

# Did Jesus Teach ‘Different Commandments’?

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**Are the commandments Christ taught different from the ones revealed in the Old Testament, as some allege? The Sabbath, tithing and certain other laws, the reasoning goes, are not included in the commandments Christ was referring to when he said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” ([John 14:15](#)). This idea is hardly a new one. It was taught by second century teachers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and numerous others who followed down through the centuries. But what does God’s word say? Did Jesus teach a different set of commandments?**

When a rich man asked Jesus, “...what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered, “You know the commandments” ([Mark 10:17-22](#); [Luke 18:18-23](#)). And he then named some commandments from the Old Testament. We too know the commandments from the Scriptures of the Old Testament (which for years were the only Scriptures the Church had) as well as the New. Every single one of the ten commandments, and many others from the Old Testament, are directly discussed and established within the context of the New Testament. Jesus never suggested to his followers that the Sabbath and other commandments did not apply to them. Much of the four gospels is a record of how Jesus observed the Sabbath, teaching us by example how to observe it (not according to Jewish tradition but according to the true meaning and spirit of the Sabbath). It was still a commandment, and a day on which to rest from one’s own labors, after our Savior’s death: “...they rested on the Sabbath according to the **commandment**” ([Luke 23:56](#); see also [Hebrews 4:9-10](#)).

Whether or not to keep the Sabbath was not an issue in the Church of the original apostles. Evidence concerning the early Church reveals that the Jerusalem Church kept not only the Sabbath well into the second century (having moved to Pella prior to the destruction of Jerusalem), but many of its members observed Jewish traditional law as well. The controversies between some of the converted Pharisees and others within the Church over keeping “the law of Moses” was not over the ten commandments but what was plainly at issue was physical

circumcision, and certain laws of the Old Covenant as kept by Jewish tradition.

In the conference recorded in Acts 15 it was believers among the Pharisees who raised the issue of circumcision and the “law of Moses” (verse 5). As the Pharisees used the term the “Law of Moses,” it included their oral tradition because they asserted that not only the written law but the oral law, too, was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai. As it’s stated in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “...while the phrase ‘Torah (given) to Moses at Sinai’ may be understood in a restricted sense [i.e., as the Pentateuch], the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition (originated by the Pharisees and continued by the Talmudic rabbis) viewed it as referring to a wide body of teaching. According to this position, which dominated Jewish thought until the modern era and still commands the allegiance of traditionalists, the encounter between God and Israel at Sinai deposited not only a written Torah (*Torah she-bikhtav*) but also an oral Torah (*Torah she-be `al pe*) that was transmitted from generation to generation” (Fifteenth Edition, vol. 10, “Judaism,” 1978, p. 286). Author Alfred Edersheim adds, “According to the Jewish view, God had given Moses on Mount Sinai alike the oral and the written Law, that is, the Law with all its interpretations and applications. From Ex. xx. 1, it was inferred, that God had communicated to Moses the Bible, the Mishnah, and Talmud, and the Haggadah, even to that which scholars would in latest times propound” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1.8). When the Pharisees among the brethren wanted to require Gentile converts to “keep the law,” it meant they wanted to impose upon them the entire weight of their extra-Biblical oral tradition, not just the commandments written in the Torah.

The “yoke” referred to by Peter ([Acts 15:10](#)) is not the ten commandments, not the Sabbath, but the Jewish traditional laws, referred to by Jesus as “heavy burdens” ([Matthew 23:4](#); [Luke 11:46](#)). Jesus never upbraided the Pharisees nor anyone else for keeping the Sabbath or other of the commandments of God. He did assail the Pharisees because through their traditions — the “commandments of men” — they transgressed God’s commandments and made them of no effect ([Matthew 15:1-9](#); [Mark 7:1-13](#)). Joachim Jeremias discusses the Pharisees’ traditional laws regarding tithing, purification and other matters which went far beyond Biblical requirements (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 246-267). Jesus rebuked the scribes for imposing these burdensome laws when he said “they...will not move [or remove] them with one of their fingers” ([Matthew 23:4](#)). The burdens of these rules of men “could be laid on, or moved away, according to the varying judgment or severity of a Rabbinic College” (Edersheim, 1.8). In a similar way, the judgment made by the conference of Acts 15 had to do not so much with the spiritual and everlasting precepts of the law ([Romans 7:14](#); [Psalm 111:7-8](#)),

but with ceremonial aspects of the law pertaining primarily to the temple service and Jewish traditional law (compare [Acts 15:24-29](#); [21:18-19](#); [28:17](#); [Galatians 1:14](#); [2:3-4](#), [10-14](#); [3:3](#); [6:12-13](#); [Hebrews 9:9-10](#)).

Jewish Pharisaic Rabbis had disagreed among themselves whether adult proselytes should be required to be circumcised to be fully accepted as citizens of the commonwealth of Israel. By the time of Christ they had adopted the affirmative view (Edersheim, 6.12). However, among the Western diaspora ("Hellenists," or "Hellenistic Jews"), Gentiles were accepted into the assembly as proselytes without circumcision. "...Hellenistic Jews,...renounced circumcision [as necessary for the acceptance of proselytes] but not the immersion that washed away the impurity of heathenism" (*New Shaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. ix, "Proselytes," p. 280-281). While circumcision was not required of Gentile converts in the West, "no concessions were made in monotheistic faith or in moral requirements, but solely in liturgical [ritual] matters" (*ibid.*, p. 281). The Sadducees, too, held that only future male children of converts must be circumcised, since no other day than the eighth after birth is specifically commanded in Scripture. Part of the *Gerim Halakhah* (binding rules of tradition relating to Gentile proselytes) concerned five specific conditions prerequisite to *entering into* full citizenship among the Jews. These five conditions, all from the Pentateuch, were circumcision ([Exodus 12:48](#)), and abstention from the following: idol sacrifices, blood, food (meat) not bled properly, and sexual immorality ([Leviticus 17:7](#), [10](#), [12-13](#); [18:1-26](#)).

The decision resulting from the conference of Acts 15 *ruled out* adult male circumcision, but *confirmed* the remaining requirements (representing separation from spiritual and physical defilement or uncleanness) for full acceptance into the community of disciples. Some sources add obedience to Jewish authority, and avoidance of blasphemy, murder and theft to the list of laws obligatory for Gentiles from Leviticus 17-20. In reality, all the laws mentioned in these chapters were to be followed by Israelites and the Gentiles living among them alike ([Leviticus 17:8](#), [10](#), [12](#), [13](#), [15](#); [18:26](#); [20:2](#)), and every single one of the ten commandments are given binding authority in the laws laid down in these chapters.

The primary concern being addressed in Acts 15 is how may a Gentile be purified from spiritual uncleanness and hence be fit for acceptance into the congregation. To the Pharisees, in particular, strict observance of laws pertaining to ritual purity was extremely important. Certainly for a Gentile, from the Pharisaic point of view,

circumcision would be a fundamental first step. Beyond that, however, Pharisaic communities had strict rules of admission. “Before admission there was a period of probation...during the course of which the postulant had to prove his ability to *follow the ritual laws*.”

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“Once this period was over, the candidate committed himself to observe the *rules of the community*.... The new member of the community bound himself to observe the *Pharisaic laws on purity and tithes*” (Jeremias, p. 251, emphasis added). Note the emphasis is on ritual laws, and their own traditional laws, which the Pharisees equated with “the law of Moses.” The point of Acts 15 is that — contrary to Pharisaic demands — spiritual purity is not accomplished through circumcision of the flesh and adherence to physical rituals of purification, but rather, as the Church had learned, “God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and **works righteousness** is accepted by Him” ([Acts 10:34-35](#)). And that God “made no distinction between us and them [Jew and Gentile], **purifying their hearts by faith**” ([Acts 15:9](#); compare also [Acts 21:24-25](#), note the issue there also is ritual purification).

The “necessary things” imposed on Gentile converts in Acts 15 is not intended as a complete list of their obligations to God. For example, baptism, which was required of Gentile converts ([Matthew 28:19](#); [Acts 10:48](#)) is not mentioned in [Acts 15:29](#). What is mentioned are common heathen practices — referred to as “abominable customs” ([Leviticus 19:30](#)) — by which the nations were defiled. “Purity of the heart” requires separation from these practices, as commanded in Scripture. When we place Acts 15 in its proper context with the rest of Scripture, we see that the approach of the New Testament Church in accepting Gentile converts was similar to that of the synagogues of the Western diaspora. Physical circumcision and ritual purifications revolving around the temple service were not required. But there was no compromise in faith and moral law, including Sabbath observance.

With regard to the Sabbath, much has been made by some of the seven so-called laws of Noah (from Leviticus 17-20, same as listed above but arranged somewhat differently) which were obligatory for so-called “half-proselytes” (a concept originated by the Rabbis). But overlooked, perhaps deliberately, is the fact that, as *Easton’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* points out, “Besides these laws, however, they were required to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to refrain from the use of leavened bread during the time of the Passover” (“Proselyte”). In fact the common term for “half-proselytes” — proselytes “of the gate” — comes from the language of the Sabbath law, which specifically requires Gentiles (“your stranger

who is within your gates”) to observe the Sabbath ([Exodus 20:10](#); [Deuteronomy 5:14](#)). There was never a question, either among the Jews nor within the New Testament Church, as to whether a Gentile convert should keep the Sabbath, since it was specifically commanded of them.

Many scholars recognize that the Jerusalem Church was a model for the Gentile churches in doctrine and practice (excepting extra-biblical Pharisaic tradition which continued to be practiced by some converted Pharisees, but was never imposed by the apostles on Gentile converts). This is alluded to by Paul where he says the Gentiles were “debtors” to the Jerusalem saints, having “been partakers of their spiritual things” ([Romans 15:27](#)); and imitators of their sufferings at the hands of persecutors ([1 Thessalonians 2:14](#)). In Hugh Smith’s *History of the Christian Church* we find the following: “The first Christian church established at Jerusalem by apostolic authority became in doctrine and practice a model for the greater part of those founded in the first century.” And he states further, “All Christians agreed in celebrating the seventh day of the week in conformity to the Jewish converts” (pp. 50-51, 69; cited in *A History of the True Religion*, A. N. Dugger and C. O. Dodd, pp. 44-45). A number of other church historians could be cited drawing the same conclusions. Jesse Lyman Hurlbut admits, “As long as the church was mainly Jewish, the Hebrew sabbath was kept; but as it became increasingly Gentile the first day gradually took the place of the seventh day” (*Story of the Christian Church*, p. 45).

In addition to Scripture, clear evidence that the apostles, specifically Paul, never taught the Gentiles nor other Christians that they were free to reject God’s command to observe the Sabbath and keep as “holy time” any time they chose is provided by Clement, a companion of Paul ([Philippians 4:3](#)). Clement wrote (as is generally believed based on available evidence, although not necessarily beyond dispute) when he was pastor of the Church of God at Rome, about 100 A.D.:

These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in their proper order, which the Lord has **commanded us to perform at stated times**. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but **at the appointed times and hours**. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable to Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings **at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed**; for inasmuch as they **follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not**.

*(First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, XL).*

Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh Day Adventist scholar, spent five years at the Vatican's Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, studying early Christian documents to investigate the early practice of the Church regarding the Sabbath, and the question of when, where and why the practice was abandoned in favor of Sunday worship. He concluded that the change occurred during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (117-135 A.D.), largely as a result of severe anti-Jewish repression and persecution. It should be noted, however, that some Gnostic Christians, who blended Christianity with pagan religion and philosophy, worshiped on Sunday rather than the Sabbath in the first century (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 379, cited by Ivor C. Fletcher, *The Incredible History of God's True Church*, p. 118). Following the pattern of the first-century Gnostic practices, the change in the "catholic" Church was an adaptation of the widespread practice of honoring the sun-deities on "Sun-day," the first day of the week. "My conclusion," says Bacchiocchi, "...was that the change from Saturday to Sunday did not occur in the Jerusalem church by apostolic authority to commemorate Christ's resurrection. Rather it occurred in the Church of Rome early in the second century as a result of the interplay of political, social, pagan-religious, and Christian factors, similar somewhat to those that gave rise to the December 25 observance of Christ's birth" ("How the Sabbath Was Changed to Sunday and Why It Matters," *Liberty* magazine, vol. 86, no. 1, January/February 1991, p. 14).

It has been stated in certain quarters that the Sabbath does not "appear in any of the commands or lists of virtues in the New Testament". And this is used as a rationalization for not having to keep it. One has to wonder, how many times must God repeat himself before men cease their attempts to reason around his law. First, contrary to the above statement, as pointed out earlier, the Sabbath is listed as a command — after Christ's death abolishing the Old Covenant ([Luke 23:56](#)). The Sabbath is mentioned more than sixty times in the New Testament, more than any other of the ten commandments. Nowhere is it stated or suggested that it is not to be kept. The majority of the cases involve Jesus' example in the gospel accounts of how to properly observe the Sabbath, not according to the man-made, burdensome and counterproductive rules of the scribes, but instead keeping faithful to its spirit and meaning as a day to rest from our own works and servile labor, and to keep it as a day of spiritual and physical liberation and restoration ([Nehemiah 13:15-22](#); [Isaiah 61:1-3](#); [58:13-14](#); [Luke 13:10-17](#); [Matthew 12:10-13](#); [Acts 16:13](#); [Hebrews 4:9-10](#)). One does not find examples of Jesus, the apostles, or converted Christians spending the Sabbath buying and selling, working at servile labor for wages, engaging in sporting events, nor in general,



pursuing their own carnal interests. One does find them resting from their own fleshly labors and preaching, teaching, praying, healing, and doing similar good works in the service of God. How much plainer could it be made, what our obligations are regarding the Sabbath?

In Matthew 24 Jesus uttered a prophecy for his own disciples. The prophecy concerns events which would precede his second coming. The words apply specifically and directly to the present era between the first and the second comings of Jesus Christ. He warned that during this age many false prophets would deceive many ([Matthew 24:11](#)). He warned that lawlessness would abound. He warned of the coming great tribulation. And he said, speaking to his very own disciples, "...pray that your flight may not be...**on the Sabbath**" ([Matthew 24:20](#)). Why would Jesus tell his disciples to pray that their flight from the tribulation be not on the Sabbath, unless he expected them to be keeping the Sabbath? Evidently Jesus did not know that his death would render the Sabbath commandment obsolete. Are we more wise than he? How can any honest Bible student contend that Jesus does not expect his own disciples, here and now, to be keeping the Sabbath? (Incidentally, this statement does not necessarily imply that it would be wrong to take flight on the Sabbath if necessary. But certainly it would be preferable not to have to do so).

In the book of Hebrews Paul explains that certain laws of the Old Covenant need not be kept in the letter under the New Covenant. These have to do with physical sacrifices of food and drink (we still sacrifice in to God in other ways), washings, or rites of purification, and other fleshly ordinances having to do with the temple service ([Hebrews 9:9-10](#)). Since there is no physical temple, we could not apply most of these laws in the letter now, even if we wanted to. Had God intended that we not keep the Sabbath — one of the ten commandments — would he not have made it at least as plain as these lesser laws that no longer apply in the letter? Notice, however, that we are not told in the book of Hebrews (nor any other book) that the Sabbath is not to be kept. In fact, we are told just the opposite!

In Hebrews 3 and 4 Paul draws an analogy between the Israelites of the time of Moses and Joshua entering into the promised land and our entering the household (or Kingdom) of God. The time they spent in the wilderness is analogous to our lives now. We are ultimately partakers of the promise of eternal life with Christ only if we remain steadfast in faith to the end ([Hebrews 3:6-14](#)). Though the Israelites were under God's rule and guidance in the wilderness, they did not enter his "rest" in the promised inheritance because they were disobedient. In like manner, we have not yet received our inheritance in God's Kingdom, but "a

promise remains of entering His rest” for us **if we are diligent to obey** ([Hebrews 4:1, 11](#)).

Some teach falsely that we have already entered that rest, but we have not. The rest we are promised *follows* the return of Jesus Christ, when his Kingdom will rule the earth (and all creation; see [Isaiah 14:1-7](#); [32:16-18](#); [33:20](#); [Jeremiah 30:10](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:7](#); [Revelation 14:13](#); [21:3-4](#)). Paul said he sought to “attain to the resurrection.” Not that he had “already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended...” ([Philippians 3:11-13](#)). Paul, in Hebrews, refers to the Sabbath as a type of entering God’s Kingdom, his rest ([Hebrews 4:4](#)). In [Hebrews 4:9](#) Paul says, “Then remains a sabbath rest to the people of God” (*The Interlinear Bible*, Jay P. Green, Sr., ed.). The Greek word translated “sabbath rest” is *sabbatismos*. It means a Sabbath keeping. And it applies both to keeping the weekly Sabbath as a type of the millennial rest, and to the millennial fulfillment of what the Sabbath prefigures.

Keep in mind that Paul was writing to Jewish Christians, of whom there is no doubt they were keeping the Sabbath. In Hebrews Paul discusses numerous details of the Old and New Covenants and their relationship. This would have been the ideal place for Paul to tell the Jewish Christians that keeping the Sabbath is no longer necessary. But instead, he does just the opposite. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Paul’s statement in Hebrews [4:9](#), “Then remains a sabbath rest [or sabbath keeping] to the people of God” (*The Interlinear Bible*), would have been taken by Jewish Christians as a clear validation of their practice of keeping the weekly Sabbath, regardless of any additional meaning the statement was intended to have. Especially in light of the next verse, where it is tied in directly with the example of God resting on the seventh day of the creation week, thus creating the Sabbath (compare [Hebrews 4:10](#); [Genesis 2:1-3](#); [Exodus 20:11](#)).

It’s not accidental that the apostate Church, after rejecting the Sabbath, in time rejected also the belief in the millennial reign of Christ. Edward Gibbon notes that the early Church taught the second coming of Christ and his millennial reign. It was believed that this age “...would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection” (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, p. 25). But eventually, as apostasy became more and more firmly rooted, “The doctrine of Christ’s reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a



doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism” (p. 26).

It's been stated that the annual festivals, or Sabbaths, are “**shadows of the reality**, who is Christ,” hence it's reasoned that they are not commanded under the New Covenant. But is this what Scripture says? Scripture says they are [not were] “a shadow [Greek: *skia*, in this context a sketch, an outline, a representation conveying to our minds a pattern; compare [Hebrews 8:5](#)] of things to come” ([Colossians 2:17](#)). The Sabbaths are formulated according to the pattern of God's plan for mankind. Because they are a representation of a greater reality, does that mean we need not keep them? Baptism is a representation of a greater reality ([Romans 6:3-4](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)). Does this mean that baptism is optional, that it's somehow not a requirement for a Christian, because it's a figure or shadow of something else? The same for the Passover symbols of bread and wine, and the Passover itself ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#); [11:23-26](#)). If we did not keep the Sabbaths, would we understand what they prefigure? How much understanding of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Trumpets, or Atonement, or Tabernacles does the average Sunday keeping church goer have? Virtually none! [Colossians 2:16-17](#) does not say we need not keep the Sabbaths. It says “let no one judge you” with regard to them. This could mean any of several things. Biblical scholar A. T. Robertson, a Baptist, having little reason to provide support to those who keep the Sabbaths, nevertheless conjectures that Paul has in mind the regulations and practices of certain ascetic Gnostics, or possibly Essenes or Pharisees, whose rules “went far beyond the Mosaic regulations” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 496). To use an ambiguous Scripture like this to sweep away dozens of clear statements from the Bible is extremely poor exegetical form, to put it mildly!

What is the standard we are being judged by? It is the word of God, the “law of liberty” ([John 12:48](#); [James 1:21-25](#); [2:9-12](#); [Revelation 20:12-13](#)). It is God who judges ([Deuteronomy 32:36](#); [Psalm 7:8-11](#); [96:10-13](#); [Acts 17:31](#)). And it is not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law who will be justified ([Romans 2:13](#); [James 2:21-25](#); [Revelation 22:14](#)).

The apostles did not believe that the annual feasts were obsolete relics of the Old Covenant. They had the Church assembled on the day of Pentecost. And God honored their keeping of that annual Sabbath and confirmed it for the New Testament Church in a most powerful way — by the giving of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:1-4](#)). Paul gave detailed instructions to the Gentile Corinthian Church regarding how to properly keep the Passover, one of the seven annual festivals commanded

in Leviticus 23. Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, "...let us keep the feast..." ([1 Corinthians 5:8](#)). "Let us keep the feast" (from *eortazo*) is in the Greek in the form of the hortatory subjunctive; it's an *exhortation* — virtually a command — to *keep the feast of unleavened bread* with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And this letter went to *Gentile* Christians.

Scripture shows that in the millennium, during the regime of the New Covenant, *all nations will* be required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Those who refuse will be punished ([Zechariah 14:16-19](#)). Why would they be punished if keeping the Feast is not a law, a command, under the New Covenant? Jesus kept the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day ([John 7:10, 14, 37-39](#)). Throughout the New Testament we find thematic material relating directly to the various feasts of God. Keeping the feasts can give life to our comprehension of the subtle, penetrating spiritual lessons of both the Old and New Testaments, because they give us the proper framework for understanding God's word. That's one very important reason why Scripture says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who **do his commandments**" ([Psalm 111:10](#)).

It's been stated that "at creation, God gave no command to human beings regarding keeping the [seventh] day as a Sabbath." The same source (which I won't dignify by naming) goes on to say that no Sabbath commandment existed until after the Exodus. Based on what evidence? One will not find recorded in Scripture before the Exodus any specific command about stealing. Does this mean stealing was not a sin until God made the Old Covenant with Israel. The same is true of lying, of covetousness, of idolatry, of blasphemy, etc. Did none of these laws exist until the time of the Old Covenant? I think the absurdity of this argument is readily apparent. Abraham knew God's commandments and kept them ([Genesis 26:5](#)).

The law of God did not begin its existence at Mount Sinai. It's existence is implicit in the Bible from cover to cover. Paul wrote, "For until the law [the Old Covenant] sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law" ([Romans 5:13](#)). As Paul goes on to explain, however, sin was imputed before the Old Covenant was sealed. Adam and Eve were punished for their sin. The entire antediluvian world was destroyed because of their sins. Sodom and Gomorrah likewise. Egypt was punished because of its sins. So we see clearly that the spiritual law of God was in force before the Old Covenant. God has always been the Supreme sovereign of his creation. He has always been the "one Lawgiver...able to save

and to destroy” ([James 4:12](#)).

The Old Covenant was an agreement between God and Israel that they would keep his laws and that they would receive blessings for doing so ([Exodus 19:5-6, 8](#)). It was a physical covenant; but based on spiritual precepts. The spiritual precepts of the law were written on stones; the priests were human. But all was according to a heavenly pattern. The New Covenant is better, not because its law is better, but because its promises are better ([Hebrews 8:6](#)). How are they better? Because the same law, (applied in the spirit and not just in the letter) is written not on stone but in our hearts; and through the primary covenant sacrifice, Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven ([2 Corinthians 3:6](#); [Hebrews 8:4-6, 10-12](#); [9:11-15](#)). Through the New Covenant is made possible the fulfillment of the promise of eternal salvation ([Hebrews 9:11-28](#)).

Are we to believe that God created the Sabbath during the creation week, and “blessed and sanctified it” ([Genesis 2:2-3](#)), but did not reveal it to Adam and Eve, nor insist that they keep holy what he had blessed and sanctified? Especially when the Sabbath was *created for man*? ([Mark 2:27](#)). Nehemiah wrote that in the wilderness God “made known” to Israel the holy Sabbath (9:14). Remember the Sabbath had been *made holy* at creation. The detailed chronology of the flood found in Genesis 7 and 8 makes it clear that the men who wrote and preserved the source documents for the book of Genesis were meticulous time keepers, and that they knew God’s calendar. It’s simply not credible to believe that they did not preserve a knowledge of the Sabbath as well. But in slavery, the children of Israel had lost track of it (compare [Lamentations 2:6](#); the Egyptians did not observe a seven day week, but divided the month into three periods of ten days each). So it was necessary that God make known to them the Sabbath day, the day he had made holy at creation. This was done several weeks *before* the Old Covenant was agreed to at Sinai (compare Exodus [16:1](#); [19:1](#)). The Sabbath was *already* a law and a commandment to be obeyed before the Old Covenant came into existence ([Exodus 16:4, 23, 25-28](#)).

When God gave Israel his commandments at Mount Sinai he told them to “**Remember** the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” ([Exodus 20:8](#)). In giving the command he reminds us how the Sabbath came to be holy in the first place. “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” ([Exodus 20:11](#)). God hallowed, that is consecrated, set apart the Sabbath for a holy purpose, at the time that he made mankind. The basis for keeping the Sabbath holy is that God made it to be holy at the beginning of man’s

history.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "...keeping the commandments of God is what matters" ([1 Corinthians 7:19](#)). Paul knew what the commandments were. They were those enjoined in the Old Testament law ([Romans 13:8-10](#)). Love is not walking in just Jesus' commandments, but in the Father's commandments ([2 John 4-6](#)). Jesus' commandments and the Father's are the same ([John 12:49-50](#)).

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, **till heaven and earth pass away**, one jot or one tittle will **by no means** pass from the law till all is fulfilled [better translated in this context come to pass or established]. Whoever breaks [or looses or relaxes] one of **the least of these commandments**, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever **does and teaches** them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:17-19](#)). It's obvious from this statement that Jesus practiced and taught to be kept all the commandments written in the Law and the Prophets. And the commission Jesus gave to the Church included teaching his disciples likewise "to observe **all things** that I have commanded you" ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

The Old and New Testaments are consistent in teaching that obedience to all the commandments is the principle sign of God's elect (see again [1 John 2:3-6](#); [Deuteronomy 6:8](#); [11:18](#)). The commandments God is writing in the hearts of true Christians certainly *includes* the Sabbath, but they are not limited to the Sabbath. Merely keeping that one commandment does not identify one as a Christian. But surely no one who willfully refuses to keep the Sabbaths, the days God sanctified, can truthfully claim to be keeping the commandments. And make no mistake, the Sabbaths are among the commandments. They are not mere "window dressing" nor an optional "special blessing" for a limited number of "Christians" who deem them worth keeping. Who is any man to say keeping them is not necessary, when it is God himself — Lord of the Sabbath ([Mark 2:28](#)) — who *commanded* their observance?

The Sabbath is a test for God's people, "whether they will walk in My law or not" ([Exodus 16:4](#)). Almost always the Sabbath is one of the first laws to be rejected or made ineffectual by those who depart from the truth. God asked, with regard to the Sabbath, "How long do you **refuse** to keep My commandments and My laws?" ([Exodus 16:28](#)). Instead of obeying God, Israel chose to imitate the peoples around them. God appealed to them, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers..." ([2 Kings 17:13](#)). But they "did not believe in the LORD their God"

and “rejected his statutes” ([2 Kings 17:14-15](#)). *Disobedience is disbelief!*

Salvation is for those who believe, and obey ([Mark 16:15-16](#); [Romans 2:6-10](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:8-9](#)).

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