

Shall we keep the sabbath?

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In the Freethinker's "non-tract" (No. 5) the atheists claim that the following is a contradiction in the Bible:

Shall we keep the sabbath?

Ex. 20:8

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. (*Ex. 31:15; Num. 15:32.36*)

Is. 1:13

The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity. (*John 5:16; Matt. 12:1-5*)

The following are the full texts of the verses supposedly in contradiction.

Verses supporting the keeping of the Sabbath

Exodus 20:8

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 31:15

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh *is* the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 15:32-36

And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in

ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.

Verses that supposedly say to not keep the Sabbath.

Isaiah 1:13

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

John 5:16

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Matthew 12:1-5

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

The key to understanding how this is not a contradiction rests upon two things:

First: Knowing and understanding the difference in dispensations of witness.

Second: Knowing and understanding what the Sabbath is actually for.

To begin, please note that all the verses in support of the keeping of the Sabbath are in the Pentateuch, or the Books of the Law. These first five books of the Scripture are held by Judaism to be the Law that one must keep to be righteous before God. To understand how the Jews got this idea, we must look at Exodus and what happened at Mount Sinai. Beginning at Chapter 20 and ending in Chapter 23, we find the giving of what seem to be commandments from God. However, if we look further on in Chapter 24, we find this passage in the beginning of the chapter:

And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put *it* in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words. (*Exodus 24:1-8*)

In addition, we find in Deuteronomy, chapter 9, the following statement concerning the Ten Commandments, at the time the LORD spoke to Israel at Mount Horeb (Sinai).

Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD. Also in Horeb ye provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry with you to have destroyed you. When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water: And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the LORD gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant. (*Deuteronomy 9:7-11*)

Again, this is reinforced in Deuteronomy, chapter 10, in relating how the replacement for the first tables of stone came to be. In this it is plainly stated that the Ten Commandments are the covenant the LORD God had with Israel.

At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me. (*Deuteronomy 10:1-4*)

Thus, it is clear and plain that the Children of Israel (the Jews) voluntarily agreed to be bound by the aforesaid requirements (Chap. 20 through 23) of the covenant the Lord offered to them. Now if we understand what a covenant is, we

will understand that a covenant is a contract between two or more parties to accomplish a specific end. Thus, the keeping of the Sabbath belongs to Israel and anyone else the Scripture records as having made such a contract with the LORD God.

However, since the Scripture records no one else as having made that kind of a contract, or covenant with the LORD God, we must understand that the express keeping of the Sabbath belongs only to Israel so long as the covenant between the LORD and Israel is not broken by both parties. ((**Please note:** Just because one party to a covenant violates the bounds of the covenant, it does not mean the covenant is dissolved. Both parties must agree to dissolving the covenant before it is no longer in force and effect.))

Now, we do find that ultimately this covenant was dissolved by both parties. First, by Israel through their failure to abide in the covenant. And second, by the Lord Jesus Christ during the final days prior to His crucifixion.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (*Matthew 23:37-39*)

Thus, we find that the keeping of the Sabbath, as expressed in the Ten Commandments belongs only to Israel. If and only if we find in the Gospels, or the rest of the New Testament that we are commanded to keep the Sabbath, must we keep the Sabbath. However, what we find in the New Testament is typified by the following passages.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of

Christ. (*Colossians 2:16-17*)

And again.

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. (*Romans 14:5-6*)

Now then, with regard to the “contradictory” passages, they must be dealt with individually as one is from the Old Testament, and two are from the New Testament during the time of the Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry.

Beginning with the verse from Isaiah, which states:

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is iniquity*, even the solemn meeting. (*Isaiah 1:13*)

We find that this is part of a larger condemnation of Judah for their abandonment of the covenant the Lord made with them at Mount Sinai centuries earlier.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is no soundness* in it;

but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (*Isaiah 1:2-15*)

Now, it should be evident why the LORD God did not desire for Israel to “keep the Sabbath” at this point in time. The above passage is one of the most damning passages of Scripture in the Bible. The LORD’s condemnation of Judah is extensive and a precursor of the judgement to come. Why? For the express failure to keep the covenant they said they would not only keep, but teach their children from generation to generation. Thus, this condemnation of Judah is justified.

Moreover, not that many decades before the time of Isaiah, the prophet Samuel recorded an incident that was for all Israel to learn from. The Children of Israel should have learned from

the failure of Saul, their first king. The following passages is the LORD's rebuke of Saul following his disobedience to the LORD's commandment.

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king. (*I Samuel 15:22-23*)

If we look back at the agreement the Children of Israel made at Mount Sinai, we find the following statement:

And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. (*Exodus 24:7*)

Thus, Saul, having Samuel as a faithful priest of God, would have known that he was to obey, and then sacrifice, rather than sacrificing without obedience. Yet moreover, Saul should have known the following seeing that the LORD appointed him king when he was humble in heart.

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (*I Samuel 16:6-7*)

Therefore, we find that the LORD God's refusal of the Children of Israel's observance of the Sabbath was based upon the higher standard of having a right, humble and obedient heart before God. Because they did not, the LORD informs them that their observances avail nothing (in fact they are an abomination to Him) as they are done as religious formalities,

and not as true worship, or true observance of the covenant they had with the LORD.

So then, what of the other two 'contradictions' from the New Testament? As has been shown before, so it is with these: They are lifted out of context with no understanding of the surrounding issues.

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. (*John 5:16*)

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? (*Matthew 12:1-5*)

In the case of the first verse, the entire passage is from John, chapter 5, verses 1 through 18. However, it teaches very much the same thing as the passage from Matthew, chapter 12. The passage from Matthew spans verses 1 through 13. In the passage from Matthew 12, one of the most pertinent statements made consists of a question and answer the Lord Jesus Christ makes to those in the synagogue before He healed another man on the Sabbath:

And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What

man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. (*Matthew 12:9-12*)

So it is that the LORD God never intended for man to do absolutely nothing on the Sabbath day as the Jews were declaring. Rather, even in the covenant (which was still in force and effect) it was always lawful to that which was right and needful on the Sabbath. What was forbidden was the performing of any servile work, or work for profit. Thus, for a man to gather sticks on the Sabbath, during the time Israel was in the wilderness, would have been profaning the Sabbath as there was expressly no need in that the LORD was already providing manna for everyone in Israel. Manna did not require cooking to be eaten and thus there was no need for a fire. Besides that, the man had six other days in which to gather sticks. It is not like the Sabbath just snuck up on him and suddenly was there.

In the case of David, who “profaned the tabernacle” by eating the shewbread, if we examine that whole situation, we find that David was fleeing from Saul, and had no means of support and no food. It has never been the case that the LORD God would deny a man the sustenance to live when it was available. Even so, it was the case with the disciples eating corn on the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples had no certain place to lay their head, and no certain meal. Therefore, it was lawful for them to do what they were doing on the Sabbath.

Incidentally, verses 6 through 8 of Matthew 12 confirm this fact.

But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple. But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the

guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.
(*Matthew 12:6-8*)

And again, in the Gospel of Mark it is recorded that the Lord Jesus Christ made an additional statement, thus making it expressly clear who the Sabbath is for.

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. (*Mark 2:27-28*)

So then, what are we to make of what is recorded in Genesis, chapter 2, verses 1 through 3? After all, this is before Israel and the giving of the law and the covenant.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (*Genesis 2:1-3*)

As the Lord Jesus Christ stated in Mark, chapter 2, verses 27 and 28, this is for man, that a pattern of rest should be established so that men do not toil their lives away without rest. Moreover, it demonstrates plainly that the LORD God does not desire that a man work continually without a day for rest and consideration of his life upon this earth, and just Who it is that has granted him life.

A final thought

There are those who claim that men must keep the Sabbath for justification before God. However, nowhere in the Scripture is that taught – even in Israel during the time of the covenant. Yes, the proper keeping of the Sabbath would allow the LORD God to bless the nation of Israel as a whole. But it had nothing to do with an individual's justification before God.

Why? Because it is impossible to be justified before God by keeping the law. Yes, the Sabbath is part of the law and keeping it is a requirement under the law. However, the first commandment is this:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*. (Mark 12:28-34)

What then does it matter if one keeps the Sabbath, and yet violates the first commandment under the law? After all, the Scripture is express about the keeping of the law and how much of it one is required to keep.

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11)

So then, of what value is it to 'keep the Sabbath' and violate the very first of all commandments? Rather, this is the very reason why the LORD, from the beginning gave the following commandment which the apostle Peter preached to the Jews at Jerusalem:

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (*Acts 3:18-21*)

So it is that there exists no contradiction in Scripture concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. Rather, the giving of the Sabbath to Israel was for the specific purpose of witness to the nations around Israel, and to demonstrate that man cannot keep the law and be justified before God. The real purpose of the Sabbath is so that man can rest from his labors and consider his life and his eternal destiny.

Finis