An Investigation of the Meaning of the Word SABBATON in Colossians 2:16

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Abstract

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD ΣΑΒΒΑΤΩΝ IN COLOSSIANS 2:16

by Paul Giem

Colossians 2:16 has been a much-debated text, with no consensus reached yet as to its meaning. In view of this, it was felt that the passage should be re-examined to see if a better understanding of the text could be reached.

The study begins with a survey of the recent literature. It is found that opinion on the meaning of the word σαββάτων in Colossians 2:16 is divisible into four groups: Those who feel it meant the seventh-day Sabbath in toto, those who feel that it meant the ceremonial sabbaths, those who feel that it meant the Jewish part of the Sabbath, and those who feel that it referred to keeping the Sabbath in honor of the elemental spirits of the Universe.

The study then deals with verses 14, 16, and 17, and their context. It is suggested that a generalized characterization of the Colossian heresy is not much help in determining the meaning of verse 16. It is suggested that verse 14 did not deal directly with the law, whether moral or ceremonial, and thus verse 16 did not describe an aspect of verse 14. It is also suggested that the eating and drinking referred to in verse 16 probably were rooted in pagan asceticism. Parallels to the phrase "a festival or a new moon or a sabbath" are noted in the Old Testament, in the War Scroll found at Qumran, and in the Book of Jubilees. The Old Testament passages, with one possible exception, and the War Scroll passage, all
associate the phrase with the sacrificial service. Jubilees associates the phrase, in a much modified form, with the calendar peculiar to the Essenes. Verse 17 is examined, and found to fit better with the above phrase interpreted as sacrifices on the festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths than when it is interpreted as the days themselves, as is usually done.

It is concluded that when Paul used the above phrase he meant the sacrificial system. It is recognized that this interpretation does not exclude other viewpoints, but it is held that this is the primary meaning of the phrase.
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD ΣΑΒΒΑΤΩΝ IN COLOSSIANS 2:16

by

Paul Giem

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................. iii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION .............................................................. 1

II. HISTORICAL SURVEY OF INTERPRETATIONS .......................... 3

Some theological considerations ........................................... 3
Σαββάτων as Sabbath per se ................................................. 3
Σαββάτων as ceremonial sabbath ......................................... 5
Σαββάτων as Jewish part of Sabbath .................................... 7
Σαββάτων as worship of στοιχεῖα ........................................ 9
Σαββάτων as Jewish ............................................................. 10

III. EXEGESIS OF THE PASSAGE ........................................... 13

The general context ......................................................... 13
Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands ......................................................... 18
This he set aside, nailing it to the cross ................................ 21
Therefore ................................................................................ 21
Let no man pass judgment on you .......................................... 22
In questions of food and drink .............................................. 25
Or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath ............ 26
These are only a shadow of what is to come ............................ 40
But the substance belongs to Christ ...................................... 42

IV. CONCLUSION ................................................................. 44

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 45
I. Introduction

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; . . . Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.1

These words from Paul to the church at Colossae have been the center of the fiercest and, regrettably, the most heated controversy in the history of the Sabbath question. On the one hand, one author who believes in the Christian's freedom from sabbatizing practically rests his entire case upon this one text.2 On the other hand, the official church paper of the largest Saturday-keeping denomination has probably had more articles written in it dealing primarily with this passage than any other.3 With this in mind, perhaps the passage should be re-examined to find out what Paul actually intended to say to the Colossians and what bearing, if any, it has on Sabbath observance today.

This paper will consist of two parts: a historical survey of the interpretations given the passage, and an exegesis of the passage. The historical survey will allow us to benefit from any insights the men who have gone before us have had, and also to gain a perspective on the controversy over the passage. The exegesis, of course, must be the heart

1Colossians 2:14,16,17, KJV. All quotations from the Bible and the Apocrypha are from the RSV, 1952 ed., unless otherwise specified.

2Dudley M. Canright (Seventh-day Adventism Renounced, Reprint of 14th ed. [Nashville, TN: B. C. Goodpasture, 1948]) has a complete chapter on Colossians 2 (pp. 282-299). Outside of that chapter he spends all his time on the Sabbath making antinomian arguments, trying to blunt the force of Sabbatarian arguments, or with extrabiblical material.

of any Biblical study. We will pay particular attention to verse 16,
since this verse is at the center of the controversy.
II. Historical Survey of Interpretations

Some theological considerations. We will begin the historical survey by noting that there are three basic opinions on the Sabbath question. One is that the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment is still binding upon Christians. The second is that the Sabbath commandment is still binding, but that the sacredness of the day has been transferred to Sunday. The third is that Christ has freed us from the demands of the Sabbath. This opinion usually includes the idea that Sunday is kept as a holiday rather than a holy day, because it is convenient to keep it or because the Lord was resurrected on that day, or both.

Those who hold the first two positions cannot hold that the Sabbath was done away in toto, and consequently often end up interpreting the passage under consideration similarly. Those who hold the last position, if they are going to avoid being antinomian, must make use of this text to prove their position, as it is the only one in the New Testament that uses the word ἑβραϊκὸν in a derogatory sense.2

Ἑβραϊκὸν as Sabbath per se. The text was used in the seventeenth century3 to prove that the Sabbath has been abolished, according to

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1 In fact, I suspect, although I have not been able to prove, that the traditional seventh-day Sabbatarian position was inherited from first-day Sabbatarians. Note the date for Adam Clarke (1832) on p. 5, note 2.

2 There are some passages (e.g. Matt 12:1-8; John 7:21-24) where Jesus is accused of Sabbathbreaking and answers the charge by pointing out that the Jews did some work on the Sabbath, but it is usually conceded that Christ did not really break the Sabbath, as the law was in effect before the cross. He was merely stripping away the rabbinic regulations encrusted about the Sabbath and pointing out its proper observance.

3 For a survey of the literature on the text up to Luther and Calvin, see William E. Richardson, "A Study of the Historical Background and Interpretation of Colossians 2:14-17" (Unpublished M. A. thesis,
D. M. Canright. He quotes John Bunyan as saying,

"Here also as he [Paul] serveth other holy days he serveth the Sabbath, he gives a liberty to believers to refuse the observation of it. Nor hath the apostle (since he saith or of the Sabbath), one would think, left any hole out at which men's inventions could get."¹

F. F. Bruce agrees with him:

And something similar might be said about the charge that Christians who do not observe the seventh day as a sabbath have accepted the mark of the beast. "Let no man judge you in respect of a sabbath day" is all the answer that such a charge requires.²

R. C. H. Lenski carries the argument to its logical conclusion:

first-day Sabbatarianism is forbidden, even if only advocated as a help to spirituality.

This point is most important for us. When law observance is demanded by present-day legalists, the gospel is upset and we must fight as Paul does in Galatians. But when certain observances, rules, and regulations are attached to the gospel, which are said to produce a much safer and superior Christianity, we must fight as Paul does in Colossians, scorn this fictitious safety and superiority with the absolute completeness and superiority of the gospel, with the infinite supremacy of the God-man, the utter fulness and completeness of his saving work, and the fulness (v. 10) which he has bestowed upon us. . . .

Here all the conscience-binding power and the meritoriousness of church rites and observances are destroyed, in particular also all sabbatarianism, a substitution by divine right of the Christian Sunday for the abrogated Jewish Sabbath (C. Tr. 91, § 57, etc.)³

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1960).

¹Canright (Adventism, p. 289) gives his reference as "Bunyan's Complete Works, pp. 899,900". I have been unable to trace the quotation down in Bunyan's works.


³The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1946), pp. 124,127,128.
Others holding this position are Henry Alford, Canright, and Walter Martin.

Those who interpret verse 16 in this way tend to interpret the χειρόγραφον τοῦ δόγματος (handwriting of ordinances—KJV) of verse 14 to mean the law of Moses in toto. As Lenski says,

The document contained the divine decrees (Eph. 2:15). No signature of ours is remotely thought of. God issued the decrees, he acted like the Roman emperor; he issued them in a written document with his signature and his seal affixed. This describes the divine law exactly: "written and engraven in stones" (II Cor. 3:7) and demanding, "Thou shalt! Thou shalt not!" . . .

To speak of moral and ceremonial laws is to limit this term unduly.

There is thus an interrelationship between the exegesis of the two verses: verse 14 says that the law (including the ten commandments) was done away, and verse 16 says that one need no longer keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

Σαββατήν as ceremonial sabbath. As one might expect, many first-day Sabbatarians disagree strongly with this analysis. For example, Adam Clarke says,

There is no intimation here that the sabbath was done away, or that its moral use was superseded, by the introduction of Christianity.


2Colossians, pp. 114,115. I do not see how he squares his use of Ephesians 2:15 in this context with a statement on p. 116, and he doesn't explain the discrepancy. I will try to give the passage in its context:

The phrase ἐκ τοῦ μέσου = "clear away." We need not stress the idea that the document no longer stands "in the midst" between God and us. Eph. 2:11, etc., speaks of an entirely different subject, namely of the abolition of the law which kept Jews and Gentiles apart, an idea that is not touched upon here. (Italics mine).

3The Holy Bible, 6 vols. (New York: Emory and Waugh and Waugh and Mason,
Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown express this position a little more completely:

"SABBATHS" (not "the sabbaths") of the day of atonement and feast of tabernacles have come to an end with the Jewish services to which they belonged (Leviticus 23:32,37-39). The weekly sabbath rests on a more permanent foundation, having been instituted in Paradise to commemorate the completion of creation in six days. Leviticus 23:38 expressly distinguishes "the sabbath of the Lord" from the other sabbaths. . . . the sabbath is still needed, and is . . . still linked with the other nine commandments, as obligatory in the spirit, though the letter of the law has been superseded by that higher spirit of love which is the essence of law and gospel alike (Romans 13:8-10).¹

Another example of a first-day Sabbatarian who espouses this view is Albert Barnes.²

This position is very close to "... the position Seventh-day Adventists have held through the years, namely that Paul is speaking of ceremonial sabbath days whose observance has become obsolete."³ Early Adventist examples are Uriah Smith and J. N. Andrews,⁴ and this view was held by the editors of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary.⁵

This view is also associated with a particular interpretation of Colossians 2:14. Barnes is an example:

The word rendered handwriting means something written by the hand, a manuscript; and here, probably, the writings of the Mosaic law, or the law appointing many ordinances or observances in religion. The allusion is probably to a written contract, in which we bind ourselves to do any work, or to make a payment, and which remains in force against us until the bond is cancelled. That might be done either by blotting out the names or by drawing lines through it, or, as appears to have been practised in the East, by driving a nail through it. The Jewish ceremonial law is here represented as such a contract, binding those under it to its observance until it was nailed to the cross.¹

Again there is an interrelationship between the exegesis of the two verses. Verse 14 says that the ceremonial law was done away, and verse 16 says that one need no longer keep the ceremonial sabbaths.

Σαββάτων as Jewish part of Sabbath. A third approach to the text was expressed by W. E. Howell. He felt that the word Σαββάτων in Colossians 2:16 included both the ceremonial sabbaths and the ceremonial aspects of the seventh-day Sabbath:

... when Paul ... uses the word "sabbath" ... , he has the ceremonial sabbaths and the ceremonies on the weekly sabbath in mind and not the seventh-day institution as a memorial of creation. ... Let no man judge you wrong when you interpret the word "sabbath" in Colossians 2:16 as being used generically in the singular ... ²

Apparently he was judged wrong by his fellow Adventists, for two years

¹Notes, 7:265. He differentiates between the "ceremonial law" and the "moral law" of ten commandments, as he explains on p. 267: ... there is not the slightest reason to believe that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind ... he had his eye on the ... ceremonial and typical law, and not ... the moral law, or the ten commandments.

For a more extensive treatment of the subject from this viewpoint, see Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), pp. 129-134.

later he wrote a correction to his article in which he said,

Be it far from me, Brother Editor, ever to weaken or question the true interpretation of "sabbath days" in Colossians 2:16, namely, that it means ceremonial sabbaths, and could not possibly mean the seventh-day Sabbath ... ¹

A related position, that the word ἥμεραι has reference to the Sabbath as a sign of Judaism and the Jewish regulations concerning the Sabbath, was proposed by H. G. C. Moule,² a first-day Sabbatarian, and has been gaining the approval of "a growing number of Adventists".³ Among these are William E. Richardson and Walter F. Specht.⁴ As Moule put it,

It is plain from the argument that the Sabbath is here regarded not as it was primevally (Gen. ii.3) "made for man" (Mar. ii.27), God's benignant gift, fenced with precept and prohibition only for His creature's bodily and spiritual benefit; but as it was adopted to be a symbolic institution of the Mosaic covenant, and expressly adapted to the relation between God and Israel (Exod. xxxv.12-17); an aspect of the Sabbath which governs much of the language of the O. T. about it. In that respect the Sabbath was abrogated, and the New Israelite enters upon the spiritual realities foreshadowed by it as by them. The Colossian Christian who declined the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath in this respect was right. An altogether different question arises when the Christian is asked to "secularize" the weekly Rest which descends to us from the days of paradise, and which is as vitally necessary as ever for man's physical and spiritual well-being.⁵


⁵Colossians, pp. 109-110.
Along the same lines, W. H. Griffith Thomas and the editors of *The Expositor's Bible* and *The Pulpit Commentary*\(^1\) believe that the Jewish part of the Sabbath (i.e., the seventh day) has been superseded, but that the part referable to Creation and to the needs of nature (i.e., a weekly rest day) remains.

Σαββάτων as worship of στοιχεία. A fourth approach is that of Eduard Lohse, Ralph P. Martin, and Arthur J. Ferch,\(^2\) who regard the most important word in the passage as οὖν, "therefore". They see Sabbath observance as being urged on the Colossians in deference to the elemental spirits of the universe rather than the Torah. Lohse says,

\(^1\) Thomas, Christ Pre-eminent (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Ass'n, 1923), pp. 82-84, Alexander Maclaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, *The Expositor's Bible*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), pp. 245-247, and H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*, 52 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, [189?]), 47:91,92,115,116. The way Thomas expresses himself ("The mention of the Sabbath Day is clearly that of the Jewish Sabbath as one of those legal institutions from which we are set free in Christ. No one must for an instant suppose that the observance of the Sabbath Day can in any way procure or help to procure salvation. . . . although there are those who, with what may perhaps be called hyperspirituality speak of every day being a sabbath, facts prove beyond question that the observance of the Lord's day is one of the most essential features of all spiritual life, and that spirituality is not furthered by thinking of every day as exactly alike." [pp. 83,84]) reminds one of the Didache (8:1): "Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays." (Tr. by Cyril C. Richardson, Early Christian Fathers [New York: The Macmillan Company, n. d.]).

In the context of Col, however, the command to keep festival, new moon, and sabbath is not based on the Torah according to which Israel received the sabbath as a sign of her election from among the nations. Rather the sacred days must be kept for the sake of the "elements of the universe," who direct the course of the stars and thus also prescribe minutely the order of the calendar. By birth and fate man is subjected to the elements of the universe and must serve them by meticulous conformity to food laws and special times.¹

Martin explicitly denies that there is any reference in this passage to Jewish holy days per se or that there is a generalized condemnation of Sabbatizing.

Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days and seasons. Nor does he have in view the Jewish observance of these days as an expression of Israel's obedience to God's law and a token of her election.²

Rather, as Ferch puts it,

It appears that Paul was saying that since the spirit forces which would lord it over the Colossians are defeated by Christ they were to pay no attention to the arrogant and condemnatory criticisms of the false teachers. They were to stand in Christian liberty and not in a legalistic bondage to ascetic practices or sacred prescriptions in recognition of the "astral powers," the "elements of the universe".³

Σαββάτων as Jewish. The largest group of commentators fall into the rather vague category outlined by Richardson as summarizing the Patristic view:

...when the Fathers comment on the Sabbath of verse 16 (which is very rare) the predominant interpretation is that it is Jewish and thus abolished at the cross.⁴

This is as much comment as one gets from the International Critical Com-

¹Lohse, Colossians, pp. 115, 116.
²Martin, Colossians and Philemon, p. 90.
³Ferch, letter, p. 2.
⁴Richardson, "Colossians 2," p. 22.
mentary, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, Moffatt, Lange, C. F. D. Moule, and, on a more popular level, The Interpreters Bible. These commentators do not say enough to enable one to put them in any of the other groups, although occasionally, as in the Tyndale series, one can gather that they lean toward one or another of the preceding opinions (in this case what might be called the libertarian position).

The vast majority of commentators of this view, as well as those of the third and fourth views, see in the χειρόγραφον a certificate of debt, usually taken to mean bond of indebtedness to the law. As C. F. D. Moule put it,

A χειρόγραφον is an 'IOU', a statement of indebtedness, personally signed by the debtor. . . . The bond in question here is signed by men's consciences: for a Jew, it is his acceptance of the revealed Law of God as an obligation to abide by; for the Gentile, it is a corresponding recognition of obligation to what


he knows of the will of God. In either case, it is an 'autographed' undertaking: 'I owe God obedience to his will. Signed, Mankind.'

This agrees with the general consensus of the patristic literature:

... when Fathers comment on the phrase of Colossians 2:14, "blotting out the handwriting," (which is very frequent) there is much agreement that this refers to Christ's wiping away the condemnation of sin which covered all mankind.

To summarize, then, there are four views concerning the word σαββάτων in Colossians 2:16. It may apply to the Sabbath in toto, to the Sabbath as a sign of Judaism, to the Sabbath as advocated by the quasi-gnostic false teachers at Colossae without reference to Judaism, or solely to the ceremonial sabbaths of the Mosaic law. Or it may be that none of these is completely correct. We will now examine Colossians and try to discover an answer to the problem.

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1 Colossians, p. 97.

2 Richardson, "Colossians 2," p. 22.
III. Exegesis of the Passage

The general context. The epistle to the Colossians was written by Paul to the church at Colossae during one of his imprisonments. The epistle was written in response to news, apparently brought by Epaphras, of a strange set of teachings being promulgated by certain self-styled philosophers, which threatened to undermine the foundation of the Colossians' Christianity. The purpose of the epistle was to refute the claims of this philosophy and to point the Colossian believers to their spiritual Head, whose complete sufficiency was being challenged. Since the verse we are studying most carefully is located within a polemic against the heresy, we should examine the heresy to see if that examination can help us in the interpretation of our text.

We can gather our most reliable information on the heresy from the polemic passages of Colossians, namely chapter 2, verses 8,16-23. In verse 8, Paul warns the Colossians not to let anyone steal them away through philosophy and empty deceit (τῶς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης), according to the tradition of men (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων), according to the elements of the cosmos (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου), and not according to Christ. In verse 16 he disparages regulations concerning eating and drinking, "or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sab-

1Throughout the study the Pauline authorship of Colossians has been assumed. This is the general consensus of English-speaking scholars (the most notable exception being Lohse, Colossians, p. 181).

2The three imprisonments usually proposed as the setting for the epistle are a proposed imprisonment at Ephesus during his two year stay there (Acts 19), his imprisonment at Caesarea (Acts 23-26), and his first imprisonment at Rome (Acts 28). Although I favor the latter view, it makes little difference which view is accepted for the exegesis of the passage under special consideration in this paper, since all three imprisonments were well before the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in A. D. 70.
bath". In verse 18 he warns against some who apparently had visions
(unfortunately the Greek is obscure) and were "insisting on self-abase-
ment and worship of angels (τακεινοφοροοῦντι καὶ θεσπεῖα τῶν ἄγγελῶν)".
They were not staying close to Christ (verse 19). In verse 20 the
στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου came up again for condemnation, this time in associ-
ation with regulations (verse 21), "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not
touch (μὴ ἀψινοὴ γενώτρυς μηδὲ δύνας)". In verse 22 the heretical reli-
gion is condemned as being "human precepts and doctrines (τὰ ἐντάλματα
καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων)"; and in verse 23 as having an appearance
of wisdom in self-appointed religion (ἐν ἀνθρωποστασίᾳ) and self-abase-
ment (τακεινοφοροοῦντι) and severity to the body but not being of any
value "in checking the indulgence of the flesh (τῆς σαρκὸς)".

From these passages several points emerge. First, there were Jewish
elements in the heresy. The festival-new moon-Sabbath sequence, par-
ticularly the Sabbath part of the sequence, is exclusively Jewish, and
has always been recognized as such.²

Second, there were pagan elements in the heresy. The worship of
angels mentioned in verse 18 was unthinkable in the Judaism of the first
century, where probably the most firmly established norm was found in
Deuteronomy 6:4,5,14:

1Some have compared the μὴ ἀψινοὴ here with the μὴ ἀπεσισθαι in 1 Cor.
7:1, thus making the phrase forbid sexual contact, eating, and drinking
(cf. 1 Tim. 4:3), but it is probably unwise to accept this theory as
proven on the basis of one parallel.

2This is not to say that the heresy was Jewish, but only that there
were Jewish elements in the heresy. Even those commentators who see
these days as being kept in honor of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου believe
that the days originated in Judaism.
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. . . .

You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you; . . .

What kind of pagan elements they were we cannot say from the polemic passages alone. A wide variety of pagans and Jews had taboos on eating

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This principle was used by Jesus during the temptation (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8) and alluded to by the Jews in John 10:33. I do not think angel worship would have been accorded a much better welcome than Jesus' statement in John 10:30 was.

Some, for example Lenski (Colossians), feel that the Colossian heresy was purely Judaizing. They are forced to deny that "worship of angels" has anything to do with idolatry:

The supposition that they advocated the worship of angels and thus in Gnostic fashion elevated angels rests on a strained interpretation of 2:18, to which later ideas are added. But no Jew would turn to the worship of angels. (p. 10)

Lenski's defense of this position is found on pp. 130,132.

The two nouns are governed by one preposition: ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἡρμηνείᾳ. We thus regard the genitive τῶν ἀγγέλων as belonging to both. If it were read by itself without the genitive, "in lowliness" would be an incomplete concept. "Lowness and worship" naturally go together, for ἡρμηνεία, the worship in acts (cultus exterior), is practiced in humility; the worshiper approaches God in a humble, lowly attitude. We thus regard the genitive as subjective; "the angels' lowness with which they bring their worship to God." . . .

We cannot agree with the view of those who regard the genitive as the objective genitive; this view attaches τῶν ἀγγέλων only to the second noun, ἡρμηνείᾳ. The Judaizers did not worship the good angels. This would have been flagrant idolatry, and Paul would not have dealt with it by a mere incidental phrase and in a connection that referred to denial of the prize. No worship of angels was known in Paul's day. To posit such a worship on the strength of this genitive is asserting too much as far as the genitive is concerned and as far as Paul's whole statement is concerned.

Most commentators find this line of reasoning unconvincing. If Colossians is describing the beginnings of a heresy such as gnosticism, then one should not be surprised at the lack of contemporary records corroborating this fact. Gnosticism had to start sometime, and the first century is as good as any other time for that start. It would appear that the humility referred to in 2:18 could consist in worshipping angels instead of God (cf. Heb. 4:16) without doing violence to the text. Finally, ταπεινοφροσύνη reappears in verse 23 with ἐθελοθρησκία, self-appointed worship, which seems to imply that the angels did not originate the worship.
and drinking. Most Greek schools of thought (and a few Jewish ones, such as that of Philo), would use the name \( \phi \lambda \omicron \sigma \omicron \omicron \varphi \alpha \). And the meaning of the phrase \( \sigma \tau \iota \chi \epsilon \tau \alpha \tau \circ \sigma \omicron \mu \circ \mu \) is still an open subject, with some holding that the heresy itself did not use the term.\(^1\)

Third, while the heresy had diverse elements, it was nevertheless a unity. Paul switches from condemning one error to the next without the slightest indication of a break. This is particularly true in the transition from verse 17 to verse 18. The impression one gets is that Paul is opposing a single heresy with diverse elements.

Fourth, the heresy appears to have been synthesized by the Colossian heretics themselves. Paul calls it self-appointed religion (\( \delta \theta \epsilon \lambda \omicron \theta \omicron \omicron \sigma \chi \alpha \)) in verse 23. He says in verse 22 that it is "according to human precepts and doctrines", probably alluding to the Septuagint of Isaiah 29:13. In verse 8 he says it is "according to human tradition"\(^2\). It is possible that the false teachers tried to bolster their claims by an appeal to visions (verse 18), although too much should not be made of the verse, since the reading is questionable. In any case the general impression is one of syncretism.

Other features of the heresy may be deduced from the rest of the epistle. In 2:11 Paul says the Colossians "were circumcised with a cir-

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\(^{1}\)See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (1960), s. v. \( \sigma \tau \iota \chi \epsilon \tau \alpha \).

\(^{2}\)This language could imply that the Colossian heresy was not original but rather tied to some tradition. However, verse 23 and the use of the term \( \phi \lambda \omicron \sigma \omicron \omicron \varphi \alpha \) in verse 8 are against this, and in any case, the references are too negative for Paul to use in connection with the Mosaic law (cf. 2:16,17; Gal. 3:24).
cumcision made without hands," which suggests that the false teachers were advocating a circumcision made with hands. 1:28 says that Paul warned "every man" and taught "every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. . . ." (italics mine), which suggests that the false teachers may have been an esoteric sect. There is the repeated reference to ἄρχη καὶ ἔξουσία or ἄρχη καὶ ἔξουσία (1:16; 2:10,15), which has been connected with gnostic speculations about emanations from God. There is the constant reference to knowledge (γνῶσις, ἐπίγνωσις: 1:9,10;2:2,3) and wisdom (σοφία: 1:9,28;2:2), which has also been related to the gnostics. There is the combined reference to God and bodily form (1:19,22;2:9) which may be a polemic directed at Docetism. There is the emphasis on Christ's role in creation (1:15,16), which may have been aimed at destroying the doctrine of a demiurge. These clues strongly suggest that the heresy Paul was attacking was a gnostic one which had adopted some Jewish elements.¹

But whether the heresy was a Judaizing gnosticism or a gnosticising

¹This is the general consensus of most commentators, following the lead of Lightfoot (Colossians, pp. 73-113). Lightfoot himself placed the Colossian heresy on a continuum which ran from orthodox Judaism to Essenism to the Colossian heresy to Cerinthus to the full-blown gnostic heresy. He maintained that this was also a time sequence. His picture of the Essenes has been largely confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but a few points, such as their aversion to animal sacrifice on principle (p. 89) should be revised (see below, pp. 35,36). It is almost certain that the sect avoided the Temple because of the wickedness of the place, rather than because sacrifice was evil in itself. It is also the case that their dualism was an ethical one rather than the spirit-matter dualism of the gnostics, and they appear to have had a great respect for the law. Perhaps Philo and Hellenistic Judaism would be a better candidate for the second position in the sequence. In any case, it is certain that at least the Qumran brand of Essenism was not the Colossian heresy itself (see R. Martin, Colossians and Philemon, pp. 93,94). For a good treatment of the whole subject, see Richardson, "Colossians 2," pp. 23-48.
Judaism makes little difference in the interpretation of Colossians 2:16. Everyone agrees that the antecedent of the "festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath" in verse 16 is Jewish, even if by now it has become disconnected from Judaism. All proposed theories fit about equally well into the basic framework of the heresy:¹ these regulations are part of the Jewish element in a syncretistic conglomeration. Since we cannot use the nature of the heresy to choose between the various hypotheses concerning the meaning of verse 16, we will examine the passage itself to see if it is of more help.

Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands (ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὁ ἢν ὑπεναντίου ἡμῖν). The most important debate from the standpoint of exegesis is whether χειρόγραφον is a bond of indebtedness, as it usually is in the papyri, or whether it signifies merely a handwritten document. The main arguments for seeing the "ceremonial law" or the entire Mosaic law in the χειρόγραφον are three. First, the translation "handwriting of ordinances" (KJV) conjures up the picture of a handwritten document, which immediately suggests the law of Moses. Second, the passage is echoed in Ephesians 2:15, where the "law of commandments and ordinances (νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν)" is usually interpreted as part or all of the Mosaic law. Third, the verse is usually connected with verse 16 and, as noted above, those who see verse 16 as referring to the law tend to see that same law in verse 14.

¹Unless one should conceive it possible that the Colossian heretics were keeping the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation. The dualism of the heretics would probably keep them from memorializing the day when the demiurge finished creating the world.
However, these arguments are all fairly weak when examined closely. The first argument ignores the fact that the τοῖς δόγμασιν is in the dative form, and so may be translated dative (bond of indebtedness to the decrees)\(^1\) or instrumental (bond . . . with . . . legal demands, as in the RSV) or even locative (the handwriting or bond in the ordinances), but not genitive (handwriting of ordinances). The KJV translation is simply wrong here, and so is any exegesis built upon it. The second argument ignores the fact that the contexts of the two terms are somewhat different. The χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 is directed primarily against us, and its removal is associated with forgiveness of sins (verse 13), whereas as Lenski himself says,

\[\text{Eph. 2:11, etc., speaks of an entirely different subject, namely of the abolition of the Law which kept Jews and Gentiles apart, an idea that is not touched upon here.}^{2}\]

The third argument equates the contexts of verses 14 and 16. However, verse 14 refers to the Colossians' conversion experience and verse 16 refers to the attempt of the false teachers to impose regulations on them. The two situations cannot be equated in the face of contrary evidence, as presented below.

Furthermore, there are cogent reasons for understanding χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν as "bond of indebtedness to the decrees" (or "bond with its legal demands") rather than "handwritten law." First, "bond" is the usual meaning of χειρόγραφον.\(^3\) While not conclusive for determining the

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\(^1\)See Richardson, "Colossians 2," p. 51.

\(^2\)Colossians, p. 116.

\(^3\)See, for example, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Dictionary*, s. v. χειρόγραφον. The only example of χειρόγραφον in the LXX is in
meaning here, this fact must be given due weight. Second, the recipients of the letter were probably Gentiles when first converted (verse 13), and it seems logical that the χειρόγραφον was something that they felt hanging over their heads at that time, in which case it could not have been the Mosaic law. Third, the phrase "having canceled the bond . . ." is parallel to "having forgiven us all our trespasses" of verse 13, and the meaning "bond" for χειρόγραφον fits this context better. The χειρόγραφον was a bond and not the Mosaic law, and the canceling of that bond did not necessarily destroy the "festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath" of verse 16.

Two identities for the χειρόγραφον might be suggested. It could be the broken obligation to fulfill the law God has revealed to us, or

Tobit, where Tobit gives some money to Gabael in Media (1:14, 15) and later sends his son Tobias to get it from him (4:1, 2, 20). Tobias says, "'... how can I obtain the money when I do not know them?' Then Tobit gave him the receipt (χειρογραφων), and said to him, '... go and get the money'" (5:2, 3) Tobias goes to Media and sends Azarias (really the angel Raphael) to Gabael to get the money. (9:1, 2) 9:5 continues, "He gave him the receipt (χειρογραφων) and Gabael brought out the money bags . . . and gave them to him."

1 The Greek fathers, according to Lightfoot (Colossians, p. 188), interpreted τοις δόγμασιν as referring to the decrees or doctrines of the Gospel, describing the instrument of the destruction of the χειρόγραφον. This interpretation has now been universally abandoned and is mentioned only for historical interest.

2 If the δόγματα were the Mosaic law, then the bond was probably the debt incurred upon breaking the law and not the obligation to keep the law. This would allow verse 14 to parallel verse 13 more closely. However, as noted above, the Colossian believers were probably Gentiles at their conversion, and it is not likely that they would have felt a debt to the Jewish law hanging over their heads. More probably, they felt their guilt at breaking natural law (Rom. 2:14-16; 1:19 ff.), and it was this, or an objectification of it as a record of their misdeeds, that constituted the χειρογραφον τοις δόγμασιν.

3 C. F. D. Moule, Colossians, p. 97.
more likely, it could be a written record in heaven of misdeeds.\(^1\) Either way, it would justify Paul's use of two phrases meaning "contrary to us," thus stressing its antagonism to us.\(^2\)

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross (καὶ αὐτὸ ἡρῴευ ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ). Just as Paul emphasized the intense antagonism of the χειρόγραφον toward us by using two phrases, καθ' ἡμῶν and ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, to express this antagonism, so also he uses three actions to illustrate the completeness with which it is destroyed. It was erased, taken out of the way (ἐκ τοῦ μέσου), and nailed to the cross of Christ. In many commentaries an ancient custom of canceling a document by affixing it to a post with a nail is alluded to, but I am unable to trace the custom earlier than Grotius,\(^3\) and most commentators admit that, while it's a nice thought, there is really no evidence for such a custom.\(^4\)

Therefore (οὖν). Verses 16 and 17 are a conclusion of the preceding verses, and so to completely understand the passage, we have to have some idea of what Paul was saying in what has gone before. Paul is taking issue with the self-styled φιλοσοφία (Colossians 2:8) of certain false

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\(^1\) Martin, Colossians, p. 79, Herold Weiss, "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34 (July, 1972)310-312, and TDNT, s. v. χειρόγραφον, by Edward Lohse.


\(^3\) Barnes, Notes, 7:265,

\(^4\) Lightfoot, Colossians, p. 189.
teachers. They were "not holding fast to the Head" (verse 19), but were "insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels" (verse 18), and they were insisting on "regulations, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch' . . . promoting rigor of devotion . . . and severity to the body."

As noted above (pp. 16,17), they were probably proto-gnostics who had absorbed some Jewish and Christian elements.

In verses 8-15 he gives what might be considered an introduction to verses 16 and 17. He lists several things God has done for the believer through Christ: He has circumcised him "with a circumcision made without hands" (verse 11), buried him in baptism and then raised him (verse 12), forgiven his trespasses and cancelled the bond of indebtedness (verses 13,14), and triumphed over the "principalities and powers" (verse 15). These "principalities and powers" are probably important intermediaries between God and man in the heretical speculations, which means that the verses following verse 15 may refer to these proto-gnostic ideas. But the comment on circumcision stands out as being directed at Jewish elements in this syncretism. Since the latter half of verse 16 has some close Old Testament parallels and no parallels outside of Jewish circles, we can safely interpret that part of the verse in the light of these parallels.¹

Let no man pass judgment on you (Μὴ ἄνθρωπος ἀποκριθῇ τῇ χειρὶ σου). This could also be translated, 'whoever he is, he is to stop judging you.'¹

The verb ἀποκριθῇ is a third person imperative, which is difficult to

¹The foregoing is not meant to disparage the view that verse 16 is talking about regulations kept in honor of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. Doubtless this was the case. The question we are trying to answer is, what kind of regulations were they?
translate into English, but either translation gives the approximate sense.

One reason for Paul's order to stop judging may be found in Romans 14:4,5:

Who are you to pass judgment on (ο ὑπαιτού) the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand. . . . Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind.

That is, our responsibility for purity in doctrine and practice is to ourselves and to God, and in the final analysis, no one has a right to judge us except God. In fact, in John 12:47, Jesus, our Example, is quoted as saying, "If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge (ο ὑπαίτο) him, for I did not come to judge (ὅνα ὑπαίτο) the world but to save the world." Some have made a special application of Romans 14:4,5 to Colossians 2:16,17 in view of the first half of verse 5: "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike." This has often been connected with the ἑαυτής ἐνευμηνιας ἀλλὰ οὐκ ἑαυτῶν of Colossians 2:16.3

Against this we need to balance Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 5:12-6:2:

Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge (κρίνετε)? . . . When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law (κρίνεσθαι) before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge (κρίνοντα) the world? And if the world is to be judged (κρίνεται) by you, are you

1 Interestingly, the Greek translated "estems" is κρίνει.

2 More accurately, every day (τὰς ἡμέρας); the "alike" is supplied, although the meaning may be the same.

3 For example, see Canright, *Adventism*, p. 297. The phrase θεούς και τούς also occurs in both passages, giving support to this position. Cf. Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:16.
incompetent to try (κρινοῦν) trivial cases?

Apparently there is some judging function for Christians, and it in-
volves other Christians as well. Whatever the balance that is finally
struck between Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 5,6, we cannot assume that
Romans 14 and Colossians 2 are forbidding judgment for the same reason
unless the texts are otherwise similar.

And there is an important difference between the two passages. In
Romans, Paul carefully avoids taking sides on the issue of days. In
Colossians he seems to be disparaging the practices of which he says
"let no man pass judgment on you."¹ He calls some of them "a shadow
of things to come" (verse 17, KJV) and says about others in verses 20–23,

Why do you submit to regulations, . . . according to human
precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom
in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to
the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of
the flesh.

I see no further way to disparage a practice than to say that it is of
no value, unless it is to say that it is sin to participate in it. It
is true that Paul does not specifically mention feast days, new moons,
or sabbaths as being of no value, but everything else in the passage is
disparaged (except, of course, Christ), and σκότος in this setting is not
a very complimentary word. The distinct mood of the passage is, "let
no man make you think that you have a duty to perform these worthless
acts. You are now in Christ."

¹Raoul Dederen ("On Esteeming One Day Better Than Another," Andrews
University Seminary Studies 9 [Jan. 1971]:29) feels that Paul actually
sided with those who disregarded the days in Romans, but believed the
issue to be peripheral, whereas in Colossians he condemned the days as
being substituted for salvation by faith in Christ.
In questions of food and drink (ἐν βρῶσει καὶ ἐν πόσει), or more accurately, in eating and drinking. The Greek word for food is βρῶμα. Although John does not always observe the distinction between βρῶμας and βρῶμα, Paul apparently does, and so he is probably concerned not with what kind of food or drink to consume "but rather with when to eat and to drink and when to fast. It is a question of asceticism."

Some have felt that the phrase "in questions of food and drink" refers to the food and drink offerings described in the Mosaic law. But the Septuagint's translation of cereal offering (ἱερὰ καὶ χορταστήριον) and drink offering (τοιχία), are θυσία and σπουδή, not βρῶμας and πόσις.

1The only significant textual problem in the passage involves the choice of καὶ or η. We are reading with p.6, B, and the text of Nestle's Novum Testamentum Graece, 24th ed. (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1960), and against the majority of the manuscripts and the International Critical Commentary (30:264). However, the textual problem makes little difference exegetically.

2John 6:55; see also John 4:32;6:27.

3Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 8:4, and 2 Corinthians 9:10 all use βρῶμας to mean the act of eating. Compare the use of βρῶμα in 1 Timothy 4:3, and also in Romans 14:15,20; 1 Corinthians 3:2,6:13;8:8,13;10:3. The only apparent exception, if Paul wrote Hebrews, is Hebrews 12:16, where Esau, ἵνα βρῶμας μιᾶς, sold his birthright. Even this may not be an exception, as the concept was not that he got one dish but rather that he got all he could eat at one sitting.

4Specht, "Sabbath," p. 4. (However, see the parallel with Hebrews 13:9-12 cited on p. 38.) Some have seen the dietary restrictions in the Pentateuch in this expression, but even Lightfoot, who has the best list (Colossians, p. 193) can only find three instances of drink restriction, the Nazirite vow, priests on duty, and drinks in unclean vessels. It is doubtful that the first two were being urged on the Colossians, and the third one alone would hardly have given rise to the expression. This proposal also has trouble with the fact that Paul could allow some judgment of Gentile Christians concerning Jewish dietary laws (Acts 15:12,22, 23,27).

5Among them the editors of the SDABC (7:205).

6See the LXX of Ex. 29:41;30:9; Lev. 2:5;13:6;14:7;9.10.37;22; Num.
More probably, ἀρξασις καὶ πότις was a phrase borrowed from gnostic or other pagan sources.¹ R. Martin gives a couple of reasons why some ancients practiced abstinence from food and drink.

One was a belief in the transmigration of souls which led to the idea that consuming animal meat was a form of 'cannibalism' (see C. Bornkamm, TDNT iv, p. 67). Another view (more important in this context, in the light of v. 18) was an importance attached to fasting as a prelude to receiving a revelation from the gods...²

To this list must be added the common garden variety of asceticism based on dualistic principles.

Or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath (ἡ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἡ νεομηνίας ἡ σαββάτων). Historically, the greatest controversy over this phrase has been whether the σαββάτων is singular or plural. Those who viewed it as plural regarded its plurality as proof that the seventh-day Sabbath is not intended, but rather the many ceremonial sabbaths. This position has several problems. First, there is only one ceremonial sabbath for which the Septuagint uses the word σάββατον, the Day of Atonement.³ Thus, if a plural meaning is urged for σαββάτων the only two σαββάτα around are the Day of Atonement and the weekly Sabbath, and including the weekly Sabbath was precisely what the pluralists were

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¹Richardson, "Colossians 2," pp. 69-73.
²Colossians and Philemon, p. 90.
³Lev. 16:31;23:32: The expression used is σάββατα σαββάτων. Interestingly, the term is plural, like most of the references to the seventh-day Sabbath. Ἀνάπαυσις was used for the other ceremonial rest days (cf., for example, Lev. 23:14, 39). Σάββατα is also used for the rest the land was to have every seven years (Lev. 25:2,4,6), but it is extremely doubtful that this aspect of the Mosaic law was being urged on the Colossians believers.
trying to avoid. 1 Besides this, it is well known that the plural σαββατα is used in the New Testament when only the singular can be meant. 2 The same is true in the Septuagint. In fact, the form used in the fourth commandment is plural. 3 One suggested reason for this phenomenon is that "there may be a parallel here to the custom of using the Greek plural for celebrations such as the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mark 14:1), and birthdays (Mark 6:21)."4 Another suggestion is well put by Earle Hilgert:

... A. T. Robertson (A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research [London: Hodder and Staughton, n. d.], pp. 95, 105) ... suggests that the two forms, sabbaton and sabbata, while apparently the singular and plural of the same word, are in reality each the singular of different words. He points out that the Hebrew word for 'sabbath', as is commonly known, is shabbath, and is the logical source of the common Greek term sabbaton. In postexilic times, however, Aramaic was widely used in Palestine, and its term for 'sabbath' is shab-betha, a word which could easily have been taken into Greek as sabbata. Thus sabbaton was always a singular, while sabbata might be either singular or plural, depending upon whether it was used as the derivative of the Aramaic or as the plural of sabbaton. 5

In any case, the distinction between σαββατον and σαββατα is practically

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1 This is perhaps nitpicking, but so is the argument for a plural meaning for σαββατων. Even if successful, the argument would still only allow other sabbaths to be included in the reference and would not exclude the seventh-day Sabbath.


3 Cf. Ex. 16:23,25,26,29;31:3; Lev. 19:3;24:8;26:2,34,43; Num. 15:32; Is. 56:2,4;58:13; Jer. 17:21 for some examples. See especially Ex. 20:8,9; Deut. 5:12,14,15.


5 "Sabbath Days' in Colossians 2:16," The Ministry 25 (Feb. 1952): 42. Lightfoot also used this explanation (Colossians, p. 194).
nonexistent. In fact, in the whole New Testament there is only one text where it can be proven from the context that ἀδερφά is meant to be plural, Acts 17:2, where it says καὶ ἔτι ἀδερφά τρία, and for three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them. Thus the case for a plural meaning of ἀδερφάων rests on a shaky foundation. It is much more likely that it is singular like ἐκκλήσις and νεομνήμας, the other two words in the series.

There is only one parallel passage in the New Testament besides the passage in Romans 14 cited on page 17 above. The relevant passage is in Galatians 4:10,11 and reads, "You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain." The parallel lies not only in the fact that "months and seasons and years" are similar to "a feast day or a new moon" and that "days" may be parallel to "a sabbath", but also in their context. The στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου of Colossians 2:8,20 are also found in Galatians 4:3, and in the verse preceding the passage quoted above in Galatians, Paul speaks of turning back to the "weak and beggarly στοιχεῖα." The heresies at Colossae and Galatia are also similar in requiring circumcision (Colossians 2:11,13; Galatians

1In the story of the plucking of wheat on the Sabbath, Mark uses the plural in 2:23,24. In the parallel passages, Matthew uses the plural in 12:1 and the singular in 12:2, whereas Luke uses the singular in 6:1 and the plural in 6:2. In the story of the man with the withered hand, Matthew uses the plural in 12:10,11,12, while Luke uses the singular in 6:6,7,9. In fact, in Matt. 12:5, Matthew uses the two forms with only six words between them, apparently with no change in meaning.

2This could also be translated "and for three weeks," as another meaning of ἀδερφάων is week (cf. Luke 18:12). The word probably has both connotations here.

5:11,12). There are differences, however, most notably the absence of any discussion of law in Colossians (the word νόμος does not even occur there), while the discussion of law fills most of Galatians. We can not identify the antecedent customs to Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10 with each other without further evidence that they should be so identified.

And even if Galatians 4:10 is parallel to Colossians 2:16, the passage in Galatians gives us little help in interpreting Colossians 2:16, except to say that, whatever the problem was, it was a common one. Galatians 4:10,11 clearly states that the problem was the keeping of days, rather than the ignoring of days, but we already had gathered that from the passage in Colossians. It also indicates that Paul is concerned about the Galatians' keeping of days, rather than just their being judgmental about others not keeping those days; but again, we had suspected that from the Colossians passage. Finally, the Greek for "you observe" is παρατηρεῖτε, which means "you scrupulously observe" or "you carefully observe", possibly indicating that a more relaxed attitude, rather than a complete disregard for these days, was what Paul was after,¹ but that is squeezing the last drop out of the passage, and we still have been enlightened very little by it.

When we turn to the Old Testament, however, the situation is changed. There are six passages in the Septuagint where the sequence ἐν οἴνῳ . . . νεομνυμα . . . σάββατον, or the reverse, is found, and once where μὴν

¹That Paul did not totally disregard these days may be deduced from Acts 20:16;21:21,24,26, although Paul may have wished to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost because of the audience he could have then, and Acts 21:24 gives another motive for his purification at the Temple.
substitutes for νεομνιεία. A similar grouping with a wider separation between the terms is found in three other passages, and several passages have two of the words together or the words μὴν and όδηβατον.

When two of the words are used together (or the words μὴν and όδηβατον) the usage is varied. In Amos 8:5, μὴν . . . καὶ τὰ όδηβατα (Ἱσραὴλ) . . . μὴν ἐγερθοῦν) are days when wheat and other kinds of grain may not be sold. In Isaiah 66:23 μὴν εἶναι μὴν καὶ όδηβατον εἰς σαββάτον (ςαββάτον would be days of worship when the Lord restores Israel. In 2 Kings 4:23 νεομνιεία (ὡς Χρή) and όδηβατον (ὡς Χρή) are days in which to consult prophets. In Psalm 81:3 (80:4 in the LXX; 81:4 in the Hebrew) εἰς νεομνιεία (ὡς Χρή) and εἰς εὐσεβεία ἡμῶν ἔορτας ἡμῶν (ὡς Χρή) Israel is to sing and blow trumpets, apparently a reference to Numbers 10:10, where νεομνιεία and ἔορτας are also mentioned as days in which to blow trumpets (although here the Hebrew is not quite parallel: νῦν ἐν τῇ χαίρειν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἁρπαγῇ). In Ezra 3:5 (2 Esdras 3:5 in the LXX) offerings are to be made εἰς τὰς νομιματικὰς καὶ εἰς πάσας ἐορτὰς (ὡς Χρή). And in Lamentations 2:6 the Lord has made an end in Zion ἐορτὰς καὶ σαββάτα (ὡς Χρή). As seen above, there is no consistent connotation beyond to describe the days themselves.

But with the possible exception of Hosea 2:11, whenever σαββάτα, νεομνιεία, and ἐορτά, or the equivalent σαββάτα, μὴν, ἐορτά, are used

1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Eze. 45:17; Neh. 10:33; Hos. 2:11.

2 Is. 1:13, 14; Eze. 46; Num. 28, 29.

3 Num. 10:10; 2 Kings 4:23; Psalm 81:3; Is. 66:23; Amos 8:5; Lam. 2:6; Ezra 3:5.
together in the Septuagint (τῷ δὲ, ἀπὸ τῶν, and ἐπὶ or ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ in the Hebrew), what is dealt with is the offerings on these days. According to 1 Chronicles 23:30,31 the Levites are to stand thanking and praising the Lord morning and evening "and whenever burnt offerings are offered to the Lord ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς νεομνημονίαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱμάτισι)". The same phrase is used in 2 Chronicles 2:4 (2:3 in the LXX and the Hebrew) with "for burnt offerings morning and evening, and . . ." in front of it. There is a spelling change in the Septuagint (νομιμαίας for νεομνημονίαις), and two minor changes in the Hebrew: a ה in front of בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל and the construct state of בַּעֲדוֹ. In 2 Chronicles 8:12,13 it says, "Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord . . . according to the commandment of Moses ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς μησον καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς τρεῖς καὶ τῶν τοῦ ἑνλαυνοῦ." The Hebrew is identical to that of 2 Chronicles 2:4 except for the feminine ending of בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Hezekiah contributed to "the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings εἰς σαββάτα καὶ εἰς τὰς νεομνημονίας καὶ εἰς τὰς ἑορτάς, as it is written in the law of the Lord." (2 Chronicles 31:3) The Hebrew is identical to that of 2 Chronicles 2:4 except for the lack of the construct (the last word being בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). Ezekiel, in his vision of the Temple, mentions "the prince's duty to furnish the burnt offerings . . . ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς νεομνημονίαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱμάτισι).") (Ezekiel 45:17) And Nehemiah 10:33 (2 Esdras 20:34 in the LXX, Nehemiah 10:34 in the Hebrew) makes reference to "the continual burnt offering, [and that] τῶν σαββάτων, τῶν νεομνημονῶν, εἰς τὰς ἑορτάς, (καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱμάτισι) . . ."
Hosea may also be referring to the offerings on those days when he says, "I will put an end to her mirth, ἐορτὰς αὐτῆς καὶ τὰς νομιμίας αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ σάββατα αὐτῆς καὶ πάσας τὰς πανηγυρίες αὐτῆς (ῥῆμα τὸ ἐπιτύπωσεν τὴν θητερίαν ἡμών)." (Hosea 2:11, 2:13 in the LXX and the Hebrew) The context does speak of "the feast days of the Baals when she burned incense to them," (verse 13), although I feel that it is more probable that either he was speaking of both the days and their offerings or he did not have the offerings per se in mind. But in what are by far the majority of the Old Testament festival—new moon—Sabbath passages, what is dealt with is the burnt offerings on these days.

There remain the three passages where σάββατον, νομιμία, and ἐορτὴ (ἡμέρα, ἡμέραν, and ἀπὸ or ἡμέρας) are used without their sequential juxtaposition, Numbers 28, 29, Ezekiel 46, and Isaiah 1:13, 14. In Isaiah, the only difference from the passages quoted in the last paragraph is that there is not a smooth sequence. The passage reads, "Bring no more vain offerings: incense is an abomination to me. Τὰς νομιμίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ σάββατα καὶ ἡμέραν μεγάλην (ἡμέρας ξένης καὶ ἡμέρας τοῦ βασιλέως)—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Καὶ τὰς νομιμίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰς ἐορτὰς ὑμῶν (ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπου) my soul hates." Isaiah appears to be talking about offerings here, as the first part of the passage indicates (see also verse 11). So Isaiah 1:13, 14 supports the

1Canright (Adventism, p. 289) states that "Hosea 2:11 is a plain prophecy that all these holy days should cease just as we know has happened in fact; and in Col. 2:16, is proof that they were nailed to the cross." But assuming that Hosea meant the days as well as the sacrifices on those days would be put to an end, his prophecy was fulfilled at the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cf. Lam. 2:6) and need not be fulfilled again.
hypothesis that ἐορτὴ... νεομνημα... σαββατου refers to the sacrifices on those days.

Ezekiel 46 is an interesting chapter to study from this standpoint. There are two kinds of references to σαββατου (Ταβάντιον) and νεομνημα (Σήμερον). One is in series with ἐορτή (网约), the other is not, and as one might expect, one has reference to the sacrificial system and the other does not. The gate of the inner court that faces east is to be opened ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων... καὶ ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῆς νομονίας (ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων... ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς νομονίας) (verse 1), and the people of the land shall worship at that gate ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς νομονίαις (ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς νομονίαις) (verse 3). But the burnt offering ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων (ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων) (verse 4), ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῆς νομονίας (ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῆς νομονίας) (verse 6), and ἐν ταῖς ἐορταῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς καννηψεστίν (ἐν ταῖς καννηψεστίν) (verse 11) are described in sequence, adding further weight to our hypothesis.

Finally, "Numbers 28 and 29... list the very 'ordinances' referred to in Colossians 2:16,17..." Numbers 28:1,2 starts out, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Command the people of Israel, and say to them, "My offering, my food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take heed to offer to me in its due season."' Then verses 3–8 describe the continual offering morning and evening, verses 9,10 mention the offering ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων (ἐν τῷ ἡμέρα τῶν σαββάτων), verses 11–15 describe the offering ἐν ταῖς νομονίαις (ἐν ταῖς νομονίαις), verses 16–25 describe the offering of the Passover, verses 26–31 that of Pente-
cost, 29:1-6 that of the Day of Trumpets, verses 7-11 that of the Day of Atonement, and verses 12-38 those of the Feast of Tabernacles. Verse 39 closes with "These you shall offer to the Lord ἐν ταῖς ἐορτασίς τῆς θείας ἑορτὰς (τῶν ἑορτῶν) in addition to your votive offerings and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your cereal offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings." Notice the sequence of offerings: first the daily, then the weekly, then the monthly, then the seasonal or yearly. It is evident that this is the source of the expression ὀδηγεῖν ... ἐν εὐαγγελία ... ἐορτῇ. Notice that in the majority of cases, that phrase is linked with the continual burnt offering or the offering morning and evening. Notice also that twice (2 Chronicles 8:13;31:3) the offerings are described as being offered "according to the commandment of Moses," or "as it is written in the law of the Lord."

The passage in Nehemiah 10 deserves special mention. In verse 21 the people "join with their brethren, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law which was given by Moses the servant of God,..." They will not intermarry with "the people of the land" (verse 30; cf. Deuteronomy 7:3; Exodus 34:16), buy on the Sabbath or a holy day, plant crops on the seventh year (cf. Exodus 23:10,11; Leviticus 25:1-7), or exact debts (verse 31; cf. Deuteronomy 15:1,2).

At this point the subject is changed to the temple service. The people lay upon themselves the obligation to pay one third of a shekel yearly for the upkeep of the temple: for "the showbread, the continual cereal offering, the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new
moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings . . ."

There are other things that they promise to do, but these are the important ones for our purposes. Note that the keeping of the Sabbath (verse 31) is clearly differentiated from the offerings on the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the feast days (verse 33). When the people of Nehemiah's time used the above expression, they were referring to the sacrificial offerings on these days, and not the cessation of labor on these days, particularly not the keeping of the Sabbath.

There are two more sources which precede Colossians which deserve attention. The first is the Dead Sea Scroll called The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness (1QM). The second is the Book of Jubilees, an anonymous Essene rewriting of Genesis and part of Exodus. As the War Scroll contains the closer parallel, we will consider it first.

The passage in question is 1QM 2.4-6. Theodor H. Gaster translates it as follows:

The major officials assigned to service shall take up their positions, in discharge of their duties, on the festivals, new moons, sabbaths or weekdays duly assigned to them. They shall be fifteen years of age and upwards. Their function shall be to attend to the burnt-offerings and the sacrifices, to set out the incense of 'pleasant savor' for God's acceptance, to perform rites of atonement in behalf of all His congregation, and constantly to clear away the fat ashes which lie before Him on the 'table of glory'.

1Two noteworthy references that are both second century are Justin, Dialogue With Trypho 8.4, and in the Mishna, Zebahim 10.1. The former has Trypho saying that if Justin will become circumcised and keep the precepts regarding the Sabbath, feast days, and new moons, in other words fulfill the law, God will look with favor upon him. The latter is a midrash stating that the daily whole burnt offerings should precede the additional whole offerings, and that the additional offerings for the Sabbath should precede those of the new moon, which should precede those of the new year.

2The Dead Sea Scriptures (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc.,
Notice the reference to festivals ( זמן קדש), new moons ( Sabbaths ( יום טוב). Note also the context: temple worship. This passage also supports the position that the sequence feast day, new moon, Sabbath is always used in association with the sacrificial system.

The Book of Jubilees (and one poor parallel in the book of Enoch) contains nine series worth looking at. Six of them are scattered throughout the book. I will give them first.¹

Jubilees 1.10
And many will perish and they will be taken captive, and will fall into the hands of the enemy, because they have forsaken My ordinances and My commandments, and the festivals of My covenant, and My sabbaths, and My holy place which I have hallowed for Myself in their midst, and My tabernacle, and My sanctuary, . . .

Jubilees 1.14
And they will forget all My law and all My commandments and all My judgments, and will go astray as to new moons, and Sabbaths, and festivals, and jubilees, and ordinances.

Jubilees 2.9,10
And God appointed the sun to be a great sign on the earth for days and for sabbaths and for months and for feasts and for years and for sabbaths of years and for jubilees and for all seasons of the years.

Jubilees 4:18
And he [Enoch] was the first to write a testimony, and he testified to the sons of men among the generations of the earth, and recounted the weeks of the jubilees, and made known to them the days of the years, and set in order the months and recounted the Sabbaths of the years as we made (them), [sic] known to him.

Jubilees 23.19
And they shall strive one with another, . . . on account of the law and the covenant; for they have forgotten commandment,


and covenant, and feasts, and months, and Sabbaths, and jubilees, and all judgements.

Enoch 82:7

And the account thereof [the four intercalary days and the year of 364 days] is accurate and the recorded reckoning thereof exact; for the luminaries, and months and festivals, and years and days, has Uriel shown and revealed to me, . . .

The other three parallels are in chapter six. Because they are within five verses of each other and the intervening verses help us to understand what the phrases meant, I will quote the passage in full.

And all the children of Israel will forget, and will not find the path of the years, and will forget the new moons, and seasons, and sabbaths, and they will go wrong as to all the order of the years. For I know and from henceforth will I declare it unto thee, and it is not of my own devising; for the book (lies) written before me, and on the heavenly tablets the division of days is ordained, lest they forget the feasts of the covenant and walk according to the feasts of the Gentiles after their error and after their ignorance. For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon—how (it) disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. For this reason the years will come upon them when they will disturb (the order) and make an abominable (day) the day of testimony, and an unclean day a feast day, and they will confound all the days, the holy with the unclean, and the unclean day with the holy, for they will go wrong as to the months and sabbaths and feasts and jubilees. For this reason I command and testify to thee that thou mayst testify to them; for after thy death thy children will disturb (them), so that they will not make the year three hundred and sixty-four days only, and for this reason they will go wrong as to the new moons and seasons and sabbaths and festivals, and they will eat all kinds of blood with all kinds of flesh. (Jubilees 6.34-38)

If one reads the earlier part of chapter six, one realizes why all the excitement about feast days, new moons, and sabbaths. The Book of Jubilees (and the book of Enoch—see especially chapters 72-74,82) had a 364 day calendar, divided into 4 quarters of exactly 13 weeks each. It made a beautiful theoretical system. Of course, someone sooner or later was bound to discover that the moon and the sun did not keep pace with the calendar, hence the warning in verse 36.
Two further observations might be made. First, the order of members in the different lists is highly variable. There is very little stereotyping of lists, either in content or in order. They generally do not preserve the order "feast day, new moon, Sabbath," tending to put the new moons first. Second, there is considerable stereotyping of the introductions to the lists. All but three of the lists (Jubilees 2.9,10;4.18; Enoch 8.7—and two of those three are the two most atypical in their lists) contain an introduction like "And the children of Israel will forget" or "The children of Israel will go astray." In summary we might say that there is a fairly well-defined general type of statement that would call to mind the calendar conflict of Jubilees. One would expect to find a hodgepodge of calendrical occasions, weekly, yearly, monthly, and non-descript.1

We thus come to the end of our search for parallels to Colossians 2:16. We are left with four options: 1. we can choose to ignore all parallels, leaving the study where we began; 2. we can accept those parts of the parallels most convenient to us (for example, the virtual proof that οὐαββαδίων in Colossians 2:16 has reference to the seventh-day Sabbath) and ignore what we do not like; 3. we can accept a parallelism between Colossians 2:16 and the Book of Jubilees and attempt to build our exegesis around it; or 4. we can accept the parallelism between Colossians 2:16 and the Old Testament and the War Scroll, and attempt to build our exegesis around this parallelism. As I see it, by far the most logical

1I would propose that that is exactly what we have in Galatians 4:10. The "days and months and seasons and years" are not as well sequenced as the occasions listed in Colossians 2:16. "Weeks" are skipped entirely. Compare especially with Enoch 82.7.
choice at our present state of knowledge is the fourth.

Now one of the things we have noticed about the Old Testament material is that the phrase "festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath" is practically always associated with the offerings on those days, not just as incidental (after all, if there were special offerings on those days we might expect some incidental references without any close relationship between the phrase and the offerings), but as the way to describe those offerings. So when Paul uses the phrase in Colossians, anyone who was acquainted with the Old Testament parallels would immediately think of the weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices prescribed by Moses.

Are we making too big a leap from Paul's phrase to the sacrificial system? I think not, for three reasons. First, the identity is very close to the surface in the Old Testament, particularly when the later part of the Old Testament was written. Remember the use made of the phrase in Nehemiah 10. Second, all through Colossians, as Ralph Martin puts it, Paul "seems to be actually quoting the slogans and watchwords of the cult."¹ For example, the "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" of Colossians 2:21 is almost certainly quoted from the false teachers. It is otherwise far too cryptic to be of much help to the Colossian believers in their dilemma. It seems quite likely to me that Paul is here quoting or parodying another slogan from the false teachers, only this time we know the antecedent. Finally, I think this interpretation fits much better with verse 17 than any other, as I think we will

¹Colossians and Philemon, p. 8.
see as we come to it.¹

These are only a shadow of what is to come (ὄλα ἑστιν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων), or more literally, which are a shadow of the coming things. The ὅ probably refers to the phrase ἐρημῆς καὶ νεομνήμας καὶ σάββατὼν, rather than just to σάββατὼν, as the phrase is a unit and the latter interpretation must break it up. In fact, some commentators see in ὅ a reference to ἐν βρῶσι καὶ ἐν πόσι as well,³ but the grammar does not call for this, and considering that βρῶσις καὶ πόσις is probably a gnostic rather than an Old Testament phrase, it would seem unlikely that Paul would see in it a symbol of Christ.

The word σκιὰ has been seen by some commentators as the key to the phrase preceding it, excluding the seventh-day Sabbath as it is said to have a commemorative function (Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 20:8-11) rather than a foreshadowing function.⁴ Those who see the Sabbath as an institution in this text have often answered by pointing to Hebrews 4:1-11 as an evidence of its typical nature, and have mentioned that the Passover also had a dual function, pointing both backwards (Exodus 12:11-17) and

¹As noted above (pp. 17,18), the Colossian heresy can accomodate all of the interpretations of verse 16 about equally well. If our interpretation is correct, the heresy advocated something similar to the 1/3 shekel tax mentioned in Neh. 10:32-34. The Temple in Jerusalem was still standing when Paul wrote the verse, and it would not be surprising if someone advocated participation in the temple sacrifices during this period.

²There is a slight textual variant here. B, G, and Marcion read ὅ. Again, accepting the variant does not make much difference in the exegesis. (Of course, the ὅ is correct either way).

³For example, see SDABC 7:206.

⁴For example, see Hilgert, "Sabbath Days," p. 43.
forwards (1 Corinthians 5:7), so why not the Sabbath?\(^1\) They have a point and one cannot exclude the Sabbath as an institution from the text by an appeal to σκιά alone. However, according to Genesis 2:2,3 the Sabbath was instituted before sin, and while the only other institution originating before the fall (marriage; Genesis 2:23,24) was symbolic of Christ (Ephesians 5:31,32), marriage was not done away when Christ came.\(^2\) The Sabbath might fit as "a shadow of things to come" (KJV) but it does not fit comfortably, and in view of the fact that the preceding phrase is probably a reference to the sacrificial system rather than to Sabbath observance (see above pp. 29-40), there is no reason to try to force it to fit.

A related observation is pertinent here. The new moon did not obviously point forward to Christ, who was crucified at the full moon (passover, the fourteenth day of the lunar month); in fact, new moons were part of the original plan for a restored earth (Isaiah 66:23). However, the offerings of the new moon festival are much more easily understood as foreshadowing Christ.

It has also recently been asserted\(^3\) that the word σκιά refers to the shadowy and unsubstantial nature of the ἔορται τῆς νεομνήνιας τοῦ σαββάτου.

\(^1\)For example, see Canright, *Adventism*, p. 294.

\(^2\)Adam Clarke claims (*The Bible*, 6:498) that the Sabbath is a type of the new earth and that "no type ever ceases till the antitype be come." However, Adventists cannot conscientiously use his argument, as they believe that the antitypical day of atonement was separated from the last typical day by 1800 years, and it should not be a very strong argument for first-day Sabbatarians in view of Moses' serpent (Num. 21:4-9; 2 Kings 18:4; John 3:14,15).

\(^3\)Richardson, "Colossians 2," pp. 77-83.
rather than to any foreshadowing function they may possess. However, while σκιά doubtless has the connotation of nonsubstantiality and emptiness (especially when contrasted with σῶμα), σκιά is also connected with τῶν μελλόντων, of the coming things. It would seem that something that was a shadow of coming things fore-shadowed them by definition. In Hebrews 8:5, σκιά is parallel with ὑποδείγματι, pattern, and in Hebrews 10:1 the law is spoken of as having a shadow (Σκιάν) of the good things to come (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν).¹ These two texts have always, to my knowledge, been understood as using σκιά with a pointing or fore-shadowing function,² and there is no real reason why σκιά in Colossians 2:17 should not be understood in the same way.

If ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων refers to the sacrificial system, the meaning of ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων is obvious. The sacrificial system pointed forward to Christ,³ and when He came that system had no more significance than a shadow. It may still be worthwhile studying, but it is no longer worth practicing.

But the substance belongs to Christ (τὰ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ). "Substance" is in fact one rendering of the Greek term (σῶμα) for 'body.' This has suggested to some interpreter . . . that Paul has the church as Christ's body in view."⁴ This view accords well with Colossians 1:18

¹The verse goes on to say "instead of the true form of these realities (οὐχ ὁτὲν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων)," thus making the parallel even closer.

²See, for example, Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Dictionary, s. v. σκιά.

³See John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 8-10 passim.

⁴R. Martin, Colossians, pp. 90,91.
and 2:19, but it seems to detract a little from the centrality of Christ to say that the Jewish rituals only foreshadowed the church. There is another very significant use of the word body, occurring in 1 Peter 2:24, as well as in Colossians 1:22. As C. F. D. Moule said, the word 'body'

... probably suggested that famous verse which, in the prevalent LXX version of Ps. xl. 7, read (as quoted in Heb. x. 5)

θυσίαν καὶ προσφορὰν ὑπὸ ἡσύχασας, σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι: Christ's body, offered in sacrifice, was the reality to which the mere 'shadow'—the sacrificial system—pointed. Thus 'substance', 'Church', and 'final, perfect sacrifice' may all be ideas which would have crowded into the listeners' minds when this phrase in our letter was read, or at any rate into the writer's mind when it was written.¹

A parallel to Colossians 2:16,17 according to this interpretation, showing that the proposed sequence of meat, drink, and sacrifices was not unique in early Christianity, may be found in Hebrews 13. Verse 9a warns about being led astray by "diverse and strange teachings" (cf. Colossians 2:8), 9b urges the believer to have his heart strengthened by grace (cf. Colossians 2:10-15), and 9c disparages food. (cf. Colossians 2:16a). Then 10a disparages the temple service (cf. Colossians 2:16b), and finally verses 11 and 12 speak about the parallel between the sacrificial system and Jesus (cf. Colossians 2:17).²

¹Colossians, p. 103.

IV. Conclusion

To summarize, the word σαββατών in Colossians 2:16,17 has often been used to prove that the seventh-day Sabbath has been done away; it has been interpreted as referring to ceremonial sabbaths and having nothing to do with the seventh-day Sabbath; it has been understood as referring to the Sabbath as a sign of Judaism and the Jewish regulations concerning the Sabbath; and it has been read as decrying the observance of the Sabbath in honor of the elemental spirits of the Universe. But the weight of evidence indicates that what Paul actually had reference to was the sacrifices on the seventh-day Sabbath prescribed in Numbers 28:9,10, which pointed forward to Christ and are no longer binding on the Christian since His death.

From a broader perspective, we can see that Paul may have had more than one thing in mind when he wrote the text, and we may read other valid Pauline thoughts into the text, and, while Paul did not have them in mind specifically, he would nevertheless agree with them. Doing anything in honor of the elemental spirits of the Universe is something that I am sure Paul would condemn. Keeping the Sabbath as a sign of Judaism might encounter resistance from him. The ceremonial sabbaths he would probably disregard. And he might (although I do not think so) even have the keeping of any Sabbath in mind. If it can be shown elsewhere that Paul was against any of these things, then Colossians 2:16,17 may contain an additional reference to them. But the primary meaning of the text is that the sacrificial system pointed forward to Christ and is no longer necessary now that He has come.
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