

# Brief on The New Covenant Replaced the Old Covenant<sup>1</sup>

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When the abolished Old Covenant laws were dead but not deadly.....	1
When the abolished Old Covenant laws were dead and deadly.....	5
The transition period most probably ended when the Temple fell in AD 70.....	5
The transition period was definitely ended by at least the 4th century.....	6
The Old Covenant ended and thus was not transformed .....	6

## *When the abolished Old Covenant laws were dead but not deadly*

It was prophesied during the Old Covenant era that another covenant, a new covenant, an everlasting covenant, would replace the Old Covenant:

“And I will make with them another covenant that shall be everlasting.” (Bar. 2:35)

“Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Juda...” (Jer. 31:31)

“And I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish with thee an everlasting covenant.” (Ez. 16:60)

When Christ died on the holy cross, the New Covenant was instituted, as testified to when the veil in the Temple was rent in two:

“And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And behold the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom...” (Mt. 27:50-51)

*Catholic Commentary* on Mt. 27:51: “**Veil:** The veil of the temple was rent at Christ’s death. And by it being broken down was signified that the ceremonies of the ancient law were to be abolished by the law of Christ.”

At that instant, the Old Covenant ended and was replaced by the New Covenant. The things in the Old Testament era that were figures of Christ’s first coming were fulfilled upon his first coming and thus there was no more need for them. St. Paul, then, testifies that the Old Covenant ended and was replaced by a new and better Covenant:

“And therefore he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of his death for the redemption of those transgressions which were under the former testament, they that are called may receive the promise of everlasting inheritance.” (Heb. 9:15)

“In saying before, sacrifices and oblation, and holocausts for sin thou wouldest not, neither are they pleasing to thee [anymore], which are offered according to the law [the Old Covenant]. Then said I: Behold, I come to do thy will, O God: he taketh away the first [the Old Covenant], that he may establish that which followeth [the New Covenant]. In the which will, we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once.” (Heb. 10:8-10)

“But now he [Jesus Christ] hath obtained a better ministry, by how much also he is a mediator of a better testament, which is established on better promises.” (Heb. 8:6)

“Jesus [is] the mediator of the new testament and to the sprinkling of blood which speaketh better than that of Abel.” (Heb. 12:24)

At the instant of Christ’s death, the sacrificed Christ replaced the animal sacrifices, baptism replaced circumcision, the Melchisedec priesthood (the Christian priesthood) replaced the Levitical priesthood, the pope replaced the high priest, the Christian hierarchy replaced the Levitical hierarchy, and Christianity replaced Judaism. And when Christ rose from the dead, the Lord’s Day replaced the Sabbath Day. And, after some time had passed, all of the Old Covenant

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<sup>1</sup> RJMI’s Briefs are Long Commentaries contained in the end of *The Catholic Bible*, revised by RJMI.

disciplinary laws were eventually abolished. However, the Old Testament's dogmatic laws remained in effect because dogmatic laws can never be abolished or modified because they are infallible truths regarding faith and morals.

There was a period of time in which the abolished Old Covenant sacrifices, rituals, and disciplinary laws were allowed to be observed without sinning. Even though these things were dead and no longer necessary for salvation, they were not deadly to the souls of those who observed them. Thus they were dead but not deadly. Once the gospel was sufficiently promulgated, these things could no longer be observed without committing sin; at that point, these things became not only dead but also deadly (to the souls of those who observe them). St. Augustine aptly refers to this transition period as a time when the Old Covenant rituals, disciplinary laws, Levitical priesthood, and Levitical hierarchy were being buried with honor. And he says that the time when the transition period ended and thus these things could no longer be observed without sinning are to be compared to a buried body that if dug up is defiled:

St. Augustine, *Letter 82*, to apostate Jerome, 405: "15. I maintain, therefore, that circumcision and other things of this kind were by means of what is called the Old Testament given to the Jews with divine authority as signs of future things which were to be fulfilled in Christ... [Therefore] circumcision and [the] other...rites were not to be imposed upon the Gentiles. [However,] the compliance with them to which the Jews had been accustomed was not to be prohibited in such a way as to give the impression that it was worthy of abhorrence and condemnation. Therefore slowly and by degrees all this observance of these types was to vanish away through the power of the sound preaching of the truth of the grace of Christ, to which alone believers would be taught to ascribe their justification and salvation and not to those types and shadows of things which till then had been future... The toleration, for the time, of their continuing to observe these was enough to declare their excellence as things which, though they were to be given up, were not like the worship of idols, worthy of abhorrence; but they were not to be imposed upon others lest they should be thought necessary either as means or as conditions of salvation..."

"20. ...How much more impossible for those ordinances which were merely typical, circumcision and the rest, which were destined to be abolished when the revelation of grace became more widely known, to be the means of justifying any man! Nevertheless they were not on this ground to be immediately shunned with abhorrence, like the diabolical impieties of heathenism,...but to be for a little while tolerated, especially among those who joined the Christian Church from that nation to whom these ordinances had been given. When, however, they had been, as it were, honourably buried, they were thenceforward to be finally abandoned by all Christians..."

"16. ...What objection can there be to my affirming that the Apostle Paul and other sound and faithful Christians were bound sincerely to declare the worth of these old observances by occasionally honouring them, lest it should be thought that these institutions, originally full of prophetic significance, and cherished sacredly by their most pious forefathers, were to be abhorred by their posterity as profane inventions of the devil? For now, when the faith had come, which, previously foreshadowed by these ceremonies, was revealed after the death and resurrection of the Lord, they became, so far as their office was concerned, defunct. But just as it is seemly that the bodies of the deceased be carried honourably to the grave by their kindred, so was it fitting that these rites should be removed in a manner worthy of their origin and history, and this not with pretence of respect, but as a religious duty, instead of being forsaken at once, or cast forth to be torn in pieces by the reproaches of their enemies, as by the teeth of dogs. To carry the illustration further, if now any Christian (though he may have been converted from Judaism) were proposing to imitate the apostles in the observance of these ceremonies, like one who disturbs the ashes of those who rest, he would be not piously performing his part in the obsequies, but impiously violating the sepulchre."

Hence St. Paul and other Jewish Christians still observed some of the old defunct (dead) ordinances to show that these ordinances were good and holy and to mingle with unbelieving

Jews in order to try to convert them, to bring them out of the synagogue and into the Christian Church.

For example, after the Council of Jerusalem in AD 50 decreed that Gentile converts did not have to get circumcised, St. Paul circumcised the Christian Gentile St. Timothy in AD 51. But he did not do so as a necessity of St. Timothy's salvation but so that St. Timothy could enter the Temple and synagogues and mingle with the unbelieving Jews in order to try to convert them:

“And he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, there was a certain disciple there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman that believed; but his father was a Gentile. To this man the brethren that were in Lystra and Iconium gave a good testimony. Him Paul would have to go along with him: and taking him he circumcised him, because of the Jews who were in those places. For they all knew that his father was a Gentile.” (Acts 16:1-3)

*Catholic Commentary* on Acts 16:3: “**Circumcised him:** The Old Covenant rituals and disciplinary laws though now no longer obligatory were for a time observed by the Christian Jews to bury, as it were, the synagogue with honor. But they could not look upon circumcision as necessary for salvation. St. Paul circumcised Timothy not to obstruct the conversion of the Jews and because it was still lawful to observe the Jewish ceremonies, though the obligation of keeping the old law had ceased. This St. Paul did in order to gain the Jews and make Timothy acceptable to them. To the Jew, says he, I became a Jew that I might gain the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20). While he refused to circumcise Titus in order to vindicate the Christian's independence of the Mosaic ceremonies (Gal. 2:1-5), he now submits to the observance of them by circumcising St. Timothy to shew there is nothing of itself bad in them; and that they might without crime be practised till time by degrees had abolished them. (St. Augustine, *Letter 82*, to Jerome).”

We can then take in correct context St. Paul's following words that he wrote in AD 57:

“Is any man called being circumcised? let him not procure uncircumcision. Is any man called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing: but the observance of the commandments of God.” (1 Cor. 7:18-19)

In context, then, when St. Paul tells Christians who are uncircumcised not to get circumcised, he means as if it were necessary for salvation. We know this because St. Paul circumcised St. Timothy, a Christian Gentile, as recorded in Acts 16. And in AD 58, St. Paul, according to the dead Mosaic laws, was purified and prepared to have an animal sacrifice offered for him in the Temple, as recorded in Acts 21. But he did not do so as a necessity for salvation.

The reason St. Paul refused to circumcise St. Titus was because some Jews tried to impose circumcision on the Gentiles as if it were necessary for salvation. This occurred in AD 51:

“Then, after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. I went up by revelation, and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. But neither Titus who was with me, being a Gentile, was compelled to be circumcised. But because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into servitude, to them we yielded not by subjection, no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (Gal. 2:1-5)

Again from his *Letter 82* to the apostate Jerome, St. Augustine aptly says the following regarding St. Paul's circumcising St. Timothy but not St. Titus:

St. Augustine, *Letter 82*, to apostate Jerome, 405: “12. For this reason also he circumcised Timothy, lest to the Jews, and especially to his relations by the mother's side, it should seem that the Gentiles who had believed in Christ abhorred circumcision as they abhorred the worship of idols; whereas the former was appointed by God, and the latter invented by Satan. Again, he did not circumcise

Titus, lest he should give occasion to those who said that believers could not be saved without circumcision, and who, in order to deceive the Gentiles, openly declared that this was the view held by Paul. This is plainly enough intimated by himself, when he says: ‘But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.’ Here we see plainly what he perceived them to be eagerly watching for, and why it was that he did not do in the case of Titus as he had done in the case of Timothy, and as he might otherwise have done in the exercise of that liberty, by which he had shown that these observances were neither to be demanded as necessary to salvation, nor denounced as unlawful.”

Some Christian Jews falsely accused St. Paul of commanding the Jewish converts *not* to circumcise their children. To refute them, St. Paul and four other Christian Jews observed the dead Mosaic laws of purification before entering the Temple and were prepared to have the customary oblation (animal sacrifice) offered for them in order to prove they did not condemn the Mosaic laws and that they could still be observed as long as Christians did not observe them as a necessity for salvation. However, they were kicked out of the Temple before the oblation could be offered for them:

“But they hearing it, glorified God, and said to him: Thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews that have believed: and they are all zealous for the law. Now they have heard of thee that thou teachest those Jews, who are among the Gentiles, to depart from Moses: saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, nor walk according to the custom. What then is to be done? The multitude must needs come together, for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men who have a vow on them. Take them and go and purify thyself with them and pay the expenses along with them as they shall shave their heads that every one may know that what is said against thee is false and that thou fulfillst and observest the law. But as touching the Gentiles that believe, we have written, decreeing that they should only refrain themselves from that which has been offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day being purified with them, entered into the temple, giving notice of the accomplishment of the days of purification, until an oblation should be offered for every one of them. But when the seven days were drawing to an end, those Jews that were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands upon him, crying out: Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and moreover hath brought in Gentiles into the temple, and hath violated this holy place. For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.” (Acts 21:20-29) (See Acts 24:17-18.)

*Catholic Commentary* on Acts 21:24: “**Observest the law:** All the observations of the law were now in themselves dead and unprofitable, yet till further propagation of the Gospel, they were not damnable to the keepers, nor offensive to God, but might be observed even of the Christian Jews, and for fear of scandalizing the weak of that nation, newly converted or prone to receive the faith, the Apostles by God’s suggestion did think it good to observe them as occasion required.”

*Catholic Commentary* on Acts 21:21: “**To forsake Moses:** To depart or apostatize from Moses and the law. This is more than was true. For St. Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16) and did not absolutely hinder converts who had been Jews, from practicing the Jewish ceremonies. There is a manifest falsity in this accusation against St. Paul. He had never commanded or advised the Jews, to whom he had preached, to renounce the law, abandon the ceremonies of Moses, or reject the ancient customs of the nation. He had never hindered any one from following in this respect the bias of his inclinations. He had indeed defended the liberty of the

converts from these ceremonies; he had taught that Christ had taken away the necessity of this yoke; but he left them at liberty still to carry it if they pleased. For these things were not then to be sought after as necessary, nor yet to be condemned as sacrilegious. The law of Moses at that time was dead but not deadly. (St. Augustine, *Letter 82*) These considerations will sufficiently explain the apostle's motive for submitting on this occasion to one of their ceremonies. He became all to all, that he might gain all to Christ."

*Catholic Commentary* on Acts 21:23: "**Who have a vow upon them:** On which account they will have sacrifices offered for them in the temple."

### *When the abolished Old Covenant laws were dead and deadly*

After some time had passed, when the gospel was sufficiently promulgated, the transition period ended and thus all Christian Jews were no longer allowed to observe any of the Old Covenant rituals and all but two of the Old Covenant's disciplinary laws. Hence these laws were now not only dead but also deadly. The two Old Covenant disciplinary laws that banned eating blood and things strangled remained in force and thus were not abolished. It was not until quite some time later that they too were abolished. Even though the Council of Florence was invalid and heretical, it nevertheless teaches the truth in this regard:

Invalid and heretical *Council of Florence*, 1442: "It firmly believes, professes, and teaches that the legal prescriptions of the old Testament or the Mosaic law, which are divided into ceremonies, holy sacrifices and sacraments, because they were instituted to signify something in the future, although they were adequate for the divine cult of that age, once our lord Jesus Christ who was signified by them had come, came to an end and the sacraments of the new Testament had their beginning. Whoever, after the passion, places his hope in the legal prescriptions and submits himself to them as necessary for salvation and as if faith in Christ without them could not save, sins mortally. It does not deny that from Christ's passion until the promulgation of the gospel they could have been retained, provided they were in no way believed to be necessary for salvation. But it asserts that after the promulgation of the gospel they cannot be observed without loss of everlasting salvation. Therefore it denounces all who after that time observe circumcision, the sabbath, and other legal prescriptions as strangers to the faith of Christ and unable to share in everlasting salvation unless they recoil at some time from these errors. Therefore it strictly orders all who glory in the name of Christian, not to practise circumcision either before or after baptism, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of everlasting salvation."(Sess. 11: Bull of Union with the Copts.)

In some countries, Catholics are circumcised for health reasons. This does not violate this law because they are circumcised for health reasons and not for religious reasons and thus not by a religious rite. However, it is nevertheless a scandal and can be a sin if Catholics do not do their best to legally evade the law that they must get circumcised for health reasons. (See RJMI article *Circumcised Catholics*.)

### The transition period most probably ended when the Temple fell in AD 70

The most probable opinion as to when the transition period ended was when the Second Temple fell in AD 70. The reason is that one would expect a manifest sign from God to announce the end of the transition period. And what better sign than the fall of the Temple when the Old Covenant rituals and other rites that had to be observed in the Temple, such as the animal sacrifices, could no longer be observed. And the Levitical priesthood and hierarchy were taken into exile and thus dispersed from Israel. And the great majority of the apostate Jews were killed or taken into exile:

*Catholic Commentary* on Zach. 11:14: “After the destruction of the temple, the Jewish ceremonies were no longer observed or tolerated in the Church, as they had been in order that the synagogue might be buried with honour.”

The transition period was definitely ended by at least the 4th century

Testimony from the Church Fathers and others prove that by at least the 4th century the transition period had already ended. (See St. Augustine’s *Letter 82*, as quoted above.)

*The Old Covenant ended and thus was not transformed*

The Old Covenant ended and was replaced by the New Covenant. Hence the Old Covenant did not transform into the New Covenant, like a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. If it did, then the Paschal Lamb under the Old Covenant would have been transformed into Christ (the Paschal Lamb of the New Covenant) and thus Christ would have been an animal that was transformed into a human. Instead, Christ replaced the Old Covenant Paschal Lamb. The sacrifice of an animal during the Old Covenant was replaced by the sacrifice of the God-man during the New Covenant. Hence one must not say that the Old Covenant is in the New Covenant, or that the Old Covenant was transformed into the New Covenant. Rather, the Old Covenant ended, is dead. It died when Christ died, and it was replaced with the New Covenant. Jesus compared those who try to mix the Old Covenant with the New Covenant to those who put new wine into old bottles. He said,

“And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: otherwise the wine will burst the bottles, and both the wine will be spilled and the bottles will be lost. But new wine must be put into new bottles.” (Mk. 2:22)

*Catholic Commentary* on Mt. 9:16-17: “**Raw cloth... new wine**: This shows that the Apostles being hereafter to be replenished with newness of grace, ought not now to be bound to the old observances. By the old garment and old skins, we must understand the Scribes and Pharisees; and by the piece of new cloth and new wine, the Gospel precepts, which the Jews were not able to bear, so the rent was made worse. Something such the Galatians sought to do, to mix the precepts of the Law with the Gospel, and to put new wine into old skins. The word of the Gospel is therefore to be poured into the Apostles rather than into the Scribes and Pharisees, who, corrupted by the traditions of the elders, were unable to preserve the purity of Christ’s precepts.”

Beware, then, of the heresy which teaches that the Old Covenant still exists either by itself or within the New Covenant era. And beware of the heresy that the Christ-denying Jews are under any kind of covenant with God. There is only one covenant with God in effect during the New Testament era, and that is the New Covenant.

*For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men*

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