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Isaiah 66:23: Does Sabbath To Sabbath Require A Future Temple And A Revived Old Covenant?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Isaiah 66:23 is often used to argue that Sabbath observance will return in a future new heavens and new earth. Because Isaiah says worship will occur "from sabbath to sabbath," some futurists conclude that the Old Covenant Sabbath, a rebuilt temple, and even sacrifices must exist again.

† But that interpretation creates a serious covenant problem. The New Testament teaches that the Old Covenant became

obsolete, its priesthood changed, its sacrifices were fulfilled in Christ, and God's dwelling place is now His people (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

† Isaiah described New Covenant realities through language his original audience understood. Sabbath, new moon, Jerusalem, priests, sacrifices, and temple language belonged to Israel's covenant world. The prophetic imagery doesn't require the literal restoration of that covenant system.

† Isaiah 66 itself points beyond exclusive worship at an earthly temple. God declares that heaven is His throne and earth His footstool, then asks what kind of house Israel could build for Him (Isaiah 66:1-2).

† The question isn't whether Isaiah used Sabbath language. He clearly did. The question is whether the New Testament teaches that the Old Covenant Sabbath and temple system would someday be restored after Christ fulfilled them.

Isaiah 66:22-23

"For just as the new heavens and the new earth, Which I make, will endure before Me," declares the Lord, "So will your descendants and your name endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from Sabbath to Sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord.

† Notice that Isaiah didn't mention only Sabbaths. He also said "from one new moon to another." If the Sabbath must be restored literally because it's mentioned here, consistency would require the restoration of Israel's new moon observances as well.

† Paul placed new moons and Sabbaths together when warning believers against being judged regarding these Old Covenant observances. He called them a shadow, while the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

† Isaiah's emphasis is continual and universal worship. "All flesh" coming before God presents worship extending beyond Old Covenant Israel to the nations, something Isaiah repeatedly anticipated (Isaiah 56:6-8; Isaiah 60:1-3).

† The new heavens and new earth aren't presented as a return

to Moses. They're the promised New Covenant world in which God's people remain before Him and worship isn't restricted to the former covenant order.

Colossians 2:16-17

Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day- things which are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

† Paul gives us an inspired New Covenant explanation of the very categories Isaiah used. Feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths belonged to the shadow system pointing toward Christ.

† Paul didn't tell believers that these shadows would disappear temporarily and then return in a future new heavens and new earth. He directed believers away from the shadows and toward Christ, who is their substance.

† Restoring the Old Covenant Sabbath as a required institution in the new creation would move backward from substance to shadow.

† Isaiah 66:23 must therefore be understood consistently with the apostolic explanation of new moons and Sabbaths, rather than interpreting Paul through a literalistic reading that recreates the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† Hebrews doesn't describe the Old Covenant as waiting for a future restoration. It describes it as old, aging, and near disappearance in the first century.

† The writer was living during the covenant transition before Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in AD 70. The physical temple was still standing, but the covenant it represented had already been made obsolete through Christ (Hebrews 8:6-12).

† The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple brought the visible Old Covenant order to its final historical end. A future restoration of that covenant system would contradict the direction of Hebrews.

† The new heavens and new earth can't represent the resurrection of a covenant that Scripture says became obsolete.

Hebrews 7:12

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

† A rebuilt Old Covenant temple would require more than a building. The biblical temple system included a priesthood, sacrifices, an altar, ceremonial regulations, and covenant laws governing worship.

† Hebrews says the priesthood changed, and with that change came a change of law. Jesus is our permanent High Priest, not according to the Levitical order, but according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17-24).

† Returning to a Levitical temple system would reverse the movement from the temporary priesthood to Christ's superior priesthood.

† Isaiah's prophetic language can't be interpreted in a way that overturns what Hebrews explicitly teaches about the priesthood and the law.

Hebrews 10:11-14

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

† The contrast couldn't be stronger. Old Covenant priests repeatedly offered sacrifices, but Christ offered one sacrifice for sins and sat down.

† A future temple with restored animal sacrifices would have no redemptive purpose. Christ's sacrifice doesn't need

supplementation, repetition, or memorial animal offerings.

† Hebrews consistently moves from the temporary to the permanent, from repeated sacrifices to Christ's finished sacrifice, and from the earthly system to the heavenly reality (Hebrews 9:11-12; Hebrews 10:19-22).

† The new creation doesn't move God's people backward to animal blood, Levitical priests, and an earthly sanctuary. It brings God's people into the completed reality those things anticipated.

John 4:21-24

Jesus said to her, "Believe Me, woman, that a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

† Jesus directly addressed the location of worship. He didn't point toward a future age when worship would again center on a temple in Jerusalem.

† He announced the opposite. The hour was coming when worship wouldn't be centered on Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim.

† This is crucial for Isaiah 66:23. Isaiah pictured "all flesh" coming to worship before God, while Jesus revealed the New Covenant reality behind that prophetic picture. True worship isn't geographically centered on an earthly temple.

† The worldwide worship Isaiah anticipated is fulfilled in people worshipping the Father in spirit and truth wherever they are.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new

covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer didn't tell believers they were waiting for a future earthly Jerusalem to become the center of worship. He said they had already come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem.

† This Jerusalem belongs to Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant. The movement is from earthly types to heavenly realities, not from heavenly realities back to earthly types.

† Isaiah's new creation promises find their covenant fulfillment in this New Covenant order where God's people have access to Him through Christ.

† Rebuilding an Old Covenant center of worship would miss the greater Jerusalem to which believers have already come.

Revelation 21:1-3

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† John's new heaven and new earth imagery draws directly from Isaiah's prophetic language, but John identifies the holy city as New Jerusalem and describes her as a bride.

† The dwelling place of God isn't presented as a rebuilt stone temple. God dwells with His people.

† The bride imagery confirms that this is covenantal language. The New Jerusalem represents God's redeemed covenant people in union with Christ (Revelation 21:9-10).

† Isaiah's promise reaches its goal not in the reconstruction of the old order, but in God's presence with His people under the New Covenant.

Revelation 21:22-24

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

† This directly answers the claim that Isaiah's new heavens and new earth require a rebuilt temple. When John describes New Jerusalem, he specifically says, "I saw no temple therein."

† There couldn't be a clearer contrast. The old Jerusalem had a physical temple. New Jerusalem doesn't need one because God and the Lamb are its temple.

† Isaiah 66:23 therefore can't be used to establish a future rebuilt temple when Revelation's new creation vision explicitly declares that there is no temple in the city.

† The nations walking in its light also corresponds beautifully with Isaiah's vision of "all flesh" worshipping before God (Isaiah 66:23).

Historical References

† Josephus described the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 in *The Wars of the Jews*. His account records the catastrophic end of the temple-centered Jewish order that had dominated Jerusalem.

† Eusebius later connected Jerusalem's devastation with Jesus' warnings concerning the city and recorded the tradition that believers departed Jerusalem before the final catastrophe in *Ecclesiastical History*.

† These historical witnesses don't establish doctrine, Scripture does. They do confirm the historical setting in which Jerusalem and its temple system came to their devastating end.

† Nothing in the New Testament tells believers to expect that destroyed Old Covenant system to be rebuilt and reinstituted as God's future covenant order.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to travel to Jerusalem, worship in a rebuilt

temple, observe new moons, or return to the Old Covenant Sabbath system to worship God.

† Our access to God isn't through a building, Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifice, calendar, or geographical location. Our access is through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18).

† Isaiah's "from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another" points to the continuing worship of God in the New Covenant creation, not the resurrection of the covenant that Christ fulfilled.

† We live in the reality to which the shadows pointed. Christ is our High Priest, His sacrifice is complete, His people are His dwelling place, and New Jerusalem is the covenant city of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16; Hebrews 12:22-24).

† Isaiah's prophecy isn't telling us to look forward to another temple. Revelation tells us where the prophecy leads, "I saw no temple therein." God and the Lamb are its temple.

† The new heavens and new earth aren't a return to Moses. They're the New Covenant reality established through Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does Isaiah 66:23 teach that Christians will observe the Old Covenant Sabbath forever?

A: No. Isaiah uses both new moon and Sabbath language to describe worship in the new creation. Paul identifies new moons and Sabbaths as shadows whose substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

Q: If Sabbath is literal in Isaiah 66:23, wouldn't the new moon also have to be literal?

A: Yes, that's the consistency problem with that interpretation. Isaiah places them together, and Paul also places feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths together as shadows pointing toward Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

Q: Does Isaiah 66 require a rebuilt temple?

A: No. Revelation's description of the New Jerusalem explicitly says there is no temple in it because God and the Lamb are its

temple (Revelation 21:22).

Q: Will Old Covenant sacrifices return?

A: Scripture gives no need for their return. Christ offered one sacrifice for sins and perfected His people through His completed offering (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Q: Where do believers worship God now?

A: Jesus said true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth, rather than worship being centered on Jerusalem or another sacred geographical location (John 4:21-24).

Q: What does "all flesh" worshipping God communicate?

A: It communicates the universal reach of New Covenant worship beyond national Israel. God's worshippers are gathered from the nations and worship Him through Christ (Isaiah 66:23; Revelation 21:24).

Q: Are believers still waiting to come to New Jerusalem?

A: Hebrews told first-century believers that they had come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, through Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: What then is the main point of Isaiah 66:23?

A: The point isn't the restoration of Old Covenant shadows. It's the enduring worship of God in His promised new creation, where worship extends to all flesh and finds its reality in Christ.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Isaiah 66:22-23; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 10:11-14; John 4:21-24; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:1-3; Revelation 21:22-24

† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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