the applicability of Old Testament law, is there a single criterion that can be used to determine whether such a law should be kept

54. See also the laws regarding sexual intercourse during menstruation. In Lev 18 and 20 this is categorically prohibited in a series of moral violations and Ezek 18:6 refers to the prohibition along with moral laws. However, Lev 15:24 indicates that sex during menstruation also causes ritual impurity, even in an accidental case when a couple comes together without realizing that the woman has begun her period (Milgrom *Leviticus* 1-16, 940-41). So it appears that intercourse during menstruation comes both under timeless moral law and temporary ceremonial law.

55. It appears that offenses for which the Old Testament prescribes capital punishment require disfellowshipping under New Testament church policy (see e.g. 1 Cor 5; cf. Lev 18, 20).

56. Cf. Gerstner, 88.

57. However, there are places in the modern world where some of these institutions live on. For example, Nepal has ancestral land tenure and slavery thrives in Sudan and India.

58. See Gane, *Altar Call*.

today? I propose the following rule of thumb: *A biblical law should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application.*⁵⁹ So I basically agree with Gordon Wenham when he concluded that “the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be.”⁶⁰ My approach reverses that of Douglas Moo, who says: “While my Reformed colleague might argue that we are bound to whatever in the Mosaic law has not been clearly overturned by New Testament teaching, I argue that we are bound only to that which is clearly repeated within New Testament teaching.”⁶¹

The one-sentence rule of thumb just formulated covers a variety of cases:

- Ritual laws dependent on the sanctuary/temple can no longer be applied, so obviously they are no longer required.
- Other laws, such as the Ten Commandments, not eating meat from which the blood has not been drained out at the time of slaughter (Acts 15:20, 29), and protecting people from falling off your house if you have a flat roof where they can walk (Deut 22:8), can and should be kept today.
- “To the extent that its principle can be applied” acknowledges that universal and timeless authoritative principles may be clad in culturally conditioned garb that is not applicable to every time and place. For example, “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him” (Exod 23:4). Such respect for another’s property fulfils the principle of the eighth commandment of the Decalogue, “You shall not steal” (20:15). The principle of returning your enemy’s property applies even if it consists of something other than an ox or donkey, such as a camel, dog, (Ford) Mustang, or (Mercury) Cougar.
- Some laws, such as circumcision, could be kept today but are not applicable because the NT has removed the reason for them (Acts 15).

The net effect of the above discussion is that we should be paying a lot more attention to biblical law than we do. Won’t this lead to legalism? Not if the place of God’s law is kept in its true perspective. First, God’s law is a standard of acting and thinking in harmony with his character. It is not, cannot be, and never was intended to be a means to salvation. Right doing can never redeem anyone from

mortality or past sins. Only God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can do that. Second, God’s law is a gift/present⁶² that protects human beings. It is and always was supposed to be for their good. As such, “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12).

Categorization of the seventh day Sabbath law

Thus far we have found that categories such as “moral,” “health,” “civil,” and “ceremonial” laws are postbiblical analytical classifications that imply the extent to which a given law remains applicable, and a law may fit in more than one category. These factors are important when we come to the divine commands regarding the seventh day Sabbath. There is nothing in the biblical text that explicitly places the Sabbath laws in one category or another and we must allow for the possibility that they belong to more than one category. In fact, there are various kinds of Sabbath laws that can be viewed as pertaining to each of the four categories:

Moral. In Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 God commands Sabbath rest, i.e. ceasing from work, within the context of his paramount Ten Commandments. Since the other nine commandments are clearly moral in nature and Sabbath observance (fourth commandment) is as basic to maintenance of the divine-human relationship as abstaining from polytheism, idolatry, and taking God’s name in vain (first, second, and third commandments), there is no compelling reason to single out Sabbath rest as essentially ceremonial in nature.⁶³ If abstaining from work on Sabbath has ceremonial implications because it is crucial for true worship of the true God, other commands of the Decalogue carry similar implications. For example, outside Israel, ancient Near Eastern religions regularly carried out rituals in honor of multiple deities, which were represented by idols or other symbols. Such aspects of ritual were ruled out by the first and second of the Ten Commandments. Does this *implication* for ritual mean that these two commandments are *basically* ceremonial in nature and therefore no longer applicable? No. There is no indication in the Bible that there can ever be a time or place when/where it is legitimate to have a relationship with another being regarded as divine or to worship the deity through a material symbol. It is a universal and timeless principle governing and

59. Notice that New Testament removal of the requirement of circumcision was implicitly pre-validated by Old Testament prophecy (Acts 15:16-18, quoting Amos 9:11-12).

60. Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 35.

61. Moo, in Bahnsen, Kaiser, Moo, Strickland, and VanGemeren, 376.

62. Not German Gift = “poison”!

63. Cf. Willmore Eva, “Why the Seventh Day?” *Ministry* (July, 1999), 6-7.

protecting the divine-human relationship. Similarly, while Sabbath rest may have ceremonial implications, it is fundamentally a moral law that is timelessly applicable to all human beings on Planet Earth.⁶⁴ We will explore the timeless universality of Sabbath rest further below.

With regard to Christians who (unlike himself) believe “that the place of the Sabbath requirement in the Decalogue means that it is to be seen as binding moral law normative for all people in the same way as the rest of the Decalogue,” A. T. Lincoln pointedly remarks:

Those who argue in this way but apply the fourth commandment to Sunday, the first day of the week, are certainly not as consistent as those groups, such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, who still observe the seventh day; they need to face this inconsistency squarely. On their own presuppositions, by what right do they tamper with an eternally valid moral law? What criterion allows them to isolate the seventh day aspect, which after all is at the heart of the commandment and its rationale (cf. Exod. 20:11), as a temporary feature belonging only to the Mosaic period, while retaining the remainder of the Decalogue as normative for all ages...If the Mosaic law were designed to teach the principle of one day’s rest in seven instead of seventh-day rest, it might be expected that its legislation would have provided for a different day of rest for the priests (cf. Num. 28:9-10), but it does not.⁶⁵

Health. Exodus 23:12 commands: “Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.” Here Sabbath rest benefits animals, so it must provide physical benefit. Even people who do not necessarily understand the religious implications of the Sabbath, such as the “stranger” (resident alien), gain refreshment from its rest. Undoubtedly this refreshment at least includes a physical component that contributes to physical well-being and there is no reason why a modern person would not receive the same benefit. Of course a physical health benefit from resting one day per week

would not, by itself, single out the seventh day as the only time when this benefit could be obtained.⁶⁶

Civil. In Numbers 15:32-36, a man who flagrantly violated the Sabbath by gathering firewood on this day was stoned to death by the community at God’s command. This established a precedent showing that under the ancient Israelite theocracy, the terminal penalty for such openly deliberate Sabbath-breaking was to be administered by the civil court system. While this biblical record preserves God’s estimation of the crucial importance of Sabbath observance among his people, such a penalty can no longer be administered under theocratic civil law because this system of judicial administration no longer exists. However, our lack of such accountability to a human court in no way removes our direct accountability to God.

Ceremonial. In a calendar of periodic sacrifices, Numbers 28:9-10 calls for two burnt offerings, with their grain and drink accompaniments, to be performed every Sabbath in addition to the regular burnt offering. In Leviticus 24:8, the ritual for renewing the “bread of the Presence” on the golden table inside the tabernacle was to take place every Sabbath. There is no question that these are ceremonial laws, which involve the Sabbath, and which no longer apply because the earthly ritual system has been superseded by Christ’s royal priestly ministry in God’s temple in heaven (Heb 7-10). However, the fact that rituals appropriately honoring the holiness of the Sabbath at the Israelite sanctuary/temple have passed away does not mean that the day itself is no longer holy or that we no longer need to participate in its holiness through cessation of work. Although ceremonial roles/implications were temporarily added to the Sabbath in the context of the ancient Israelite worship system, the moral and health roles of Sabbath rest remain on their own.⁶⁷ To illustrate, I became a father and then a professor. If I cease to be a professor, I will still be a father because this role does not depend on my teaching career.

We have found that Sabbath is involved with laws belonging to all four categories. Moral and health aspects of Sabbath rest are timeless, but civil penalties and ceremonial performances are not. So on the basis of the Old Testament evidence considered up to this point, it appears that ceasing from work on the seventh day Sabbath *should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied.* We will

64. Against Cohen, 13-14, who lifts the fourth commandment out of the Decalogue in terms of its applicability for Christians and declares that “not being ‘under the law,’ and being ‘dead’ to it (Rom 6:14; 7:4) takes the Christian *out from under the Sabbath Commandment* which was given to the nation Israel...Thus, for this dispensation the *day of [sic of] convocation* has been changed from the Old Testament sabbath to the New Testament Lord’s Day. This change was made by the *competent authority of the infallible apostolic teaching and example* (Matt 18:18).”

65. A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day,” 355.

66. Ratzlaff, 323-5.

67. Cf. Frank B. Holbrook, “Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath?: Colossians 2:14-17 Revisited,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13 (2002) 65-8, 71-2.

test this provisional conclusion by considering some potential objections, including the possibility of an exception based on the New Testament, in accordance with our rule of thumb: ...*unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application.*

Objection 1: Literal seventh day Sabbath observance was commanded only for literal Israelites. In support of this idea, there is no *explicit* biblical record that the requirement for Sabbath observance was *expressly formulated as a law* before God commanded it to the Israelites. It is true that in Exodus 16, God required Sabbath rest when he gave the manna, before he uttered the Ten Commandments from the summit of Mt. Sinai (ch. 20), but the community to whom he earlier addressed the stipulation was the same: the nation of Israel.

While the objection is logical at first glance, it is fraught with flaws. To begin with, who says that a divinely mandated duty does not exist unless God commands it in the form of a law? If this were true, why would God hold Cain accountable for murdering his brother (Gen 4) centuries before he said to Noah and his family, "...from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man" (9:5-6). Obviously the principle of respect for human life, which Cain violated, was inherent in the order that God set up at Creation, when he made man in his own image (1:26-27). Similarly, the fact that rest on the seventh day Sabbath does not appear as a divine command before Exodus 16 does not automatically mean that it was not an obligation before that time.⁶⁸ An argument from silence cannot prove either way.

There is positive evidence that on the seventh day of the Creation week, God instituted cessation from work for the benefit of all human beings. He did this by example rather than command:

And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh

day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Gen 2:2-3).

These verses do not describe or explicitly prescribe human observance of Sabbath. Nevertheless, the fact that God ceased from his work and was "refreshed" (Exod. 31:17) even though he did not need rest from fatigue indicates that the Bible speaks of him anthropomorphically as receiving some kind of refreshing benefit⁶⁹ in order to show people how to rest on the seventh day, as a result of which *they* would gain relief from fatigue (23:12) by following his example.⁷⁰ Lest there is any doubt as to the validity of this interpretation, Jesus succinctly nailed it down when he affirmed that the Sabbath was made for humankind (*anthropos*)⁷¹ and not humankind for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). Jesus' view that God did not simply intend to benefit himself when he rested on the seventh day of Creation is supported by several contextual factors in Genesis:

1. On the seventh day of Creation, God did more than rest: He blessed the seventh day and endowed it with holiness (Gen 2:3). 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 (1:22,28). So could we imagine that on the seventh day God rested and admired his handiwork while Adam and Eve toiled in the garden (2:15)?⁷² The blessing must be for created beings living in the world where the seventh day operated.⁷³ To receive the blessing, they would consecrate the day as God did, by altering their behavior.⁷⁴ Sabbath as the apex of Creation on the seventh day of the first week showed that human beings, created on the sixth day, need their relationship with God in order to be complete.⁷⁵

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 role of dominion/responsibility over the earth

68. Cf. Eva, "Why the Seventh Day?" 5-6. Against Charles L. Feinberg, "The Sabbath and the Lord's Day," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 95 (1938) 180-81.

69. Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 202.

70. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (translated by I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 245, 404; John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 309.

71. Here *anthropos*, "man" = generic "humankind" (Jon Paulien, Andrews University, personal communication).

72. Contrast the Old Babylonian epic *AtraĪsis*, according to which the gods created man to impose their work on him (W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Īsis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, repr. 1999], 54-9, especially tablet I, lines 191, 195-7, 240-41).

73. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2d ed.; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930) 35, 38.

74. Cf. Jacques Doukhan, "Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective," *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. T. Eskenazi, D. Harrington and W. Shea; New York: Crossroad, 1991) 156.

75. Jiri Moskala, "The Sabbath in the First Creation Account," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13 (2002) 55-66.

(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 (compare Lev 19:2), it would stand to reason that they should also emulate God by resting from their work as God rested from his.⁷⁶

3. On each of the first six days of creation, God did something that had ongoing results for our world. Thus, it is to be expected that what he did on the seventh day would also have earthly ongoing results. He had set up cyclical time even before man was created (Gen 1:3-5, 14-18). So when Genesis 2:3 says that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, this blessing and consecration could be ongoing in a cyclical sense, applying to each subsequent seventh day.⁷⁷

The seventh day Sabbath is the "birthday of the world," which cannot be changed any more than any other birthday can because it celebrates a historical event that has occurred at a point of time in the past.⁷⁸ Another ongoing aspect signified by the Sabbath is human dependence upon the One who created and sanctifies people (Exod 31:13, 17), upon whom we depend for every breath we take and for the food that keeps us alive (Dan 5:23; Jb 12:10; Ps 114:14-15; 145:15-16). Since God will always be our Creator and Sustainer, the basic meaning of seventh day Sabbath rest, which encapsulates this divine-human relationship,⁷⁹ is timeless; it cannot become obsolete as long as human beings inhabit Planet Earth.

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 (compare 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.⁸⁰ These three institutions embody principles that were later expressed in the Ten Commandments (compare Exod 20:3-17):

1. Aside from its expression in Commandment #4, the Sabbath principle of God's Creatorship rules out any relationship with other gods (#1), idolatry (#2), and misusing the Lord's name (#3).

2. Within marriage, parents are God's agents to continue the process of creating human beings in his image. There-

fore parents must be respected (#5), respect for human life rules out murder (#6) and bearing false witness in a capital case (#9), and the sacredness of the marriage union rules out adultery (#7) and coveting someone else's spouse (#10).

3. The principle of work rules out stealing (#8) or bearing false witness (#9) in order to wrongfully gain the benefits of someone else's work, or coveting such benefits, i.e. possessions, etc. (#10).⁸¹

According to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve showed disrespect for God's lordship by eating the fruit of a forbidden tree (v. 6), their marriage and work suffered as a result of the curse of sin (vv. 16-19). But there is an important omission in Genesis 3: the Sabbath is not affected by any curse resulting from the Fall into sin. 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 work difficult and reduced their joy, it did not take away human responsibility with regard to any of the Creation institutions or the principles that they embody.

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 work. Regarding Mark 2:27, J. H. Gerstner comments that "Christ actually affirmed the sabbath by saying that it was made not just for the Jews, but for mankind, and was made not for one time but for all time, presumably."⁸² The fact that the Sabbath shows up as one of the Ten Commandments that 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 (compare e.g. Rom 7:7; 13:9; Eph 4:28; 5:3-6; 6:1-3; Rev 22:15).

O. Palmer Robertson, a Presbyterian scholar, was true to the Bible when he wrote:

Neither antinomianism nor dispensationalism may remove the obligation of the Christian today to ob-

76. Cf. Sailhamer, 96-7.

77. The seventh day Sabbath provides a credible explanation for the origin of the week, which is not based on the movement of heavenly bodies (cf. Cassuto, 244; Sarna, 111).

78. Weiss (688) points out the "Birthday of the Universe" idea in the writings of Philo (*Opif.* 89; *Mos.* 1.207; 2.210, 263-266; *Spec.* 1.170; 2.59, 70).

79. Cf. Cassuto, 244.

80. Robertson, 68-81.

81. See Gane, "Covenant of Love."

82. Gerstner, 86.

serve 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. . .

God blessed man through the Sabbath by delivering him from slavery to work...⁸³

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. For most Christians, the Sabbath does not represent the redemption of literal ancestors from bondage to literal Pharaoh. However, 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.

To conclude this section, against the objection that the seventh day Sabbath was only for literal Israel, we have found that in the Bible the Sabbath is universal because it was instituted at Creation for the benefit of all human beings, along with marriage and work, long before the nation of Israel existed.⁸⁴ Although Sabbath was later formulated as a law, originally it was simply set up by God's example as the way things are done. Even after it has become a law, it is not an onerous one. Rather than commanding us to put forth heroic exertion, God commands us to take a break for our own good! As Jesus put it, "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matt. 11:30). In a fast, goal-oriented world, it is a profound blessing for type "A" workaholic personalities, such as myself, that God has strictly commanded Sabbath rest amidst the awesome grandeur of Mt. Sinai. This is what it takes for us to enjoy Sabbath rest without feeling guilty for not working!

Objection 2: Literal seventh day Sabbath observance is no longer relevant because it was a temporary type/symbol of greater spiritual "rest" that Christians now enjoy. Some have seen support for this approach in Hebrews 4, where Sabbath rest symbolizes a life of peaceful rest, involving all days of the week, which results from believing in God.⁸⁵ Also, 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 (Col 2:17; NRSV).

In verse 17, "shadow" (*skia*) has been taken to mean "temporary type." So interpreters have commonly supposed that the "sabbaths" mentioned in verse 16 functioned as temporary types.⁸⁶

Against the idea that Sabbath was a temporary type, God instituted the seventh day Sabbath for human beings before the Fall into sin (Gen 2:2-3). Therefore it cannot be one of the temporary types/symbols that God set up after the Fall in order to lead human beings to salvation from sin.⁸⁷ In other words the Sabbath cannot be a temporary type because it pre-existed the need for temporary types.

It is helpful to consider Hebrews 4 first. It is true that in this passage Sabbath rest is used to characterize a life of peace resulting from faith in God. Sabbath as a microcosm of such a life is simply an extension of the significance that Sabbath has carried since Creation. But this does not mean that the seventh day Sabbath is a temporary, *historical/horizontal* kind of type like the Israelite sacrificial system. A historical/horizontal type consists of something that prefigures something in the future, which constitutes its antitype. When the antitype commences, the type becomes obsolete.⁸⁸ Thus, for example, the levitical priesthood was superseded by the greater Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb 7-10). Another example is the ritual of Passover, which Christ fulfilled and therefore superseded when he died on the cross (see Jn 19:14). The type and antitype do not function at the same time. But in Hebrews 4, God's "rest" has not suddenly become available for Christians; it was available all along and was not fully appropriated in

83. Robertson, 68-9.

84. Cf. Eva, "Why the Seventh Day?" 4-5.

85. See e.g. A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 209-17.

86. See e.g. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 114-17.

87. Cf. Willmore Eva, "Why the Seventh Day?" *Ministry* (July, 1999), 5; Frank B. Holbrook, "Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath?: Colossians 2:14-17 Revisited," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13 (2002) 64-5.

88. On the nature and function of biblical typology, see Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typological Structures* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981).

Old Testament times only because of unbelief.⁸⁹ Because the life of rest was available in Old Testament times, at the same time when the weekly Sabbath was in operation for the Israelites, the weekly Sabbath cannot be a historical type of the life of rest.⁹⁰ Rather, it is an eternal memorial of Creation.

Now we are in a better position to understand Colossians 2:16-17.⁹¹ At issue in this difficult passage is the problem that in spite of Christ's victory and removal of condemnation against sinners through the cross (cf. vv. 13-15), some early Christians were mistakenly prone to judge/despise others (cf. Rom 14:3) for not engaging in ascetic practices, which involved matters of diet and observance of holy times, in accordance with their philosophy. Whatever the precise meaning of *sabbaton*, "S/sabbath(s)" in Colossians 2:16 may be (see Appendix), it seems clear that Paul was not addressing simple observance of Mosaic Torah, but its misuse within the framework of a misguided philosophy.⁹²

For Israel the keeping of these holy days was evidence of obedience to God's law and a sign of her election among the nations. At Colossae, however, the sacred days were to be kept for the sake of the "elemental spirits of the universe," those astral powers who directed the course of the stars and regulated the order of the calendar. So Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days or seasons as such; it is the wrong motive involved when the observance of these days is bound up with the recognition of the elemental spirits.⁹³

In support of this conclusion, the calendric sacrificial "shadows"/types performed on festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths (Num 28-29) were public, performed by priests at the Jerusalem temple on behalf of the entire Jewish community. So except for the possibility of a few priests living in the Diaspora, people in Colossae would never have the opportunity to participate in those rituals. Therefore, the question must have been the attitude of some people toward the ceremonial system represented by the calendric sacrifices, as reflected in their personal religious practice.

The prohibition of work on the Sabbath, which is to be remembered and observed as part of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15), pre-existed and was independent from the ritual system that functioned as a shadow of things to come. In Genesis 2:2-3, God consecrated the Sabbath when the world order was established at Creation, declaring Sabbath to be a holy day.⁹⁴ Nothing that human beings do or do not do can affect the holiness of the Sabbath itself. 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."⁹⁵ Human rest participates in the holiness of the day by enacting holiness in life, but the holiness of the day that requires rest is basic to the day.⁹⁶

If literal observance of the seventh day Sabbath was not a temporary historical type and therefore should be maintained, should Christians also be obliged to keep the annual Jewish festivals? No. To begin with, Leviticus 23

89. Cf. Herold Weiss, "Sabbatismos in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 (1996) 683.

90. For detailed discussion, see Roy Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10 (1999) 318-21; cf. James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924) 51; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 73-5.

91. On this passage I am grateful for dialogue with and suggestions from Richard Davidson and from Ronald du Preez, who is working on a Ph.D. dissertation titled "A Critical Analysis of Sabbaton in Colossians 2:16."

92. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977) 355-6, 358, 362, 364, 367-8); Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 211-15, 240-49; Holbrook, 70-71; cf. Paul Ray, "New Moons, Sabbaths and Eschatological Newness: A Study of the Typological Significance of Isaiah 66:22-23, and Related Texts" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1981) 23-5. On reversion of some Christians to pagan observance of "days and months and seasons and years" in Gal 4:10, see Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, 253-6.

93. Peter O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982) 139; cf. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (transl. W. P. Poehlmann and R. J. Karris; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 115; Margaret MacDonald argues that the unifying factor in Col 2:16-23 is repudiation of ascetic practices (*Colossians and Ephesians* [Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000] 109-26). Regarding Paul's opposition to asceticism, see also Raoul Dederen, "On Esteeming One Day as Better Than Another—Romans 14:5, 6," *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (ed. K. Strand; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982) 333-7.

94. R. Cole, "The Sabbath and Genesis 2:1-3," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41 (2003) 10-12.

95. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2d ed.; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 35.

96. Cf. Wood, 341.

acknowledges that there is a difference by separating the weekly Sabbath from the festivals by means of a second introduction to the calendar of sacred times (v. 4). The festivals were limited to the Sinaitic/Israelite phase of God's covenant by several factors, none of which apply to basic Sabbath rest.⁹⁷

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.

We cannot, of course, fully keep the system of 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. These observances are based on important elements of the biblical festivals, to which postbiblical traditional liturgical and didactic elements have been added. 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.

Although the Sabbath never functioned as a temporary historical/horizontal type, could it have served as a temporary *vertical* type, like the Israelite sanctuary on earth that served as a copy of God's temple in heaven above (Exod 25:9; Heb 8:5; cp. Ps 11:4)?⁹⁸ Could human, earthly rest

on the seventh day be a copy of divine heavenly rest? The biblical evidence indicates a negative answer. First, just because human beings imitate God in some respect does not indicate the existence of a temporary vertical type. For example, the Leviticus 19:2 call to emulate God's character is reiterated in 1 Peter 1:16 for Christians as a timeless command. Second, in Genesis 2:2-3, God rested on the seventh day in connection with his creation of this world. There is no indication that Sabbath was originally a heavenly institution that was then copied on earth in the same way that the earthly sanctuary was a copy of an original heavenly temple. Third, 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 (Heb 7-10). But no such indication is found in the Bible.

Objection 3: Although seventh day Sabbath rest could be kept by Christians today to the extent that its principle can be applied, it is like circumcision (compare Acts 15) in that the New Testament has removed the reason for its application. To the contrary, aside from the fact that the non-ceremonial Sabbath principle of rest on the seventh day is not mentioned as abrogated or altered in Acts 15 or anywhere else in the New Testament,⁹⁹ the true significance of the Sabbath is restored under the "new covenant."

When God reaffirmed the Sabbath for Israel, it was more than a commandment; according to Exodus 31:13, 17 (compare Ezek 20:12), it functioned as an ongoing sign of the covenant relationship by which he sanctified his people.¹⁰⁰ This function applied to Israel a principle that 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

97. For more detailed discussion, see Ross Cole, "The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of their Applicability" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1996); Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," 322-5. Note that misuse of both Sabbath and festivals by Colossian heretics (see above) does not place these observances in the same category when it comes to ongoing applicability.

98. Lincoln adds a vertical, heavenly dimension to the "rest" in Hebrews 4 ("Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," 209-15).

99. On the Sabbath in the New Testament, see Walter Specht, "The Sabbath in the New Testament," *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 92-113; Dederen, "On Esteeming One Day," 333-7; Kenneth Wood, "The 'Sabbath Days' of Colossians 2:16, 17," *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 338-42; Roy Graham, "A Note on Hebrews 4:4-9," *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 343-5. For the fact that interpretation of the "Lord's day" as a weekly Christian Sunday was a development of the patristic period, and therefore it should not be read into the New Testament (Rev 1:10), see Kenneth Strand, "The 'Lord's Day,' in the Second Century," *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 346-51.

100. Ratzlaff argues that just as the "entrance sign" to the old covenant was circumcision, which is replaced by new covenant baptism, Sabbath was the "continuing, repeatable sign" of the old covenant, which is replaced by the Lord's Supper under the new covenant (*Sabbath in Crisis*, 180-2). But baptism, which developed from Old Testament ablutions to remedy ritual impurity (see e.g. Lev 15), did not simply replace circumcision: The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) established a transition from *circumcision + baptism* → *baptism*, not *circumcision* → *baptism*. The Lord's Supper was a transformation of Passover (Matt 26:17-19), not a replacement of Sabbath.

would emulate their holy Creator and acknowledge their ongoing connection with him. Because they would belong to God, who is intrinsically holy, they would gain holiness from him. Is such holiness important for “new covenant” believers? Peter wrote: “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16; reiterating Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26).¹⁰¹

According to Paul, Christ has eclipsed the Mosaic Torah in the sense that he is a vastly more glorious, effective, complete and therefore adequate revelation of God’s character (2 Cor 3). This means that Christ’s incarnate revelation sheds greater light on the divine principles that constitute God’s law, which are openly manifested within the community of believers as they are written on the heart.¹⁰² As a Torah-keeping Jew, Christ magnified the laws given within the framework of the Sinaitic covenant, showing how he applies them, rather than nullifying them (Matt 5:17-48).¹⁰³ “The Author of the law comes to his world and to his creation and lives out among us all that the written code was ever meant to convey. This Picture is indeed worth a thousand words!”¹⁰⁴ Thus, “The Mosaic law has not been superseded, but the law of Christ has been superimposed on it.”¹⁰⁵ Enlightened and empowered by him, his followers, who “serve in newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6), can and must have genuine righteousness that exceeds that of legalists (Matt 5:20).

The divine Christ who committed no sin and whose own blood qualifies him to offer a better covenant with real salvation in place of token purification through ani-

mals offered by faulty priests (Heb 7-10, 13) did not replace God’s holy, righteous, good, and spiritual law (Rom 7:12, 14) as a means of salvation from sin because God has never offered salvation on the basis of law. “Torah is neither the problem nor its solution. The problem is sin.”¹⁰⁶

When the Israelites were disobedient, having a dysfunctional “old covenant” experience, they failed to receive sanctification from the Lord. Under these conditions, any Sabbath-keeping they did would have been a hypocritical outward form (compare Isa 1, 58). However, by accepting God’s grace and internalizing his law, including the Sabbath, they could become holy as he is holy (Lev 19:2-3—be holy and keep sabbaths). Thus Sabbath as magnified by Christ can 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.¹⁰⁷

By restoring internalized holiness and obedience through God’s Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-28),¹⁰⁸ the “new covenant” restores the Sabbath to its true significance. Instead of being a hypocritical “tour de farce,” it points to a living reality: People who are allowing God

101. Thus the sanctification significance inherent in the Sabbath remains, so its meaning as a covenant “sign” is not eliminated by addition of the Lord’s supper (Matt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20) as a Christian sign of remembrance (against *Ibid.*).

102. Cf. R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 128-52. In this sense, Paul explicitly refers to the Mosaic scriptures as “old covenant”/Old Testament (2 Cor 3:14; cf. v. 15; Heb 8:13). Unlike the implied (but not designated as such) “old covenant” experience in Jer 31:31-34, the “old covenant” scriptures are defective only in the sense that their revelation is incomplete. Even this incompleteness is less than many realize: The Old Testament reveals much about Christ (Jn 5:39; Lk 24:27) and when those whose reading of the Old Testament is inadequate/faulty recognize Christ, the “veil” of incomprehension is removed from them (2 Cor 3:14-16; cf. Acts 8:27-39). N. T. Wright concludes: “The Torah itself, it seems, is for Paul good, and even glorious, but in the event can only condemn its recipients, because of their state of heart. It is only, finally, when the work of Christ and the Spirit has been accomplished that the glory which shone in Torah can shine once more, this time effectively” (192).

103. Holmgren, 60-64; cf. Gerstner, 85-6—“Christ was not calling to a new way of obedience, but to the old way...keeping the law and keeping Christ’s commandments are synonymous.”

104. Eva, “Why the Seventh Day? Part 2,” 7; see also 6.

105. Walton, 164. While I agree with this statement, I do not find biblical support for Walton’s subsequent qualification that none of the stipulations established within the context of the Sinaitic covenant are obligatory for New Testament Christians to keep, although (I agree with this next part) the principles of the Old Testament laws continue to provide binding guidance for Christians in that they reveal God and teach us how to pattern our lives after him (170-171; citing David Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 [1991] 325, 332).

106. Brad H. Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee Among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997) 91.

107. Doukhan, “Loving the Sabbath,” 155.

108. Deut 10:16; 30:6 and Jer 4:4 already spoke of an internalized covenant relationship with God in terms of circumcision of the heart, an expression picked up by Paul (Rom 2:29).

to sanctify them keep the sanctified day. Internalization is in harmony with the external summation of the law, rather than invalidating it.

During his ministry, Jesus showed Christians how to live under the “new covenant.”¹⁰⁹ So just as God instituted the Sabbath at Creation by his example (Gen 2:2-3), Christ’s example regarding reformation of Sabbath-keeping has prime relevance for Christians today. Luke 4:16 reports an event early in his ministry: “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.” So participating in communal worship on Sabbath was his usual practice. More significantly, the fact that Jesus went to so much trouble not merely to keep Sabbath, but to restore Sabbath to its rightful place within the “new covenant,” shows that its proper observance was of great importance for him and therefore should be important for Christians. Charles L. Feinberg argued: “Every moral principle contained in the ten commandments has been reiterated under grace by the Spirit in the form of an exhortation with the single exception...of the commandment to keep the Sabbath.”¹¹⁰ He missed the point that the Sabbath is special: It was reiterated in the New Testament not merely by an apostolic exhortation, but by records of Christ’s repeated example!

Jesus risked controversy and danger by healing people on the Sabbath (e.g. Mk 3:1-6; Jn 5:2-18; 9:1-41), thereby stripping away hypocritical human tradition and showing the purpose of the Sabbath as it was originally created (Gen 2:2-3): “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27-28). Why would he restore something that he was about to do away with? That would make as much sense as remodeling a house before demolishing it! Furthermore, why would he wipe out the seventh day Sabbath when his covenant lordship over it was part of his divine messianic claim?¹¹¹

J. Gerstner makes a penetrating observation:

Since the Sabbath was made for people and not vice versa, people cannot determine or use it as they please. It would then cease to be the sabbath and become a day that people, not God, define...

If people form the sabbath in their own image, it does not carry the utility and meaning that Christ attributes to the true sabbath of God. Thus, in this statement that Christians commonly take today as liberating them from sabbatical law, Christ actually bound His followers more tightly to it. It is to be remembered, of course, that God requires man to love mercy as well as do rightly and walk humbly on the Sabbath — that is the law.¹¹²

It is no accident that Jesus made a point of healing people on the Sabbath,¹¹³ thereby lifting their burdens and giving them rest from their suffering. His healing was a manifestation of his ongoing divine, creative power for a re-creative purpose that reveals the heart of the “new covenant”¹¹⁴ and agrees with the emphasis on redemption in the motive clause of the Sabbath command in the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue: “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 by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (5:15).

When his people persecuted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, he responded: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (Jn 5:17). Because of divine creative work, human beings can enjoy rest (compare Ps 121:3-4). Moreover, as Philip Yancey perceives, 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.”¹¹⁵

Under the “new covenant” phase of the divine covenant, God restores the world and human beings to the sinless

109. See Specht, 105. “During his ministry,” beginning with his baptism (Lk 3), does not include his passive ritual role during his infancy (Lk 2).

110. Feinberg, “The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day,” 187; see also 184-6, 188.

111. On the messianic implications of Mk 2:28, see Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day,” 363.

112. Gerstner, 86.

113. Doukhan, “Loving the Sabbath,” 152.

114. Cf. Eva, “Why the Seventh Day? Part 2,” 7-8.

115. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 182-3.

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 it continue into the sinless “new earth” (compare Isa 66:22-23).¹¹⁶

Conclusion

We have found that the successive phases of the unified divine covenant that form the skeletal structure of the entire Bible are cumulative, building on earlier phases rather than nullifying them. True, there are differences of emphasis as salvation history progresses, but God has only ever offered salvation by grace through faith. So while the “new covenant” ratified by Christ’s own blood culminates God’s initiative to restore an intimate relationship with human beings, it fulfills God’s long-range plan rather than radically repealing everything that had gone before.

It is true that the “new covenant” superseded a defective “old covenant,” but this “old covenant” involved a faulty response of faithlessness and disobedience that marred the divine-human relationship because it departed from the internalized “new covenant” heart experience offered by God all along. Not only does the “new covenant” represent a covenant phase ratified by the only sacrifice that has offered real salvation to those living during all of the covenant phases; it also represents the only kind of divine-human dynamic through which human beings under any covenant phase can be saved. So the “new covenant” is not only *a* covenant, one among several reaffirmations of the overall divine covenant; it is *the* covenant.

Divine law is for the benefit and protection of all parties involved in relationships. It has never had the purpose of salvation by works, as shown by the fact that the Bible always places it within the covenant framework of grace. In sorting out the applicability of biblical laws within modern analytical categories—moral, ceremonial, civil,

and health—I propose a simple rule of thumb: *A biblical law should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application.* Thus moral and health principles are timeless, ceremonial laws that served a prophetic function in pointing forward to Christ’s saving activity are superseded by his ministry, and Christians should preserve principles encapsulated in civil laws even though the ancient Israelite judicial system has ended and culturally dependent specifics may no longer apply.

The divine command to rest from work on the seventh day of the week embodies a universal, timeless principle that protects the divine-human relationship, as shown by its inclusion in the Ten Commandments. At the same time, Sabbath rest provides an ongoing health benefit. However, the Israelite civil penalty for Sabbath-breaking and the sacrificial ceremonies performed on the Sabbath can no longer apply because they were dependent on civil and religious institutions that no longer exist.

That modern Christians should continue to observe rest on the seventh day Sabbath as part of the “new covenant” experience that they enjoy in Christ is supported by three major factors, which I have expressed in the form of answers to objections:

1. The Sabbath is universal rather than limited to Israel because it originated before the Israelites existed as a people.

2. The Sabbath has never served as a temporary historical or vertical type/symbol of later and greater realities because God instituted it before the need for such types was brought about by the Fall into sin.

3. Rather than doing away with seventh day Sabbath rest, the “new covenant” restores the heart of true Sabbath observance, which is for the benefit of human beings and celebrates the way God makes them holy by making them like himself, whose character is love.

116. On this passage, see Gane, “Sabbath and the New Covenant,” 330-31. In context (cf. vv. 18-21), Isaiah envisioned future events through the lens of God’s plan to use the nation of Israel to gather all people to himself at Jerusalem.

APPENDIX: *Sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16

As Seventh-day Adventists have recognized, there is a major problem with the idea that *sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16 refers to seventh day “Sabbath(s)” in the sense of rest from work on the seventh day Sabbath: Elsewhere in the Bible, Sabbath rest celebrates an unchangeable historical event in the past, whether Creation (Exod 20:11) or Redemption (Deut 5:15); it never explicitly or implicitly functions as a ritual “shadow of what is to come” (v. 17), i.e. a temporary historical type (see above).¹¹⁷ A lesser problem is the near certainty that if Paul had touched the original function of the Sabbath itself, there surely would have been an uproar of biblical proportions, calling for a council like the one in Jerusalem that dealt with the controversy over circumcision (Acts 15). Although this is an argument from silence that cannot stand alone, it is worthy of consideration as collateral support.¹¹⁸

The solution usually adopted by Seventh-day Adventists has been to restrict *sabbaton* to an uncharacteristically restricted meaning: yearly ceremonial sabbaths alone, not including the seventh day Sabbath.¹¹⁹ These yearly sabbaths were part of the Israelite annual festivals: partial rest on the first and seventh days of the festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:7-8), on the festival of Weeks = Pentecost (v. 21), on the first day of the seventh month (v. 25), and on the first and eighth days of the festival of Booths (vv. 35-36), plus complete rest on the Day of Atonement (vv. 28, 30-32).

As Kenneth Wood has gently acknowledged, the historic SDA insistence that *sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16 cannot include weekly Sabbaths appears forced because it goes against the grain of usage of this term or of the original Hebrew *Ábbat* throughout the Bible.¹²⁰ To exacerbate the dilemma, in this verse, as in Ezekiel 45:17 and Hosea 2:11, the words “a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day”¹²¹ provide a clear intertextual link by chiasmatically inverting the order found in Numbers 28-29, where the calendar of ritual offerings on holy days includes special sacrifices on weekly *seventh day Sabbaths* (Num 28:9-10), monthly new moons (Num 28:11-15), and yearly festivals (Num 28:16-29:40).¹²² So we cannot avoid seventh day Sabbaths.

Even as the dilemma climaxes, it dissipates in the solution provided by Numbers: In question is not Sabbath rest, but *rituals* performed on the Sabbath. As Paul Giem has demonstrated on the basis of Numbers and other evidence regarding usage of *sabbaton*, ceremonies carried out on the Sabbath days, not the days themselves, functioned as a typological “shadow.”¹²³

Supporting Giem’s conclusion, in Colossians 2:17, “things which”¹²⁴ identifies the shadowy things as the list in verse 16, literally “...in eating or drinking or in [the] part of (*en merei*)¹²⁵ a festival or a new moon or sabbaths.” It is that which concerns or pertains to the festivals, new moons, or sabbaths that constitutes the “shadow.” Even if “shadow” here means “temporary type”¹²⁶ and even if “eat-

117. Wood, 339.

118. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 368; Specht, 111; Wood, 340.

119. See, for example, Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald) 7:205-6.

120. Wood, 338-41.

121. NKJV, NRSV, and NJB render plural “S/sabbaths”

122. Cf. 2 Chron 2:4 (Hebrew v. 3); 8:13, referring to Sabbaths, new moons, and festivals.

123. Paul Giem, “Sabbat_n in Col 2:16,” *AUSS* 19 (1981) 195-210.

124. Greek neuter plural relative pronoun *ha*.

125. NASB “in respect to”; NKJV “regarding”; NIV “with regard to”; NRSV “of observing”; NJB “about observance of” translate the Greek preposition + dative noun *en merei*, which W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich render “in the matter of, literally ‘in the part of’” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979] 507). However, for the idea “in the case (literally “part”) of,” Paul uses the definite article—*en to merei*—in 2 Cor 9:3. Since *en merei* in Col 2:16 lacks the article, we could suggest a literal translation: “... or in part of a festival or new moon or Sabbath.” For the common meaning of *meros* (nominative = lexical form) as a “part” that pertains to a larger whole, see e.g. Jn 19:23; Acts 5:2; 23:6, 9; Eph 4:16. On the other hand, Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke argue that the combination *en merei* “is an improper preposition and means ‘respectively, because of, concerning.’ The definite article is often omitted in prepositional expressions in Greek, so that the indeterminate use of ‘feast day’ (*heortĕ*), ‘new moon’ (*neomĕnia*), and ‘sabbath’ is without contextual significance...” (*Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Anchor Bible 34B; transl. A. B. Beck; New York: Doubleday, 1994] 338-9).

126. William Richardson argued for another sense of *skia*: “However, its predominant meaning seems rather to be something which is empty and shadowy in contrast to that which is real and substantial” (“A Study of the Historical Background and the Interpretation of Colossians 2:14-17” [M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1960] 88; cf. 77-83, 89).

ing” and “drinking” function as such types,¹²⁷ there is a difference between these activities on the one hand, and festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths on the other. The words for “eating” and “drinking” are simply preceded by the Greek preposition *en*, literally “in”: “So let no one judge you in (*en*) eating or in (*en*) drinking...”¹²⁸ The rest of the verse, however, literally reads: “... or in (*en*) part of (*merai*) a festival or new moon or Sabbath.” The preposition *en* here is used distributively, as if it preceded all three terms for time, so this does not signal a difference. If only *en* appeared here, a Christian should not permit anyone to judge him/her “in,” i.e. in regard to, five things: eating, drinking, festival, new moon, or Sabbath. However, addition of the noun *meros* (here in the dative form *merai*) before “a festival or new moon or Sabbath” indicates that non-allowance of judging is not simply in regard to these sacred times, but in regard to the shadowy *aspects* of them.

Again, in the context of Colossians 2:16, “new moons” and “Sabbaths” refer to ritual activity performed on these days rather than to the days themselves. There is no evidence that new moon days had typological significance of their own; it was the special sacrifices offered on new moon days (Num 28:11-15) that served as a “shadow.”¹²⁹ This explains why Sabbaths and new moons can continue as days of worship in the eschatological context of Isaiah 66 (v. 23), after the need for ritual types performed on those days has ended.

My interpretation, according to which *sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16 at least includes the seventh day Sabbath¹³⁰

(referring to rituals performed on Sabbath) agrees with and provides additional linguistic reinforcement (see on *en merai*, above) for the view that affirms the historic Seventh-day Adventist interpretation that this passage refers to obsolescence of ceremonial practices rather than Sabbath rest, but departs from the component of the SDA position that restricts “sabbaths” to yearly “ceremonial sabbaths.”¹³¹

Does *sabbaton* in Colossians 2:16 refer *exclusively* to seventh day Sabbaths, on which shadowy sacrifices were performed? Probably. As mentioned above, this verse reflects in reverse order the progression in Numbers 28-29: *weekly* Sabbaths, *monthly* new moons, and *yearly* festivals. In Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29, yearly ceremonial sabbaths were covered within the yearly festival category.¹³²

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul applies to the context of the church in Colossae the same basic message that was decided at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15): People do not need to practice or affirm circumcision or any of the other Jewish rituals in order to be Christians. The sacrificial rituals (not including circumcision) pointed forward to the better, truly efficacious ministry of Jesus Christ, which has already begun and to which our focus should now be directed. Paul says, among other things, that Christians should not allow themselves to be held accountable for observances, or misuse of observances, that show acceptance of the ongoing validity of a “shadowy” earthly ritual system.

127. Richardson (72) and Giem (207-8) hold that “eating” and “drinking” are probably not included in the “shadow.” Against *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7:205, Richardson (69-71) points out that the Greek terms for “eating” and “drinking” do not refer to grain and drink offerings performed at the sanctuary and suggests that the terms speak of ascetic practices.

128. NKJV, except that I have changed “in food or in drink” to the more literal and accurate “in eating or in drinking.”

129. Giem, 209.

130. Whether *sabbaton* is plural “sabbaths,” singular “Sabbath,” or collective/generic “sabbath day[s]” (cf. e.g. Lev 19:3; 26:2, where “sabbaths” next to other commandments of the Decalogue must include the weekly Sabbath).

131. Giem, 198-210, Wood, 338-42; Herbert Douglass, *Philippians & Colossians: His Mind in You* (ed. E. R. Gane; Adult Sabbath School Lessons: Teacher’s Edition; Silver Spring, Maryland: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994) 116.

132. Cf. Richardson, 74; Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 360. It is true that in the Septuagint, *heorte*, the Greek word for “festival” in Colossians 2:16, most often translates Hebrew *úag*, limited to “pilgrim festival.” However, it can also frequently render Hebrew *mo’ed*, “appointed time,” which embraces all of the Israelite festivals (Lev 23:2, 4, 37, 44; Num 29:39; cf. Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1986] 626).