

Was the “Sabbath Shadow” REPLACED by the Coming of Christ?

Some people teach that the seventh day Sabbath no longer needs to be observed, and they offer the following statement as their main line of reasoning: “The Lord of the Sabbath [Mark 2:28] has come [speaking of Christ’s life on earth about 2,000 years ago], and **the reality [Christ] has replaced the [Sabbath] shadow.**” Those who make this statement say that they are basing this idea on Colossians 2:17.

So, the *one and only* supposed “proof” of their argument is Col. 2:17.

Prior to examining this scripture in the KJV and the NKJV, let’s first consider how it is rendered in the NIV, and we will see that the NIV’s translation does largely *support* their contention: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a **Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ**” (verses 16-17, NIV). So, the NIV essentially says that the Sabbath is a “shadow,” and that this shadow was *replaced* by the **reality** of Christ.

Yet, let’s now consider 5 points which demonstrate the *error* of this teaching.

(1) Most Protestants, including the Protestant translators of the NIV, have long believed that the Sabbath (especially the *seventh day* Sabbath) has essentially been done away---that there is no real “requirement” by God to observe the day, and that Sabbath-keeping has absolutely nothing to do with salvation. Because of this long-standing belief, the translators *of the NIV* simply rendered this verse in such a way as to support their pre-conceived idea on this issue.

(2) Let’s now consider the *true* meaning of Col. 2:16-17.

First, let’s see how the passage is rendered in the KJV: “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” (KJV).

Now, the passage says that God’s holy days (Lev. 23) and Sabbaths are a **shadow** of things to come. But *how* are they shadows? Each of the *annual* holy days pictures (or *foreshadows*) some aspect of God’s plan of salvation. Likewise, the weekly Sabbath (the 7th day) *foreshadows* the coming Millennium ---the final 1,000 years of God’s 7,000-year plan. This 7th 1,000 year period (unlike the 1st 6,000 years) will be a period of rest---a 7th day Sabbath rest---a rest *from the sin* that characterized the first 6,000 years.

Yes, the Millennium will be “a rest from sin.” Satan will have been put away (Rev. 20:2), and those individuals who have then become spirit beings and members of God’s Kingdom will then possess the fullness of God’s character and will thus be *free* from their present *struggle* against sin.

So, both the weekly and annual holy days are “shadows.” They *foreshadow* aspects of God’s plan for mankind.

Let’s now look at the end of verse 17. The NKJV renders it: “but the **substance** is of Christ.” The word “substance” is likewise used in the NASV, whereas the NIV uses the word “reality.” However, the Greek word translated as “substance” is *soma*. *Every other scripture* in the New Testament where this word occurs, it is translated “body.” In fact, it is translated in *this* verse as “body” by the KJV, the KJ21, and Young’s Literal Translation. So, the KJV says, “but the body *is* of Christ.”

Now, consider that the KJV has the word “is” in *italics*, which means that this word was *not* in the original text---it was *added* by the translators, who were trying to make the verse make sense (according to *their* understanding). **So, the phrase is actually: “but the body of Christ.”**

Now, what does this phrase “body of Christ” refer to? To understand, go back to verse 16: “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.” Here, Paul is saying that Christians should **let no man judge or instruct you** as to how you keep the holy days and Sabbaths...**but the body of Christ**. “Let no man judge you...but [except] the body of Christ.” He is saying that *only* “the body of Christ” should judge or instruct us in the proper observance of these days. And *who is* “the body of Christ”? The Church ! (I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). Paul is saying that *only* the Church---only God’s true ministers---**not** outsiders---should judge or instruct Church members in the proper observance of the holy days and Sabbaths. In Colossae, Paul was struggling against Gnostic teachers who were trying to bring heresies into the Church. These false teachers were condemning members of the Church for supposedly improper eating and drinking---*especially* their manner of eating and drinking *on the Sabbath and holy days* (as well as wrongly condemning Church members for *rejoicing* on those days).

So, here we see that the NIV and others totally *misunderstand* what Paul was saying in Col. 2:16-17.

(3) Now for the third point which demonstrates the *error* of the notion that “the reality of Christ has *replaced* the Sabbath.” In this passage of Col. 2:16-17, Paul---*years after* Christ’s crucifixion---said that the holy days and Sabbath days “**are** a shadow”---not “**were** a shadow,” but “**are** a shadow.” Therefore, these days are *still* to be kept! They *weren’t* done away by Christ’s crucifixion!

(4) The fact that something is called a “shadow” does *not* mean that it is no longer necessary for us to observe.

Just because something is a shadow, a representation or a symbol, that does not diminish its *importance*. Both the Old *and* the New Testaments are filled with symbols and symbolic actions commanded by God to teach us important spiritual lessons.

Baptism is a *symbol* representing a greater spiritual truth, yet we are *commanded* to be baptized (Acts 2:38). The bread and wine...are *symbols* of the vital spiritual relationship we have with Jesus Christ, yet we are clearly *commanded* to partake of them (I Corinthians 10:16).

Laying on of hands (Hebrews 6:2), anointing with oil (James 5:14)...and other physical things are commanded to be observed, not because they are greater than that which they symbolize, but to strengthen and enhance our spiritual understanding as we do them...

These examples show that symbols and symbolic actions aren’t limited strictly to physical worship in the Old Testament, but are clearly commanded as important elements of New Testament worship. God simply uses the same *teaching methods* throughout the Bible.

These symbols and representations are vital reminders of important spiritual truths, as Paul recognized (I Corinthians 11:23-26). We observe these things---as well as the Sabbath and Holy Days---because they are shadows of the greater spiritual [things] to which they point.¹

Keeping the Sabbath (including *resting* on the Sabbath) is *symbolic* of our future rest in God’s Kingdom, as explained above.

(5) If this passage in Colossians 2, in fact, does away with the weekly Sabbath, then it *likewise* does away with the *annual* holy days---because it refers to *both* of them as “shadows.”

Yet, consider what will happen when Christ returns. He will subdue the rebellious nations of the earth, the Kingdom of God will be established on earth, and **all people of the earth will be keeping God’s annual holy days** (Lev. 23)---including the Feast of Tabernacles: “Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations....And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives....And the LORD shall be King over all the earth....And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the **Feast of Tabernacles**. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they *shall have no rain*; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. **This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of ALL the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles**” (Zech. 14:3-19).

So, clearly, God’s annual holy days will still be in effect *even after* Christ’s return. Colossians 2 does *not* do away with the annual holy days---and therefore it does not do away with the *weekly* Sabbath either!

In conclusion, we’ve looked at 5 points which show the *error* of the NIV’s rendering of Col. 2:16-17. The truth is that when Christ came to earth about 2,000 years ago, His coming *in no way* replaced our need to keep God’s annual holy days *or* His weekly Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath is one of God’s ten **great** Commandments!

References:

1. “Does Colossians 2 show the Sabbath and Holy Days are obsolete?” Scott Ashley, *In Transition*, Sept. 22, 1995, p.14