

# NAILED TO THE CROSS—COL. 2:13-17

by Avram Yehoshua

## [The Seed of Abraham](#)

Three verses, Colossians 2:14, 16-17, are interpreted by Christians as proof that “the Law was nailed to the Cross” (v. 14), and that they “don’t have to keep the 7th day Sabbath or the Feasts of Israel” (v. 16) or anything of Mosaic Law that isn’t moral, as they misunderstand morality,<sup>1</sup> because Mosaic Law was only a “shadows of things to come” (v. 17), meaning Christ. Therefore, once He came the shadows weren’t needed anymore. In point of fact though, the three verses reveal that the Colossians were keeping Torah (Mosaic Law) as God’s holy *lifestyle* for them and consequently, for all Christians.

The following two translations of vv. 13-14 are from the New King James Version and the New American Standard Bible. They will offer a small cross-section of what the context for v. 14 is and what pastors interpret as “the Law,” from two respected English Bibles:

NKJV:

<sup>13</sup>“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, *having forgiven you all trespasses,*

<sup>14</sup>having wiped out the *handwriting of requirements* that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has *taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross.*” (Colossians 2:13-14)

NASB:

<sup>13</sup>“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, *having forgiven us all our transgressions,*

<sup>14</sup>having canceled out *the certificate of debt* consisting of *decrees*<sup>2</sup> against us, which was hostile to us; and He has *taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross.*” (Colossians 2:13-14)

At first glance it would seem that Paul is speaking of the Law with “the handwriting of requirements” that were against us, and the NASB speaking of the “decrees” that were against us. Verse 13 speaks of the trespasses or sins of the Colossians being forgiven and the very next phrase in v. 14 continues with that thought of forgiveness (“wiped out,” “canceled”). Verse 13 makes up one half of Paul’s whole sentence or thought, the other half finishing in v. 14, whose first of three essential parts say, “having wiped out the *handwriting of requirements* that was against us” (NKJV), which we’ll see is not a good translation. The NASB does much better, saying, “having canceled out *the certificate of debt* consisting of decrees against us” (NASB). Both of these phrases in *italics* are translations of the same Greek word, χειρόγραφον (*kairo-*

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<sup>1</sup> Morality or ethics is the understanding of what is right and what is wrong. God places various penalties for what He says are right and wrong, which we see in breaking His laws (i.e. Mosaic Law), such as death or lashings, etc. In Exodus 35:1-3, breaking God’s 7th day Sabbath incurs the penalty of death, while lying, rightly seen as a moral sin by all Christians, can be forgiven (cf. Lev. 6:1-6). It should be clear to see that in God’s way of thinking, breaking His Sabbath is a much greater sin than lying, because of God’s punishment of death, and so while Christians negate the Lord’s Sabbath (Mk. 2:28), saying that Mosaic Law was “nailed to the Cross,” God still sees it as a grievous sin to not keep it holy, but to desecrate it. See [Sunday—The Catholic Sabbath](#). Mosaic Law is God’s Way to walk out a Christian’s faith in His Son Jesus (cf. Dt. 12:28).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Accordance Bible Software), para. 2,958. The Greek word for “decrees” is δόγμα; *dogma* and although it can mean a teaching or an ordinance, in this case it must mean a judgment (of God) against our sins because of what *kairo’grafone* means.

'*grafone*). Simply put, a *kairo 'grafone* is an IOU. For instance, in ancient Greece a man who was owed money by someone who didn't pay him would stand in the *middle or midst* of the courtroom, *between* the judge and the accused, and he would present the judge with his IOU; his *kairo 'grafone*—the written record of the accused debtor's *financial* indebtedness and obligation to pay him by a certain date, accusing the debtor of not paying him, and therefore, being guilty.

The NASB more accurately speaks of it as *the certificate of debt*. Obviously, this is not the Law of Moses, for Mosaic Law is never called a “certificate of debt” or even the less accurate and more anti-Law bias, the “handwriting of requirements.” Yet many Christians take the phrases to mean the *Law* and that it was nailed to the Cross.

Note also that the last Greek word for “way,” translated in the phrase, “taken it out of the way,” in both the Textus Receptus (the basis for the KJV and much of the NKJV, and the Nestle-Aland Greek text) the basis for the NASB, etc., is μέσος (*mesos*). Both *Thayer* and *BDAG* translate it as *middle*,<sup>3</sup> which is *where* the man with the IOU stood in the courtroom—in the middle (or midst) between the judge and the accused. In other words, a better translation of the Greek texts, which are identical, would be, “and He has taken it out of the middle,” which is where the man stood with the IOU. The IOU has been taken out from the place where it accused us of our sins, having all our sins written on it. Paul uses *kairo 'grafone* in a spiritual way, to illustrate the written record of our *sin indebtedness* to God. This *kairo 'grafone* was then nailed to the Cross—not Mosaic Law. Our sin indebtedness was nailed to the Cross and nullified “in Christ Jesus.”

Samuele Bacchiocchi sees that our sins were nailed to the Cross.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of the *kairo 'grafone* as the NKJV does, as the “handwriting of requirements that was against us,” is wrong because it intimates the divine IOU was Mosaic Law (its “requirements”), which is impossible, when in fact the handwriting was God writing our sins in His Book, and these accusing us of breaking God's Law. Bacchiocchi states,

“Most commentators interpret the *cheirographon*” (Bacchiocchi's way of writing *kairo 'grafone* in English) “either as the ‘certificate of indebtedness,’ resulting

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<sup>3</sup> Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Accordance Bible Software), para. 6,319. The Greek word can also mean “middle” or “midst,” and in this case it's the position where the man with the IOU stood: in the middle or midst of the courtroom.

Walter Bauer, augmented by William F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (third edition, 2001; Accordance Bible Software), pp. 634-635. “pert. to a middle position spatially or temporally, *middle, in the middle.*” Bauer equates the Greek word in the Septuagint with מִתְּוֹךְ, which also means: “in the midst.”

<sup>4</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#) (Rome, Italy: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 208, note 904. Charles Masson, “holds that ‘one must admit with Schlatter, Dibelius, Lohmeyer, and Percy that the ‘chirograph’ is a certificate acknowledging the debt resulting from our transgressions. The image derives from a rabbinic concept: God—or his angels—record in the books the report of the good and evil actions of men. To this very day, in the prayer ‘Avinu Malkenu,’ prayer for the ten penitential days that begins the (Jewish) New Year, the Jews say: ‘On account of Thy great mercy, erase all the documents that accuse us’” (Dibelius, Lohmeyer, p. 116, n. 1, Str. Billerbeck).’ Historically this view was held by Origen, *In Genesim homilia* 13, PG 12, 235; Augustine (quotes Chrysostom) *Contra Julianum* 1, 6, 26, PL 44, 658; *Super Epistola ad Colossenses* 2, lectio III. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ‘The Second Chapter of Colossians,’ *Review and Expositor* 70 (1973): 471: The ‘bond’ is an I.O.U., a signed statement of indebtedness; if it applies to the Jew through his acceptance of the Law, it also applies to the Gentile who recognizes his obligation to what he knows of the will of God. It means, in the picturesque paraphrase of Moule, ‘*I owe obedience to God's will, signed Mankind.*’ The study of the usage of *cheirographon* in Jewish and Jewish-Christian sources has helped to clarify that the term was used to describe the ‘celestial book’ where sins are recorded. The first inkling of this interpretation came over fifty years ago when P. Batiffol published *Les Odes de Salomon*, 1911, pp. 81-85. J. Daniélou found confirmation for Batiffol's suggestion in the Gospel of Truth. A. J. Banstra (p. 203, n. 14; PDF), pp. 159, reaffirms that the *cheirographon* must be a book in which sins are recorded.”

Avram adds, as for the “Celestial Book” of God's, see Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; 139:16; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Phil. 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:8, 12, 15; 21:27; 22:18-19.

from our transgressions, or a ‘book containing the record of sin,’ used for the condemnation of mankind. Both renderings, which are substantially similar, can be supported from rabbinic and apocalyptic literature.”<sup>5</sup>

Yeshua (Jesus of Nazareth) took our IOU out of the midst or middle of the heavenly Court by His sacrificial and substitutionary death, and nailed our certificate or record of all our sins to the Cross, cancelling them. Another way of understanding what happened is that all our sins, all our sin indebtedness to the Father was placed upon Yeshua (Isaiah 53:6; 2nd Cor. 5:21), who literally was nailed to the Cross.

Satan, the Accuser, has no lawful right or authority to accuse us anymore before God. He, and all our sins, have been taken out of the middle, out of the place of accusation, of God’s Court. We might accuse ourselves and demons might accuse us, but God will never accuse us. Yeshua has taken our sins *and* our just punishment (torture and death) upon Himself, and so we have been fully forgiven.

It should now be obvious that it wasn’t Mosaic Law that was nailed to the Cross. The Greek word for Law (*nomos*) is never mentioned in the entire Letter to the Colossians, let alone in 2:14. The Apostle Paul wasn’t speaking about the Law being nailed to the Cross, but our sins. Yet, so many Christians project “the Law” unto both the IOU (the *kairo’grafone*) and the word “it,” where Paul says, “And He has taken *it* out of the way” (KJV and NASB), due to their anti-Law bias.

The Church falsely teaches that the *χειρόγραφον* (*kairo’grafone*)<sup>6</sup> is Mosaic Law, but it’s God’s written record of our sin indebtedness to Him that would accuse us on Judgment Day (Ex. 32:32-33; Rev. 20:12) without belief in Yeshua. He took our sins, upon Himself<sup>7</sup> that we might stand before the God of Israel in Yeshua’s righteousness and Image.

The Law is made up of all the commandments, statutes and rules of Moses, not just the Ten<sup>8</sup> and so all the rules of Mosaic Law that apply to any one person is God’s New Testament lifestyle for every Christian.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 205f.

Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 1,083: “χειρόγραφον...a hand-written document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, account, record of debts (so plainly Test of Job 11:11...the account that stood against us, Col 2:14.”

Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, para. 9,884: “χειρόγραφον; cheirografon...a handwriting; what one has written with his own hand (Polybius 30, 8, 4; Dionysius Halicarnassus 5, 8; others); specifically, a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time...metaphorically, applied in Col. 2:14...to the Mosaic law, which shews men to be chargeable with offences for which they must pay the penalty.”

Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida, editors, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), p. 33.40. “χειρόγραφον...a handwritten statement, especially a record of financial accounts...but perhaps with emphasis upon the handwritten nature of the document—‘account, record of debts...he cancelled the record of our debts,’ Col 2:14.”

<sup>7</sup> “But He was pierced through for our open rebellion and He was crushed for our guilt. The chastisement (punishment) for our peace (with God) was upon Him, and by His stripes *we are healed*. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and *Yahveh has laid upon Him (the Messiah) the guilt of us all*. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” (Isaiah 53:5-7 my translation)

<sup>8</sup> See [Mosaic Law and the Ten](#). About 90% of the time, in either the Old or the New Testament, when it speaks of “Law” it means either Mosaic Law or a law of Mosaic Law, like the “law of leprosy.” Very rarely does “Law” ever speak of the Ten Commandments.

<sup>9</sup> For more on how Mosaic Law is still in effect for Christians as their lifestyle, see,

[Law 102](#),

[Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church](#),

[Hebrews and the Change of the Law](#),

We have been *forgiven* of our sins (trespasses against God and man), and the IOU that was against us, the *kairo'grafone* (the written record of our sin indebtedness) has been 'wiped out' (NKJV) or 'cancelled' (NASB), not so that we can continue to sin, but by His Blood and His Spirit, walk like He walked (1st John 2:6). Unfortunately, Christians are certain that the Law of Moses was nailed to the Cross because of what they have been taught about v. 14, and also vv. 16-17.

## Colossians 2:16-17

In Colossians 2:16-17 is another major place where Christians think they don't have to observe anything of Mosaic Law that isn't "moral." There are four points in vv. 16-17 that I'll address in order to come to a biblical understanding of what the Apostle Paul is telling the Colossians. The points are,

1. "let no one judge you,"
2. "food and drink,"
3. "a festival" or rather the Feasts of Israel, "New Moons and Sabbaths," and
4. "shadow."

Colossians 2:16-17 read:

<sup>16</sup>"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival (i.e. any Feast of Israel)<sup>10</sup> or a new moon or sabbaths, <sup>17</sup>which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (Colossians 2:16-17 NKJV)<sup>11</sup>

### *Church Interpretation of Colossians 2:16-17*

Before I explain what the Apostle Paul meant in Col. 2:16-17, I'll present the traditional Christian interpretation of it. From ancient times to the present the Church has been fairly unanimous that the two verses nullify Mosaic Law for Christians. Renowned Catholic theologian Augustine (354-430 AD) saw Colossians 2:16-17 as Paul "doing away with Sabbath and Feasts." He had the theological incompetence to teach that Jesus broke the Sabbath, but wasn't guilty of sin because "He was removing the shadows"<sup>12</sup> (Col. 2:17).

The heretical teaching of Augustine and many, many other Church leaders of antiquity, the past few hundred years and the present day is that Paul is "doing away with the Law in Col. 2:14-17. This has con-

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[Law 102](#),

[No Longer Under the Law?](#),

[Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws](#),

[Ten Ways Yeshua Fulfilled The Law](#),

[The Feasts of Israel and the Church](#),

[The Two Triangles of the NT](#),

[A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law](#), and my book,

[The Lifting of the Veil—Acts 15:20-21](#).

<sup>10</sup> The terms, festival or feast are interchangeable.

<sup>11</sup> The two Greek texts (Textus Receptus and Nestle-Aland) are identical except for the word "and" or "or" for, "in food or drink" (TR), or "in food and drink" (WH/NA).

<sup>12</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 202. Augustine, *Sermons on New Testament Lessons* 86, 3, *NPNF* 1st, VI, 515-516: "The Lord broke the Sabbath, but was not guilty...He, the Light, had come. He was removing the shadows."

tinued throughout Church History, thanks to Protestant leaders who blindly accepted, and still accept, Catholic theological tradition against Mosaic Law, which they took with them when they left the Roman Catholic Church, or even others not part of Catholicism, accepted without any critical thinking. Bacchiocchi writes of Col. 2:16-17, saying that Martin Luther,

“took up this tradition saying, ‘Here Paul *abolished* the Sabbath by name and called it a *bygone shadow* because the body, which is Christ himself, has come.’”<sup>13</sup>

John “Calvin similarly understood Colossians 2:16 to mean that ‘Christ has by his death abolished...the observance of rites.’<sup>14</sup> He explains that ‘the reason why he frees Christians from the observance of them is that they were *shadows* at a time when Christ was still, in a manner, absent.’<sup>15</sup> Calvin holds that the distinction between days,” for example, Sabbath vs the other days of the week,”

“was suitable for the Jews, that they might celebrate strictly the days that were appointed, by separating them from others. Among Christians however, such a division has ceased.”<sup>16</sup>

Rome, Luther, Calvin and most Christian theologians have projected their ant-Mosaic Law theology onto the text of Col. 2:16-17. God’s Holy Days, aside from teaching us about who the Messiah is and what He has done for us, are also designed to separate Christians from the world and their “holy” days, like Sunday, Easter and Xmas. It’s not only our faith in Jesus Christ, but also how we *walk out* that faith that separates us from the world. Irony isn’t it, that many non-Christians keep Xmas? No separation or holiness there. Bacchiocchi brings to the forefront that modern theologians follow in the footsteps of Catholicism, Luther and Calvin, writing that,

“This interpretation, which views the Sabbath in the Colossians passage as a *bygone* ceremonial *shadow* of the Jewish time before Jesus, *abolished by Christ on the cross*, has come down to our time *as the most predominant interpretation*...J. Daniélou for instance, declares:”

“St. Paul *proclaimed the end of the Sabbath* (Rom. 14:6)...a figure of the world to come. *Now this world has come*: the figure need only disappear.”<sup>17</sup>

“W. R. Nicoll similarly maintains that ‘*the unmistakable teaching*’ of Colossians

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<sup>13</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), pp. 202-203. Martin Luther, “Wider die himmlischen Propheten,” in his *Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. by Johann Georg Walch, 1890, vol. XX, col. 148. In vol. IX, col. 375 we find a similar statement: “The New Testament tells the Christian that every day is a day of celebration...That is why Paul once in a while calls to the attention of the Christians that they are not bound to any day (Gal. 4:10-11). The same is even clearer in Colossians 2:16-17. We see now that the Sabbath is done away with and the people are free from it.” For why Gal. 4:10-11 doesn’t speak of Mosaic Law or the Sabbath, see [Slavery to the Law? Gal. 4:8-11](#).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle, 1948, p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. John Pringle, 1948, p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203. J. Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy*, p. 228; Merrill F. Linger, “The Significance of the Sabbath,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123 (1966): 57, “Keeping new moons and Sabbaths, the unique and dominant feature of the *Mosaic covenant of legalism*—a pedagogue to conduct to Christ—is declared to be completely at variance with the gospel of grace (Col. 2:16-17; Gal. 4:9-10; Heb. 4:4) now that Christ has come and given us His wonderful salvation.”

See [Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws](#) for why Daniélou is wrong in citing Rom. 14:6 (above) as “proclaiming the end of the Sabbath.” Note also how Daniélou equates the Mosaic Covenant with legalism, something that God never speaks of in His Word, but is a common understanding among Christians who don’t realize that there is a vast difference between God’s holy Law and legalism.

is that ‘the obligation of the Jewish Sabbath *has passed away* as much as sacrifices and circumcision.’<sup>18</sup> P. K. Jewett likewise comments that,”

“Paul’s statement (Col. 2:16) comes as near to a demonstration as anything could, that he taught his converts *they had no obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath* of the Old Testament.”<sup>19</sup>

“C. S. Mosna concludes in a similar vein saying that,”

“according to this text (Col. 2:16-17)...the Colossians *are in danger of losing their liberty by accepting the Sabbath* precept...Among the prescriptions of the Law, *even the Sabbath rest was to be abolished.*”<sup>20</sup>

And the misunderstanding of W. Rordorf is similar:

“With regard to Gentile Christians, Paul *absolutely* refuses to countenance any longing eyes cast at the Old Testament Law: *they are free from any observance of the Law*...In particular there is never any question of them observing the Jewish Sabbath.”<sup>21</sup>

What these modern theologians say about the Sabbath is also said by them about the Feasts of Israel, New Moons, and Mosaic Law, as Rordorf and others write. All these were shadows and passed away with the coming of Christ. Most Christian pastors agree with this, and yet teach that Christians should keep Sunday, Easter and Xmas “in honor of Jesus’s Resurrection and Birth.” These “Christian holy days” are ceremonies first seen in paganism, a thousand years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, honoring the pagan Christ, which each ancient nation had. Paganism is where the Roman Catholic Church got Sunday, Easter and Xmas from, and consequently, where Protestants, Anabaptists, Pentecostals and Charismatics, etc., get them from.

It’s shameful, because there isn’t a single Scripture which states that we should celebrate or keep any of those three days. *Sola Scriptural*, is Latin and means, *only Scripture*. Only Scripture is divine and able to reveal God’s Will for us. This was the biblical motto of the early Protestants, yet they failed to live up to their motto when it came to Mosaic Law as God’s New Testament lifestyle. Instead they chose “to honor” Jesus through pagan days and pagan ways (see Dt. 12:28-32).<sup>22</sup> Christians who believe that Jesus broke the Sabbath because He “worked” on the Sabbath in healing Jewish people, place themselves in the Camp

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 203. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Epistle to the Colossians, The Expositor’s Bible*, 1908, p. 231; A. S. Peake, *The Epistle to the Colossians, The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 1942, p. 531, similarly comments on Col. 2:17, saying: “The Sabbath is placed on the same footing as the others, and Paul therefore commits himself to the principle that a Christian is not to be censured for its non-observance.” See [Mosaic Sacrifice in the New Testament](#) to understand that animal sacrifice did not stop or pass away at the Cross, and subsequently, neither did the Sabbath or Mosaic Law.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-204. P. K. Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, p. 45, fn. 20; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon, New Testament Commentary*, 1965, p. 124, comments on the text by raising the following rhetorical question: “What justification could there be for imposing upon converts from the Gentile world the observance of the Jewish Sabbath, when the Bringer of eternal rest is urging every one to come unto him (Matt. 11:28-29; cf. Heb. 4:8, 14)?” Bacchiocchi retorts, “This argument fails to convince because, as we have shown in Chapter II, Christ by fulfilling the Messianic typology of the Sabbath did not annul its function, but enriched it, making the day the fitting memorial of the blessings of salvation.” Note also, that if the Sabbath is “Jewish,” so is Passover and Pentecost. See [Pentecost—Shavu’ot](#) for why Pentecost is a Mosaic holy day that God gave to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 204. C. S. Mosna, *Storia della domenica*, pp. 184, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. W. Rordorf, *Sunday*, p. 138; cf. also his article “Le Dimanche, jour du culte et jour du repos dans l’èglise primitive,” *Lex Orandi* 39, 1965, p. 109, where he states: ““The literal observance of the Sabbath...was only a shadow of things to come. Its fulfilment is now present in the person of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:17);” the same view is expressed by P. Massi, *La Domenica*, pp. 22-23.”

<sup>22</sup> See [Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church](#) and [Hebrews and the Change of the Law](#) and [Law 102](#).

of the Pharisees, who also accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.<sup>23</sup> That's not a good Camp to be in. If Jesus sinned He would have been a sinner and His sacrifice of no effect upon Mankind for salvation. Some say that Jesus did sin by breaking the Sabbath, but because Jesus was the Son of God He could sin and it wouldn't apply to Him, but this reasoning is extremely faulty. Scripture declares that Jesus never sinned.<sup>24</sup> Yet, if He had sinned his deity would have done nothing to negate Him from being a sinner.

## *Let No One Judge You*

In Colossians 2:16 Paul tells the Colossian Christians that they shouldn't let anyone *judge* them (condemn them and/or determine for them) as to *how they should keep* the Feasts of Israel, New Moons and Sabbaths. The Apostle *never* says that they shouldn't keep them (cf. 1st Cor. 5:6-8 where Paul exhorts the Corinthians to become unleavened bread, "as they are meant to be," and to "keep the Feast" of Unleavened Bread). Also, v. 16 is very strange *if Sunday and Easter had already become the "new Sabbath"* and the day for celebrating the Savior's Resurrection. Why are these Colossians not told to **stop** keeping the Sabbath, etc., and to keep Sunday and Easter? Colossians was written more than 30 years after the Resurrection and the Church teaches that these new days came in right after the Resurrection, and that Mosaic Law was nullified at the Cross, yet here in Colossians we find them keeping the Feasts of Israel and the Sabbath of Mosaic Law.

The Apostle *never* speaks of keeping Sunday or Easter, either here in Colossians *or any other Letter that he writes*.<sup>25</sup> The reason why Paul doesn't speak about the three Christian "holy" days (Sunday, Easter and Xmas) is because they don't come into the Church until after all the Apostles are dead. This way the Apostles couldn't address those issues. Satan is not stupid. In 120 AD the Roman Catholic Church threw out Mosaic Law and brought in pagan Days and pagan Ways.<sup>26</sup> Paul, telling the Colossians not to let anyone *judge* them or determine for them *how* they were to celebrate God's holy Days (i.e. in Gnostic ways) does not mean that Paul is coming against the Feasts of Israel or the Sabbath, etc. Simply put, the Colossians weren't to allow their Gnostic Christian brethren to determine *how* they were to keep the Feasts of Israel, New Moons and the Sabbath, or when they could eat and drink.

## *Food and Drink*

All the Colossian Christians had grown up and been pagan Gentiles before becoming Christians and so they were susceptible and vulnerable to the heresies of Gnosticism concerning God's will for their lives, salvation and eternal life. Bacchiocchi writes about the background to Col. 2:16-17, speaking of the Gnostic problems that Paul addressed in chapters one and two:

The "cryptic allusions to such concepts as 'tradition–*paradosis*' (2:8), 'fullness–*pleroma*' (1:9; 2:9-10), 'philosophy–*philosophia*' (2:8), 'eating and drinking–*brosei, posei*' (2:16),

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; the Jewish man with the withered hand. Luke 13:10-17; the Jewish woman 'bent over' for 18 years. John 5:1-18; the Jewish invalid at Bethesda. John 9:1-41; the Jewish man born blind. See also Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:33-37; the Jewish demoniac in the synagogue, and Luke 14:1-4; the Jewish man with dropsy (edema: swelling in the hands and feet, etc., due to excess fluids).

<sup>24</sup> See John 8:46; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1st Peter 2:22; 1st John 3:5. Sin is defined as disobedience to Mosaic Law (Mt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:20b; 1st John 3:4).

<sup>25</sup> In 1st Cor. 5:6-8 Paul exhorts the Corinthians to keep the seven day Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread. This is yet another instance where the Church's "No Law!" Champion (i.e. Paul) upholds these *shadows* that obviously, were not nullified at the Cross. See [Passover](#) and [The Feasts of Israel as Time Markers After the Resurrection](#).

<sup>26</sup> See [A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law](#), [Sunday—The Catholic Sabbath](#), [Christians! Stop Following The Pope!](#), [Why Sunday?](#) and [The Two Babylons—The Full Hislop](#).

‘principalities and powers—*archai, exousiai*’ (2:15), and ‘elements of the world—*stoicheia tou kosmou*’ (2:8, 20) find correspondence both in ‘gnostic Judaism’ and in ‘Hellenistic syncretism’<sup>27</sup>... The false teaching, which Paul refutes in Colossians, is characterized by a *theological* and a *practical* error. Theologically, the Colossian ‘philosophy’ (2:8) was competing with Christ for man’s allegiance. Its source of authority, according to Paul, was *man-made* ‘tradition—*paradosis*’ (2:8) and its object was to impart ‘*true wisdom—sophia*’ (2:3, 23), ‘*knowledge—gnosis*’ (2:2-3; 3:10), and ‘*understanding—sunesis*’ (1:9; 2:2). To attain such knowledge Christians were urged *to do homage to cosmic principalities*” (angels and/or demons) “(2:10, 15) and to ‘the elements of the universe—*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*’ (2:8, 18, 20).”<sup>28</sup>

Most likely one of the things that the Hellenistic, Gnostic Christians wanted their brethren to do on the Sabbath (and other “select” days like the Feasts of Israel and New Moons) was to fast (v. 16; “eating and drinking”) and if they didn’t they might lose their salvation or not enjoy the benefits of Christianity (cf. Col. 2:23 where Paul speaks of “neglect of the body” [i.e. fasting] to attain perfection).

The translation of βρωσις (*brosis*) as *meat* (ASV, KJV) or *food* (ESV, HCSV, NASB, NKJV) in v. 16, and *posis* as *drink* is not correct. It should be translated as “eating<sup>29</sup> and drinking,” and so it really has nothing to do with any clean or unclean animals of Mosaic Law, but just *when* the Gnostic Christians were telling their Christian brethren they could not eat and drink. Bacchiocchi writes,

“The (Greek) terms *brosis* and *posis* describe not (as often inexactly translated) food—*broma* and *poma*, but the *act* of ‘eating and drinking.’<sup>30</sup> Therefore it is not a question, as R.C.H. Lenski” (a renowned Lutheran theologian) “points out, ‘about proper and improper food and drink, some being clean, others unclean, but rules about *when* to eat and to drink *and to fast*.’<sup>31</sup> Such dietary restrictions can hardly be traced back to Levitical law

<sup>27</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 205. Among the interpreters who define the heresy of Colossae as a “gnosticizing Judaism” are: Jacques Dupont, *Gnosis: La Connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de S. Paul*, 1949, pp. 256, 489-93; E. Percy, *Die Problem der Kolsser und Epheserbriefe*, 1946, pp. 137-178; Joseph B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 1879, pp. 73-113; Stanislas Lyonnet, “Paul’s Adversaries in Colossae,” in *Conflict at Colossae*, ed. Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, *SBL Sources for Biblical Study* 4, 1973, pp. 147-162.

On the other hand, Gunther Bornkamm, “The Heresy of Colossians,” in *Conflict at Colossae*, p. 126, states categorically: “No doubt seems possible to me however, on one point: The Colossian doctrine of the elements belongs to the ancient mythology and speculation of the Oriental Aeon-theology, which was widespread and active in Hellenistic syncretism;” cf. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 1930, pp. 3f.; M. Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, An Philemon*, 1953, excursus on 2:8 and 2:23.

Others interpret the Colossian heresy as a syncretism of Jewish and Hellenistic elements; see Edward Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossae and to Philemon*, 1971, pp. 115-116; Norbert Hagede, *Commentaire de l’Épître aux Colossiens*, pp. 9, 143; W. Rordorf, *Sunday*, p. 136: “We are in fact, dealing with the possibility of a whole stream of syncretistic tradition in which Jewish-Christian material is inextricably intertwined with material of Hellenistic and oriental provenance;” cf. Handley C. G. Moule, *Colossian Studies*, 1898, who defines the heresy as “an amalgam of Judaism and Gnosticism, in a wide reference of the latter word.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> “βρωσις” Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, paragraph 2,263.

<sup>30</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 210. On food/eating—*broma/brosis* cf. Johannes Behm, *TDNT* I, pp. 642-645; on drink/drinking —*poma/posis* cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *TDNT* VI, pp. 145-148.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 211. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, 1946, p. 123. Norbert Hagede (p. 8, note 27 in this article), p. 143, similarly remarks: “It is not then a question of distinction between clean and unclean food as recommended by Lev. 11, but of the practice of fasting according to the custom of pagan ascetics.” A. S. Peake (p. 6, note 18 in this article), p. 530, “The question is not altogether between lawful and unlawful food, but between eating and drinking or abstinence. Asceticism, rather than ritual cleanness, is in his mind.”

since the law does not contemplate an ascetic program, but only ‘distinguishes between clean and unclean food.’ Moreover, Mosaic Law is silent on the subject of drink, except in the case of the Nazirites...who abstained from intoxicants on account of a special vow”<sup>32</sup> (and also of the Priesthood when engaged in religious activity; Lev. 10:1-11).

“That the dietary prescriptions mentioned in Colossians 2:16 *do not belong to the Mosaic Law* is further indicated in v. 21 by the prohibition (regarding apparently the consumption of food) imposed by the proponents of the philosophy: ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.’<sup>33</sup> Such ascetic restrictions designed to promote ‘rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body’ (2:23) were foreign to Mosaic Law and normative Jewish teachings. Usually such asceticism arises from a dualistic concept of life, which despises the material...world and the human body in order to attain to” (an alleged) “higher sanctity. No traces of this dualistic view can be found in the Hebrew concept of man, which is altogether wholistic...In the case of the philosophy of” the “Colossians, the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to, and worship of, the ‘elements of the universe’ (2:20, 18).”<sup>34</sup>

The Apostle Paul isn’t speaking about the Mosaic Dietary laws in Col. 2:16 (“eating and drinking”). Even anti-Mosaic Law theologian Lenski realized this. There is something similar in Romans 14:5-6, which most Christians also misinterpret to mean that they can keep any day “as their Sabbath,” not realizing the context in which the two verses are found. The two verses are in the midst of Paul speaking to both the “pagan sacrificial meat eating group,” and also the “veggie-only eating people.” The two verses deal with the latter group fasting and/or abstaining from the sacrificial meat/animals that could be bought at the market place, which the latter group thought was defiled. It wasn’t because of what Mosaic Law said about clean and unclean animals, but by clean animals being sacrificed to pagan gods and goddesses.

Romans 14 does not deal with Mosaic Law or the Sabbath, as neither is even mentioned, let alone come against, but with the “meat eaters” being *judged* by their Christian “veggie only eating” brothers. This *judgment* is similar to what Paul says to the Colossians about their Gnostic Christian brethren (Paul condemns the Gnostic practice of say, fasting on the Sabbath. The “veggie only” group in Romans 14 said that meat bought in the market place, which was the only place one could buy meat, was defiled, having been previously sacrificed to pagan gods before coming to the market place. Determining/judging if the meat was defiled; alright to eat or not, was the problem. Romans 14 has nothing to do with the meat eaters eating unclean meat, as no mention is made of which meats could be eaten and which couldn’t be eaten, despite what Rom. 14:14 says in most English Bibles,<sup>35</sup> which is a sad commentary on Christian translators of the text and their inability or rather willful failure to properly translate v. 14 due to their theological bias against Mosaic Law. Paul didn’t think as the veggie eaters did, that the meat was defiled. He sides with the meat eaters, saying the veggie only eaters are “weak in the faith” (Romans 14:2).

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. The Nazirite’s vow included abstention from all grape products (Num. 6: 2-4). This, however, was a temporary and voluntary vow. Some, such as Samuel (I Sam. 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) were Nazirites for life, but we have no record of a person taking the vow voluntarily for life. The Rechabites led a nomadic life in tents and abstained from wine and all intoxicating drinks (Jer. 35:1-19) due to the desire of their father.

<sup>33</sup> Mosaic Law never speaks of this in relation to unclean animals; just that they were forbidden to be eaten, but touching and tanning say, the hide of an unclean animal like a camel “to tan it,” to change it into leather, could be done, but the tanner would still be defiled for a time.

<sup>34</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 212.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek word translated as *unclean* in Rom. 14:14 should be translated as *common* (κοινὸν; *koinon*) There is a huge theological difference between the two. See [Romans 14 and the Dietary Laws](#) for a proper understanding of the verse and also, why vv. 5-6 have nothing to do with anyone being able to choose their own day of the week as “their Sabbath day.”

## *Feasts, New Moons and Sabbaths*

Many Christians use Romans 14:5-6 and Colossians 2:16-17 to say it's alright to keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath, and Easter instead of Passover, and to eat any (unclean) meat they desire. When correctly understood though, neither Romans 14 nor Colossians 2 authorize or state the keeping of "any day" as eligible for one's Sabbath, or the eating of unclean animals, all of which would have been sin for Yeshua and therefore, sin for Christians. It's really pretty simple. He's the Standard. Sin for Him is therefore sin for us. Let's not complicate it with theological concepts that aren't biblical, like Mosaic Law was nailed to the Cross. The Lord walked in all the rules of Mosaic Law that applied to Him, and He desires that we should too.

With the Colossians being lured into Gnostic ways and the worshiping of angels (2:18), we see a heretical Gnostic Christian way of walking out their faith in Jesus. Pertaining to 2:16-17 these intruders, these Hellenistic, Gnostic Christians, were teaching, judging and condemning their brethren who kept the Feasts of Israel, New Moons and Sabbaths, not because they kept them, but because they didn't keep them *their* way (i.e. with fastings and flagellations). This is the Gentile version of the Pharisaic Christian Judaizers.<sup>36</sup> which all Christians today despise, not realizing that they are Pharisaic Christians themselves, with keeping of Sunday, Easter and Xmas and their eating of many unclean meats (i.e. pig and shrimp). Their traditions nullify God's Word (cf. Mark 7:9).<sup>37</sup>

Paul never mentions the Greek word for Law (*nomos*) in either Romans 14 or Colossians 2, and he would never metaphorically speak of the Law as "the elementary principles of this world" (2:8, 20) or the "traditions of men" (2:8). Every Jew knows, and Paul was certainly a Jew all his life (cf. Acts 21:39–22:3; Phil. 3:5)<sup>38</sup> that the Law of Moses came directly from God and is literally the words of God (cf. Ex. 20:1ff.;

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<sup>36</sup> Teaching the Law as God's Standard for how to walk out our faith in Yeshua, I have been called a Judaizer on more than one occasion. As a matter of fact, just yesterday, after posting my short article, *The Feasts of Israel and the Church*, on a pastor's website, I received a comment from a man calling me a Judaizer. I wrote the man back, and among other things I said, "it seems like you have a lot to say about me that isn't very nice, but I can understand where you are coming from—you have learned the Church's traditions that nullify God's New Testament Word. For instance, you attack me as a "Judaizer," but the very mention of the word addressed to me reveals that you haven't got the foggiest idea what a New Testament Judaizer was. You think that keeping any or all of the Law of Moses makes one a Judaizer, and in that you have lots of Christian friends supporting you, but the actual biblical meaning of "a Judaizer" was someone who attached Mosaic Law (symbolized in physical, covenantal circumcision; cf. Acts 15:1ff.) to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. On the other hand, I have never thought that, let alone taught it, so you are reading into my writing something that isn't there. I teach that once you are Born Again, God's Standard for Christian lifestyle is keeping all the rules of Mosaic Law that apply to any one person. Have you never read in Romans 3:20b where Paul says that it's through the Law that we have the *knowledge* of sin? Without Mosaic Law Christians are handicapped, not realizing there's more to sin than just what they think is moral or not (cf. 2nd Timothy 3:16-17)."

"Was Jesus a Judaizer? He kept all the Law that applied to Him and was never legalistic about it. Aren't we supposed to follow Jesus? You read my message where Luke uses the Feasts of Israel as Time Markers to relay to Theophilus *where* and *when* Paul, he and others were or would be. This would have meant absolutely nothing to Theo if he didn't know *when* the Feasts were, and so how can you call me a Judaizer for wanting Christians to follow in the steps of Luke and Theo, and Jesus, Paul and Peter? Paul tells the Corinthians...about keeping Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (1st Cor. 5:6-8). You degrade me without actually giving any mention whatever to my teaching or try to dismantle what I wrote in the message on the *Feasts of Israel in Acts and First Corinthians*. You didn't show me where I was wrong in my reasoning, but you set the message aside and attacked me. Great way to win friends and influence people! How can you be so wrong, but think you are so right? It's called Deception." (See Daniel 7:25)

<sup>37</sup> "Yeshua said to the Pharisees, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). The Sabbath and Passover are still commandments of God (cf. Mt. 5:18-19).

<sup>38</sup> Paul becoming a believer in the Jewish Messiah does not negate his racial or ethnic identity. He was a Jew who loved Jesus. Being a Christian does not destroy one's racial or ethnic identity.

24:4), which reveal God’s will for Israel, even and especially the Israel of God “in Christ” (Gal. 6:16). In other words, Moses didn’t make the Law up. Mosaic Law is God’s divine lifestyle and Jesus amplified it; He didn’t do away with it (cf. Mt. 5:17-19f.). This means that the Apostle Paul used those two phrases to speak of paganism and Gnosticism (the “elementary principles *of the world*” or the “traditions *of men*”).<sup>39</sup>

Also, in response to Augustine and all those Christians who follow him and think that Jesus broke the Sabbath because He either had the right to do it, as the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28) and/or because the “Body” had come and the “Shadow” was gone (Col. 2:17), Yeshua never admits or says that He broke the Sabbath, John 5:18 notwithstanding.<sup>40</sup> On the contrary, He always defends Himself from the Pharisaic *accusation* of Sabbath breaking and presents biblical evidence that He wasn’t breaking the Sabbath (cf. Mt. 12:1-8, 9-13; John 8:46). A defense of an action is never an admission of guilt or acquiescence to the accusation. In other words, *according to Jesus He never broke the Sabbath* even though some Pharisees accused Him of it, and some Christians take up their accusation today, just as the Pharisees did.

Second, nothing Yeshua nor His Apostles were accused of as being sin, was written as sin in Mosaic Law. On the contrary, His healings on the Sabbath day revealed to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear that He was the Redeemer of Israel—the long-awaited Messiah.<sup>41</sup> He was the one who would redeem Israel from Her sins. Yeshua broke Pharisaic laws, but not the laws of God (i.e. Mosaic Law).

Third, if Jesus had broken the Sabbath He would have been a sinner and His sacrifice of no effect, but we know that He never sinned because Scripture states that He was sinless.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, anyone who says that Yeshua broke the Sabbath not only contradicts Scripture and is very wrong, but aligns himself with the Pharisees, who also said He broke the Sabbath.<sup>43</sup>

Some Christians say He could break the Sabbath and sin with impunity because He was “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). I wonder if they would also think something similar if He broke the commandments to murder, steal and lie, with impunity? After all, according to their logic, cannot the Lord of Creation do anything He wants to do? If so, Jesus would have been the Grand Hypocrite, far exceeding the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, whom He lambasted for their hypocrisy (cf. Mt. 23:13-15, 23, 25). He would be as unethical and evil as Satan, being a breaker of the very Law that He had given to Israel to keep, but which He, according to them, could break capriciously. The Grand Law Giver though, cannot be the Grand Law Breaker, and so Yeshua being Lord of the Sabbath means, among other things, that He, and not the Pharisees who accused Him of breaking the Sabbath, *determined* what was Lawful to do on the Sabbath and what was sin.<sup>44</sup>

If Yeshua had broken the Sabbath just once, He would have been worthy of death by stoning (cf. Ex. 35:1-3; Num. 15:32-36), for He was certainly born “under the Law” (Gal. 4:4), which in this instance means that if Jesus didn’t obey all the rules of Moses that applied to Him, He would have been a sinner. It was Mosaic Law that judged Him sinless. It couldn’t have reached that verdict if He had sinned, and it

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<sup>39</sup> See [Slavery to the Law? Gal. 4:8-11](#) where Paul uses the same Greek term for the “elementary elements of this world.”

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18 NKJV). It seems that John is saying that Jesus broke the Sabbath, but all he’s doing is telling us what the Pharisees thought Jesus was doing (cf. John 5:16; 9:16, etc.). Important point: the laws Yeshua broke on the Sabbath were Pharisaic, not Mosaic laws. See also Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), pp. 22-28.

<sup>41</sup> See [Messiah—The Sent One](#).

<sup>42</sup> John 8:46; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1st Peter 2:22; 1st John 3:5. Also, see God’s definition of disobedience or sin (Mt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:20; 1st John 3:4).

<sup>43</sup> In John 5:18 John writes that Yeshua broke the Sabbath, but John is speaking of what the Pharisees were saying about Him; not that Jesus actually broke the Sabbath by healing on it.

<sup>44</sup> Mt. 12:10; Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9; 14:3 cf. Mt. 19:3; Jn. 5:10.

couldn't have said that if He could sin with impunity. Consequently it's Mosaic Law that judges us; whether we realize it or not.<sup>45</sup>

The Lord of the Sabbath came to show us *how* to keep Mosaic Law, not how to break it so we didn't have to keep it. He is the quintessential Israeli—the One who totally obeyed His Father's will in everything, whose will is revealed in the Law. The Law is God's holy Standard and obeying it is how God wants us to love Him (cf. Mt. 22:35-40; Jn. 14:15; 1st John 2:6).

In Col. 2:16 Paul is attacking not the celebration of the Feasts of Israel, nor the Sabbath, nor the Mosaic Dietary laws, etc., but their Gnostic perversions. Paul doesn't say not to keep them, but not to let anyone judge you as to how you must keep them the Gnostic way. Paul's *warning* relates to that. Bacchiocchi speaks of the Gnostic Christians presenting their own rules as,

“indispensable aids to Christian perfection and as needed protection from ‘the elements of the world,’ thus denying the all-sufficiency of Christ.”<sup>46</sup>

The Apostle Paul attacks the promotion of these practices as auxiliary aids to salvation, as means to gain protection from, or help from, the elements: angels or demons. Paul is coming against the philosophy and the practice of Gnosticism in Christianity, not Mosaic Law. All the Colossians were keeping the Feasts of Israel, the New Moons and the Sabbath day holy. This is Church History<sup>47</sup> and it goes directly against how Christians walk out their faith in Jesus today.

## ***The Divine Shadow***

Colossians 2:17 has the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13) saying that the Feasts, New Moons and Sabbaths are “a *shadow of things to come*” (NKJV v. 17), or “a *shadow of the things that were to come*” (NIV), etc.<sup>48</sup> The verse reads:

“which are a shadow of things to come, *but* the substance is of Christ.” (Col. 2:17 NKJV)

“These are a shadow of the things that *were* to come; the reality, *however*, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:17 NIV)

“things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:17 NASB)

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<sup>45</sup> See [Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church](#).

<sup>46</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 213. Ralph P. Martin (p. 207, note 897 in [From Sabbath to Sunday](#)), p. 90: “The root principle needs to be noted. Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days and seasons...What moves him here is the wrong motive involved when the observance of holy festivals is made part of the worship advocated at Colossae in recognition of the ‘elements of the universe,’ the astral powers which direct the course of the stars and regulate the calendar. And so they must be placated.”

<sup>47</sup> See [A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law](#).

<sup>48</sup> ASV: the thing to come.

ESV: the things to come.

HCSB: what *was* to come.

KJV: things to come.

NASB: a *mere* shadow of what is to come.

NET: *only* a shadow of what is to come.

NIV: things that *were* to come.

NKJV: things to come.

NRSV: *only* a shadow of what is to come.

“these are *only* the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ!” (Colossians 2:17 NET)

Bacchiocchi writes,

“Several commentators...unable to see how Paul could view Old Testament holy days ...as ‘shadows’ having prophetic meaning” (and knowledge of Christ) “have attempted to solve the dilemma by adding arbitrarily the word ‘only’ or ‘at best’ after *shadow*, thus making the latter pejorative.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the verb ‘*are (estin)* a shadow’ is interpreted or translated as ‘were (*en*) a shadow,’ thus implying that their function had...ceased with Christ’s coming.”<sup>50</sup>

With an eye on Mosaic Law being nailed to the Cross (2:14), many Christians interpret “to come” as having come in Christ,<sup>51</sup> the “shadow” giving way to the “body” or the reality of Christ, but the biblical meaning that Paul is assigning to these shadows (the Feasts, New Moons and Sabbaths) is that they “still present Yeshua, who is now known by name to Christians. “Still present” in that they pictured Him when they were given at Mt. Sinai, and *continue* to picture Him and what is to come and also what has been, for Yeshua is still the Passover Lamb of God who set us free, and still worthy of being worshiped for what He has done at Passover. Isn’t that what it means to celebrate a past event like Victory over Germany Day? Paul never says the shadows are gone or not to be observed, but on the contrary, the Apostle celebrated these Divine Shadows all his life (cf. Acts 21:20-25; Rom. 7:12, 14), and according to Colossians 2:16-17 the Colossians did also.

These Divine Shadows are not the thing itself, just as the celebration of July 4th in the USA is not an annual beginning of the American Revolutionary War every year, but its *yearly* celebration of freedom from Britain. God gave biblical *Shadows* to Israel for Her understanding and they are God’s way of honoring Him and His Son Yeshua as we celebrate the freedom from sin that Messiah Yeshua has given us and what and Who awaits us in the future. Yes, the reality or Body is Messiah, but we don’t literally see Him now or know Him as He really is. We have the Feasts of Israel, the New Moons and the Sabbath though, to better see and understand Him who is rest and peace (cf. Matthew 11:28-30).

If the Sabbath, etc., had been done away with, Paul wouldn’t have spoken of them picturing “things *to come*,” which is the correct translation of the Greek phrase, as Bacchiocchi brought out. If the Shadows had been done away with, Paul would have said they are “gone with Christ’s coming,” but he doesn’t write that. Paul tells the Colossian Christians that they shouldn’t let Gnostic Christian teaching about Mosaic Law determine *how* they should walk in God’s Sabbath, Feasts and New Moons. Therefore, it’s clear that Christians should be walking in these Divine Shadows today. Bacchiocchi writes,

“By acknowledging the holy days of the Old Testament as ‘a shadow of what is to come—*skia ton mellonton*,’ Paul could hardly have ‘abolished the Sabbath by name and called it a by-gone shadow.’”<sup>52</sup>

E. F. Scott writes, “Paul cannot admit that the most sacred ordinances of Judaism are

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<sup>49</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 213. Cf. RSV; Lenski (p. 8, note 31 in this article), p. 125: “These things are a shadow *at best*.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. For example, A.B. Caird (p. 206, note 896; [From Sabbath to Sunday](#)), p. 198, maintains that “the RSV translation, *what is to come* cannot be correct since, if the fulfilment lay still in the future, the shadow would not yet be superseded.” A. Lukyn Williams (p. 213, note 927), p. 104, comments: “*en* (were) would have implied that they had absolutely ceased as facts, which of course they had not.” Handley C. G. Moule, *Colossian Studies*, n.d., p. 175, points out that “*esti* is very slightly emphatic by position; I have represented this by *indeed*.” He means to acknowledge in passing the real place and value of the Festivals as ‘shadows.’ Cf. Meyer, ad bc.”

<sup>51</sup> See the *Expositors Bible Commentary, the New Biblical Comm.*, the *NIV Study Bible* and *Lenski’s Commentary*, etc.

<sup>52</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 213. See p. 5, note 13 in this article.

worthless shadows. His thought is rather that of the writer to the Hebrews, who finds a value in all the ancient ceremonies in so far as they point forward, in a sort of picture-language, to the great consummation (e.g. the Sabbath typifies the perfect rest of God; Heb. 4:11)<sup>53</sup> in the New Jerusalem, and a valid practice, weekly practice, for learning how to rest in Jesus and cease from striving for being “good enough” for God, and also, to realize that He is the One who provides for all our needs.

“The most plausible conclusion is that Paul is not disputing about the origin, form or legitimacy of these observances, but rather that he acknowledges their value...What the Apostle does...is to place these observances in their proper perspective with Christ by means of the contrast ‘shadow—body.’<sup>54</sup> In this perspective Paul sees...the observance of holy days...as a shadow, preparing Christians for the realities of the world to come,<sup>55</sup> and for today. “Old Testament festivals have a message for Christians. The Passover...commemorates Christ’s atoning sacrifice...the Sabbath, the blessings of salvation, which are a foretaste of the eternal rest of God’s people.”<sup>56</sup>

The Feasts, New Moons and Sabbaths reveal who Yeshua is and what He has done for us to become like Him. How does the New Moon do that? The first crescent moon, which is the *New Moon*, is not self radiating, but must receive it’s light from the sun. We, like the moon, must also receive our Light from the Son, which renews itself every month. Every New Moon is the beginning of a new biblical month and speaks of Christians coming out of the Darkness into His marvelous Light.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Colossians 2:14-17 has been a veritable gold mine for Christianity in its quest to prove that Mosaic Law is not for them. Unfortunately for them, it’s been fool’s gold. It glitters like real gold, but it’s valueless. Colossians 2:14 speaks of God’s written record of our sin indebtedness being blotted out or nailed to the Cross “in Messiah Yeshua” as God’s divine sacrifice for us (Gal. 1:4). It wasn’t Mosaic Law that was nailed to the Cross, as the Church heretically teaches.

The Gnostic teachers in the Colossian congregation advocated their Gnostic way of observing the Feasts, etc., of Mosaic Law, which the Colossians were observing as their God-given Way of life. The *theological* heresy of the Gnostic view of the Universe was that Christians needed more than Yeshua could offer, in both terms of what He had done on the Cross for their salvation, and for daily protection from the “elements of the world.” Therefore, they needed angel mediators along with the Head (Col. 2:9-10, 18-19).

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 213. E.F. Scott (p. 207, note 897 in [From Sabbath to Sunday](#)), p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. It is possible that the contrast “shadow-body,” which derives from Plato (cf. *Republic* 7, 514 a-517a; 10; 596; *Timeus* 46c; 71b) was employed by the Colossian philosophers to teach that “full reality” (*pleroma*) could be attained only by venerating the “shadow,” namely the angels and the elements of the universe, by ascetic regimen. If so, Paul answers their teaching by giving a christological twist to their contrast.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 214. The fact that Paul does not condemn dietary scruples in Romans 14, but rather exhorts to observe them “in honor of the Lord” (14:6) indicates that he recognizes in them some positive function.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 1879, p. 195, comments: “The reality, the antitype, in each case is found in the Christian dispensation. Thus, the Passover typifies the atoning sacrifice; the unleavened bread, the purity and sincerity of the true believer; the Pentecostal feast, the ingathering of first fruits; the Sabbath, the rest of God’s people; etc.”

Avram: Bacchiocchi is wrong when he equates Passover with Easter. The two, in terms of their ceremonies and their themes, are totally different. Passover biblically centers around the death of the Lamb, while Easter allegedly presents the risen Savior. It doesn’t. Easter presents the risen pagan Savior.

<sup>57</sup> “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of Darkness into His marvelous Light” (1st Peter 2:9 NKJV).

The *practical* outcome of this theological heresy was the insistence on strict asceticism in keeping the holy days of Israel and the invocation of angels (demons). This consisted in “putting off the body of flesh,”<sup>58</sup> rigorous treatment of the body (2:23); prohibition to either taste or touch certain kinds of foods and beverages (2:16, 21), or no food or drink, and a perverse observance of the Feasts of Israel, the New Moons and the Sabbaths. Christians were led to submit to these Gnostic, ascetic practices thinking they were receiving added protection and full access to the divine fulness. This sounds much like Jewish Kabbalah, Roman Catholic Mariolatry and penance.

The Church uses Col. 2:16-17 to strike down Mosaic Law, but a perverted use of a holy day like Passover cannot be used to challenge the validity of it. *A holy day of Mosaic Law isn't nullified by the condemnation of its abuse*, but on the contrary, it establishes its use,<sup>59</sup> and this is the point that the Apostle unwittingly makes for us today. The Feasts of Israel, the New Moons and the Sabbath, etc., were being kept by the Colossian Christians both before and after the Gnostics invaded their assembly. Paul never says that the Colossians shouldn't be keeping the weekly Sabbath or the New Moons, etc., something he most definitely would have said if his Gentile Christians weren't supposed to be keeping Mosaic Law. Paul is actually upholding Mosaic Law as God's Christian lifestyle.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bacchiocchi, [From Sabbath to Sunday](#), p. 206. The phrase suggests the practice of the mystery cults when in the initiation rite the devotee removed his clothes and took a purificatory bath. For texts and discussion see E. Lohse (p. 8, note in this article), p. 102. Apparently Paul's reply to those 'philosophers,' who insisted on circumcision as the true initiation (???), is that the true circumcision is not physical, but metaphorical, namely the surrender of the old life (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3, Eph. 2:11).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>60</sup> Last revised on Friday, June 28, 2024.