

# Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?

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We as Messianic Believers need to lament over the fact that most of our Christian brothers and sisters do not honor and observe our Heavenly Father's appointed times or *moedim*<sup>1</sup> of Leviticus 23. Instead of celebrating *Pesach*/Passover, *Chag HaMatzot*/Unleavened Bread, *Yom HaBikkurim*/First Fruits, *Shavuot*/Pentecost, *Yom Teruah*/the Feast of Trumpets, *Yom Kippur*/the Day of Atonement, *Sukkot*/Tabernacles, and *Shemini Atzeret*/the Eighth Day Assembly, in addition to the weekly seventh-day *Shabbat*/Sabbath, Christians today celebrate Christmas and Easter and assemble on Sunday. They have missed out on much of what the Lord has to offer by failing to meet when He wants to meet with His people. Certainly, if anyone is truly committed to God and wants to honor and celebrate Him as much as possible, the advantage of celebrating His appointed times over man's replacements is obvious. Eight appointed times and the weekly Sabbath versus two holidays and two hours on Sunday. *It is obvious by the numbers alone that what He intended is better!*

All too often, we as Messianics can be unfairly chastised by Christians for wanting to obey the Lord by celebrating His appointments. It is not uncommon to be called legalistic for celebrating the Biblical festivals. In fact, some say that we are going too far, or are perhaps trying to earn our salvation, and in a few cases that we are not even saved. These claims against us are completely unacceptable if we are reasonable Believers united around a common hope of salvation in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus). There is nothing wrong with obeying God or His Word and in following the simple instructions that He has laid out for us. By celebrating the Biblical appointments, we as Messianic Believers are following the example of our Messiah Yeshua and the early First Century Jewish Apostles and Believers who likewise celebrated them. Contrary to popular opinion, the First Century Apostles and Believers did not celebrate "Christmas" or "Easter" or a "Sunday Sabbath," especially as we know them today. They observed the *moedim* of Leviticus 23 and the weekly *Shabbat*.<sup>2</sup> As James the Just attested to the Apostle Paul, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law" (Acts 21:20). Now, the same is being said of many non-Jewish Believers who likewise have faith in Yeshua and who are zealous for things of the Torah.

But there are those who say otherwise. There are those who say that because of Yeshua's sacrifice at Golgotha (Calvary), the Torah or Law of Moses has been abolished, and thus the *moedim* or appointed times are done away with, annulled, and abolished. Some believe that they might be important for us to understand in a historical sense for understanding the Bible, but not to be followed as standard elements of our orthopraxy.<sup>3</sup> There are those who say that the Apostle Paul gave us specific instruction in his epistles that we are no longer to celebrate the "Old Testament holidays."

Do the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) truly tell us not to celebrate the Biblical holidays? Are the Biblical holidays no longer of any value to us as Believers?

It is important that we examine the three common Scripture passages (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5-6) which are often given to support the premise that we are not supposed to celebrate the *moedim* or appointed times of Leviticus 23, placing them in proper context from the perspective that Yeshua the Messiah upheld the validity of the Torah, and that the mainline interpretation of these passages fails to account for historical setting and Biblical continuity.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) is translated variably as "appointed times" (NASU), "appointed feasts" (NIV), "fixed times" (NJPS), and "appointed festivals" (ATS). *CHALOT* defines *moed* (מוֹעֵד) as "meeting assembly," and "appointed time, fixed day," indicating that it is used in the Tanach for the "tent of meeting" where the elders of Israel met with the Lord (William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1988], 186).

<sup>2</sup> Consider varied references in the Apostolic Scriptures to *Shavuot*/Pentecost (Acts 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8) and *Yom Kippur*/the Day of Atonement, "the fast" (Acts 27:9). Why would these holidays be referenced if the Believers in the First Century were not observing them? Furthermore, Acts 17:2 tells us that it was Paul's custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day *first*, when he went into a new community, to reason with those assembled to present them with the gospel.

<sup>3</sup> The term "orthopraxy" "literally [means] 'right practice,'...living out the known and experienced truth in the Christian faith in love and justice" (Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 94). For our purposes as Messianics, it means how our faith is to be properly lived out and how Torah observance is practiced in the world.

## Galatians 4:9-11

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (Galatians 4:9-11).

This text, from Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, is part of a grossly misunderstood letter that is often not interpreted in light of Yeshua’s words regarding the fact that the Torah still stands (Matthew 5:17-19), the Jerusalem Council ruling of Acts 15:19-21 that the non-Jews coming to faith were to go to the synagogue and hear Moses taught,<sup>4</sup> and that the Galatians were more than likely new Believers who were being lead astray by those (the Judaizers) using a position of perceived importance to exert ungodly influences. It can be very easy without any background information, both from other Scriptures and from Ancient Galatia, to misinterpret Paul’s words. While it is rightfully asserted that the Galatian heresy was that many of the Galatians were being taught that strict obedience to the Law and physical circumcision would bring them salvation, or were prerequisites for salvation, the conclusion that Paul’s letter is a treatise against the Torah is not true. Paul clearly says in Galatians 3:21, “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!” What Paul’s letter is, rather, is a clarification how the Torah is not to be construed as a way of salvation to still-maturing Believers who were new converts to the faith.

Because of the misinterpretations of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, the logic that relates to vs. 4:9-11 is that that Paul feared for the Galatians’ souls because they began to celebrate the Biblical appointed times as laid out in the Law of Moses. Donald K. Campbell’s thoughts on these verses in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* are fairly typical of mainstream Christian opinions:

“Under the influence of the Judaizers the Galatians had at least begun to observe the Mosaic calendar. They kept **special days** (weekly sabbaths), **and months** (new moons), **and seasons** (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), **and years** (sabbatical and jubilee years)....They observed these special times, thinking that they would thereby gain additional merit before God. But Paul had already made it clear that works could not be added to faith as grounds for either justification or sanctification.”<sup>5</sup>

We certainly agree with the comments here that works are not to be grounds for salvation, as salvation is a free gift of God available through Messiah Yeshua. But the free gift of salvation does not negate the need for obedience, as obedience to God is to follow the true salvation experience. This was not the case with the Galatians. The Galatians were being errantly influenced by the Judaizers that salvation had to be preceded by circumcision and Torah observance (and perhaps even observance of the Oral Law). Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written concerning a situation in Galatia where the Judaizers had imposed strict legalisms on the non-Jewish Believers and they were being led astray. While there is nothing wrong with physical circumcision in and of itself, nor is obeying the Torah wrong, doing these things with a legalistic attitude and improper motives will not bring eternal salvation.

As it relates to the Torah, was Paul concerned with what they were doing? Or was he concerned about *their motivations* for doing what the Galatians were doing? Was their attitude one of trying to grow spiritually, or to prove themselves superior to others?

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 15:21 specifically says that “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” This verse appears after the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch are told to “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20), concepts deeply rooted in the Torah (Exodus 3:15-17; Leviticus 18:6-23; 3:17; 7:26; 17:10, 14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16, 23; 15:23). These were the four minimum requirements for the new non-Jewish to enter into the synagogue, where they could be trained in the instruction of God contained in the Torah, as there was no canonized “New Testament” at this time, and certainly they were to be trained in what the God of Israel considered acceptable and unacceptable from His Word. The placement of the Greek conjunction *gar* (γάρ) in v. 21, *Mousois gar* (Μουσοῖς γάρ), relates to the action to be performed after a series of qualifications is met. As *LS* notes, *gar* means “Conjunct. *for*... regularly placed after the first word of a sentence: *to introduce the reason*” (*BibleWorks 5.0: Lidell-Scott Lexicon*, CD-ROM, Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Donald K. Campbell, in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 602.

A problem for some Messianics today who may teach, or by their actions, demonstrate, that they believe that works precede salvation, rather than salvation preceding works, is the same as it was in Galatia. Salvation Biblically, however, only comes through being spiritually regenerated through the atoning work of Messiah Yeshua. **With this, none of us should be in disagreement.** After salvation, good works should follow and be *a natural outworking of the Holy Spirit*.

But what is Paul telling the Galatians in vs. 4:9-11? Is he telling them that they have fallen astray because they are keeping the appointed times of Leviticus 23? Is he telling them that they are wrong to observe “The LORD’s appointed times which” are “holy convocations” (Leviticus 23:2)? If the non-Jews coming to faith in Acts 15 were told to go to the synagogue to hear the Instructions of Moses being taught, and indeed keeping the appointed times of Leviticus 23 is a key element of observing the Torah, is there something that we have perhaps missed or glossed over?

In the text from Galatians, Paul writes, “However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?” (Galatians 4:8-9).

In v. 8 Paul describes the previous condition of the Galatians prior to coming to faith in the God of Israel. He says that “you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods” (RSV). Now that they know the God of Israel and the salvation available in His Son, he asks them why they were returning “to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (ESV). The Greek verb *epistrepho* (ἐπιστρέφω), rendered as “turn back again” (NASU), according to *BDAG* means “**to return to a point where one has been, turn around, go back.**”<sup>6</sup> The only logical conclusion that we can draw is that the Galatians were returning back to religious practices that were, (1) the exact same pagan festivities that they followed before their conversion experience, or (2) festivities that were similar in scope to the pagan festivities that they followed before their conversion experience. Either way, they were turning to things that were not of God. To assert that these are the Lord’s appointed times of Leviticus 23, and that Paul is concerned for the Galatians’ obedience to His Word, would be to say that things established by God are not of God. There has to be a viable alternative explanation to the one that is often accepted.

Samuel J. Mikolaski, in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, explains that in v. 8, the reference to “no gods,” designates “celestial and demonic powers which control destiny, as in ancient astrology and mythology...the devotee was related to these as a slave, not like the Christian to the true God as a son. The elemental spirits are by nature excluded from being God, and were served only, because the Galatians did not formerly know God.”<sup>7</sup> These words confirm that prior to the Galatians conversion they were practicing things that were not only not of God, but rooted in astrology and mythology, things directly prohibited by the Torah (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10). When the Galatians were returning back to their previous ways, these are the sorts of ways that they were returning to.

If indeed true, then what are the “days and months and seasons and years” (v. 10) referred to here? Are they the appointed times of Leviticus 23? Or, if the Galatians were returning to their previous ways in Greco-Roman paganism, were these things something else? There are several possibilities.

The first possibility is that what is being referred to are non-Biblical, pagan feast days. The foolish Galatians, falsely believing themselves to be saved by their circumcision, could be returning to these practices and to outright paganism. A second, and more likely possibility, is that “the days and months and seasons and years” are extra-Biblical Jewish practices added by some Rabbis and legalistically imposed, somehow similar to pagan Galatian holidays, perhaps involving astrology or mysticism. Mikolaski comments to this regard, noting,

“Are these Jewish or pagan observances? In writing to the Galatians, Paul clearly has Judaizers in mind. Did these worship elemental spirits? Astrological elements were at times infused into Jewish as well as pagan practices. The *elemental spirits* of this age refer probably to the ethos of an age traceable in

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<sup>6</sup> Fredrick William Danker, ed., et. al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 382.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel J. Mikolaski, “Galatians,” in D. Guthrie, et. al. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1100.

part to pagan astrological mythology, but which had become a religious habit as much as, and perhaps more than, a metaphysical system.”<sup>8</sup>

This Christian commentator seems to say that whatever days the Galatians were observing, the Judaizers seemed to integrate astrology into them, and hence, Paul would have been deeply concerned that they were returning to the same kinds of practices that they followed in paganism. Paul’s words, “I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (Galatians 4:11), would certainly be justified in this regard.

Paul’s concern for the Galatians adopting pagan practices would make perfect sense in light of his warning in Galatians 1:8, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” The *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* by Craig S. Keener, states, concerning Galatians 1:8, “Some Jewish mystics of the period claimed revelations from angels (especially in the \*apocalyptic literature)...Paul may allude here to the curses of the covenant leveled against those who failed to keep Moses’ law (Deut 27-28).”<sup>9</sup> If the Judaizers that errantly influenced the Galatians were in fact Jewish mystics (the forerunners of practicing what we today call Kabbalah) practicing astrology, witchcraft, or some other kind of mysticism, perhaps even claiming to have been given revelations by God, then of course Paul would be warning the Galatians that they had returned to the same worthless and Godless practices that they followed before their conversion of faith. (Of course, if the Judaizers errantly influencing the Galatians were mystics is true, then commonly held interpretations of Paul’s letter and his other warnings in it must be reevaluated in this light.)

The Galatians were clearly returning to things not of God or established by Him, or things that would have been approved by Him. Paul is greatly concerned that the Galatians are turning to things not of the God of Israel and were being enslaved to them. These cannot be the Biblical holidays because the appointed times are truly of God; they are certainly not “weak and miserable principles” (NIV). They are the times when our Heavenly Father wants us to meet and fellowship with Him so that He may reveal Himself fully to us.

It is important to note that many Christians, whether they know it or not, unfortunately fall into the same errors as these Galatians. When many Christians come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, they turn to keeping “days and months and seasons and years” not established by God. Most of the time they do it in ignorance, failing to understand the theological and spiritual significance of the *moedim* of Leviticus 23. But then others, understanding the importance of the Lord’s festivals, choose to say that they are not for today and unimportant. And then, some Christians celebrate the utterly Satanic holiday of Halloween, and in spite of even the evidence against observing it compiled by Christian Bible teachers, still keep it. The vast majority of Christians celebrate non-Biblical holidays. And a few, in spite of the richness that the Lord’s appointed times have, defiantly refuse to honor the Lord’s appointed times, and put others down who do. What do we do about this?

The Christians who criticize Messianics, saying that they are “concerned” because we honor God’s appointments found in Torah, probably need to read the Scriptures from Galatians a little closer and place them in proper historical context. They need to read these texts with a discerning eye. These verses may very well apply more to them than to us, because today they observe holidays that were not established by God, but rather man. Thankfully in our day, the Lord is awakening many to the importance of His appointed times and many are indeed returning to His ways. People are seeing that what God has established for His people is better than anything man can attempt to establish.<sup>10</sup>

## **Colossians 2:16-17**

“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah” (Colossians 2:16-17).

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 520.

<sup>10</sup> For a further examination of the Book of Galatians, consult the editor’s commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

This text from Paul's letter to the Colossians is often employed to demonstrate that no one is to judge in relation to "eating or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths" (YLT). These things, as Paul writes, are "were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself" (NLT). Those who believe that the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, and consequently also the seventh-day Sabbath and kosher dietary laws have been done away with, often use Colossians 2:16-17 as a proof text. A typical Christian perspective is reflected in the *Ryrie Study Bible*, which remarks, "False teachers were evidently insisting on abstinence from certain foods and observance of certain days. These, Paul says, are shadows which have been dispersed by the coming of Christ."<sup>11</sup> We believe that this text has been taken out of context, considering the situation that Paul was addressing in Colossae.

It is widely agreed by expositors that the Colossian assembly was being influenced by Gnosticism, a First Century errant religious ideology. A.M. Renwick notes in *ISBE* that "Much is said of a false teaching, apparently a theosophist doctrine that was alienating Christians in Colossae from the gospel and leading them to worship of angels contrary to the worship of Christ. The esoteric exclusiveness and asceticism of its adherents were injurious to Christian freedom and derogatory to the human body as indwelt by the Holy Spirit...Already present was the great Gnostic error that God had no connection with matter. From this theoretical basis arose the error that, as sin is inherent in the material substance of the body, the only way to perfection is to punish the body by pain and mortification of the flesh so that the soul may be saved. This ascetic attitude prevailed in many parts of the world, particularly among the pagans of the East, long before the advent of Christianity...Paul set himself to correct these errors among the Colossians by presenting to them the person and work of Christ—Christ the Creator, possessing all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, Christ in whom all matter and all creatures 'hold together.'"<sup>12</sup>

There were a wide variety of gross religious errors that had infected the congregation at Colossae. Before saying anything about the Biblical holidays or Sabbath, Paul warns the Colossians, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Messiah" (Colossians 2:9). What would we define as "deceptive philosophy" (NIV) and "elemental spirits of the universe" (RSV) here? Ryrie defines these things as "the cosmic spirits of Hellenistic syncretism," remarking, "their philosophy involved regulating their religious life by observing the movements of the stars, which they associated with the power of the angels who were worshipped by some."<sup>13</sup> We can easily say that the philosophy and empty deception that Paul warns the Colossians about are the base, humanistic, fallen religious systems of the Hellenistic Gnostics that were leading them astray. Particularly, these philosophies were leading them astray against believing that Yeshua the Messiah was God in the flesh, as he states clearly in Colossians 2:9, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." This is a very powerful statement made by Paul, as the Greek word *theoteis* (θεοτης) appears only once in the Apostolic Scriptures, in this verse. *TDNT* notes, "This word, meaning 'divinity,' occurs in the NT only in Col 2:9 (cf. 1:19-20). The one God, to whom all deity belongs, has given this fullness of deity to the incarnate Christ."<sup>14</sup>

When we understand that the deceptive teachings influencing the Believers in Colossae came out of Hellenistic, pagan religious concepts, can we conclude with any reasonable sense that Paul's comments about the Biblical appointments are connected to this deception? The "elementary principles of the world" are the ways and philosophies and teachings of men, not the precepts of God's Word rooted in the Torah. Paul has to go to great lengths in his letter, explaining to the Colossians, some of whom have been convinced against the Deity of the Messiah, that they have been saved and redeemed by Him. Worldly philosophies and humanistic teachings cause a person to doubt who Yeshua is, as opposed to portions of Scripture like the Torah which are to *confirm* who He is. Paul writes the Colossians,

"[A]nd in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the

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<sup>11</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, ed. *Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1800.

<sup>12</sup> A.M. Renwick, "Gnosticism," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:487.

<sup>13</sup> Ryrie, 1800.

<sup>14</sup> H. Kleinknecht, "theotes," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 330.

body of the flesh by the circumcision of Messiah; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 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” (Colossians 2:10-13).

These verses testify of the reality that Yeshua’s salvation provides a circumcision of the heart that is different from that of the flesh. The act of baptism or water immersion is symbolic of passing out of the world of death into new life in Him. While being dead in sin, Paul writes the Colossians that they were able to find forgiveness via the Messiah. He comments in v. 14, that Yeshua “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” While this Scripture is often interpreted as meaning that the Law of Moses was “nailed to the cross,” this is in actuality not what the verse is saying. The Greek word *cheirographon* (χειρογραφον) means “a handwritten document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, account, records of debts.”<sup>15</sup> The “bond which stood against us” (RSV), the penalties pronounced against sinners in the Torah, was nailed to the cross. Yeshua took our sin upon Himself and He was sacrificed as the atonement for our sin. Colossians 2:15 speaks of the final victory that the Messiah has over sin and against all principalities and powers: “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

With these verses in mind, and taking into account the errant philosophies that the Colossians were embracing and their forgetting Yeshua’s final sacrifice, we can now address Colossians 2:16-17:

“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah.”

When we understand the context of Paul’s writing to the Colossian Believers, it makes more logical sense to actually obey the commandments in the Torah relating to the appointed times of Leviticus 23, the seventh-day Sabbath, dietary laws, etc., rather than to shun them as is the common interpretation. If the non-Jewish Colossian Believers were following the mandate handed down by the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 for the non-Jews to go to the synagogue and hear Moses taught, and thus be trained in what the God of Israel considered acceptable behavior, then we should assume that they were keeping the Biblical Sabbath by attending synagogue, and were likewise observing the Biblical holidays. The warning in Colossians 2:8 that Paul issues is against “elemental spirits of the world” (ESV), not against the principles of God in the Scriptures. The warning he issues is “See to it that no one makes a prey of you” (RSV). The spiritual condition of being made prey is not caused by those following the foundational principles of Torah observance. The appointed times are not “according to the tradition of men,” but rather are “the appointed festivals of HASHEM, the holy convocations” (Leviticus 23:4, ATS).

Paul is warning the Colossians not to be deceived by the false and vain philosophies of the heathen Greeks around them, many of which embraced Gnostic ideas. The Colossian Believers are being persuaded by those around them against the Deity of Messiah, and the Biblical practices that they should be following. It is likely that many of the Colossian converts were still being influenced by family members, former friends, and/or associates who advocated errant religious beliefs. In telling the Colossians not be judged according to eating, drinking, a Sabbath day, or a festival, logically Paul would be telling his audience not to let the heathen Greeks around them *judge them for observing* the Biblical holidays, dietary laws, and the Sabbath. The Jerusalem Council plainly ruled in Acts 15 that the non-Jews coming to faith were expected to go to the synagogue and learn the Torah—a critical part of which is understanding the Biblical appointments.

But what do we do about Paul’s statement to the Colossians that the Biblical appointments were but “a *mere* shadow of what is to come” (v. 17, NASU). Does this not imply that they are no longer important? It is notable that the New American Standard translators took a liberty and placed the word “*mere*” in italics, meaning that the word was not originally in the Greek text. The text says *ha estin skia town mellontown* (α εστιν σκια των μελλοντων).<sup>16</sup> The placement of *mere* in the English text is not

<sup>15</sup> BDAG, 1083.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek word *monos* (μονος), which can appear “as adverb, alone, only, merely” (Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 418.), rendered as “mere” in Mark 6:8 in the NASU, does not appear in the Greek source text of Colossians 2:17.

implied by the context of the sentence, unlike an understood verb or article that was not written by the original author and could legitimately be written in italics.<sup>17</sup> The English Standard Version actually renders the Greek properly with “These are a shadow of the things to come.”

Colossians 2:17 raises an important question for us as Believers, because this text also says, regarding the Biblical appointments, that “the substance belongs to Messiah.” Rendered literally, *to de soma tou Christou* (το δε σωμα του Χριστου) is “and the body *is* of the Christ” (YLT). This is reflected in the JNT rendering of “but the body is of the Messiah.” There is debate as to what the proper context of the word *soma* (σωμα) relates to in this verse. Some interpret it as meaning that while no one is to judge Believers for eating, drinking, a Sabbath day, or festival, it is only the Body of Messiah that is able to judge. Others, however, interpret the word *soma* in relation to the things that are coming, and that the “substance” (RSV, NASU) or “reality” (NIV) of the appointed times is found in Yeshua.

*Soma* has a variety of meanings, including “*body, living body, physical body; the body* (of Christ), *the church; dead body, corpse; the reality or substance* (as opposed to a shadow).”<sup>18</sup> Is Paul comparing *soma* to “body,” i.e., the Body of Messiah judging in regard to the appointed times? Or, is he comparing *soma* to *skia* (σκια) or “shadow,” meaning that the appointed times are a shadow, and the true substance, or meaning, of them is found in Yeshua?

If we believe that the appointed times are still to be followed today, then as Messianic Believers we have to understand that the true meaning or substance of them is found in the Messiah. We honor the Lord by observing His appointed times, and by remembering what Yeshua has done for us. The true meaning and fulfillment of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Biblical appointments, and all of the Torah’s practices are found in Messiah Yeshua, and the example that He lived for us. As Roger Bullard validly remarks in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, “Dietary laws and calendrical observances point beyond themselves to Christ, the reality.”<sup>19</sup> The Biblical holidays explain the pattern of Messiah’s life and the plan of redemption and His Second Coming. When we as Messianic Believers gather to celebrate the Biblical holidays, we gather to not only remember the events they commemorate in the Torah, but also what they represent to us who believe in Yeshua. We do not just observe the Torah for the sake of observing the Torah. We are to keep these things because they point to Yeshua, and speak volumes to us about who He is, what He has done, and will do for us.

Passover represents Yeshua’s sacrifice for our sin and His covering as the perfect Lamb of God. Unleavened Bread represents the hardships and pain He had to endure for us, for *matzah* is flattened bread with “scourges” on it. First Fruits is indicative of His glorious resurrection from the dead. At Pentecost we remember the Holy Spirit being poured out in the Upper Room, just as the Torah had been given to Ancient Israel. The Feast of Trumpets prophetically represents Yeshua’s Second Coming and our gathering to meet Him in the clouds. The Day of Atonement causes us to become somber as we turn to Him and are reminded of the future Day of the LORD when Yeshua defeats His enemies at Armageddon. The Feast of Tabernacles encourages us to look forward to the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom on Earth, and it should likewise remind us of the birth of Yeshua who tabernacled among us at this time. *Shemini Atzeret* is a picture of God wanting to spend “one more day” with us and foreshadows eternity with Him.

The importance of keeping the Lord’s appointments for Believers cannot be overstated because when speaking of the Exodus and events in the wilderness, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The RSV says that “these things happened to them as a warning.” If we are the last generation “upon whom the ends of the ages have come,” or at we least are nearing that last generation, how are we expected to understand God’s redemptive plan for humanity and the end-times if we do not keep the appointed times God has specified for us? How are we supposed to properly understand what is to befall Planet Earth?

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<sup>17</sup> Other unimplied usages of “mere” in the NASU, where *monos* does not occur in the source text, appear in: 1 Corinthians 3:3, 4; 1 Timothy 1:4; Hebrews 9:24.

<sup>18</sup> Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), 177.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Bullard, in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2111.

If we do not keep the appointed times as God has told us, are we liable to misunderstand His prophetic plan for the ages? The “fixed times” (Leviticus 23:3, NJPS) of the Lord tell us when He plans to meet with us, especially regarding the Messiah’s Second Coming. By keeping the appointed times and knowing their significance, can concepts such as the any-moment, random pre-tribulation rapture be theologically supported? Or, will we understand that there is a definitive pattern in the set seasons of the God of Israel, that we can only fully understand by keeping, as opposed to just studying, the *moedim*?<sup>20</sup>

## Romans 14:5-6

“One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God” (Romans 14:5-6).

On the basis of these two verses of Scripture from Romans 14, many of us are told that all days are equal in the sight of God. It is not important, many Christians say, whether or not we honor the seventh-day Sabbath or the Biblical holidays. It is all an issue of one’s conscience and one’s personal convictions. The *NIV Study Bible* reflects this point of view, stating, “Some feel that this refers primarily to the Sabbath, but it is probably a reference to all the special days of the OT ceremonial law...The importance of personal conviction in disputable matters of conduct runs through this passage.”<sup>21</sup>

According to adherents of this interpretation, Sunday is an acceptable “Sabbath,” and Christmas and Easter are acceptable holidays to celebrate in place of the Torah-prescribed holidays. It is all a matter of one’s personal value judgments. But if one follows this conclusion to its logical end, then Tuesday is also an acceptable Sabbath, and Christmas could be celebrated on the Fourth of July as opposed to December 25. Dates or seasons when religious events are commemorated do not matter, as it is all an issue of choice, as opposed to God’s mandate. (If indeed true, what other issues discussed in the Tanach or Old Testament, notably moral ones, are only a matter of one’s own conscience?)

We would surmise that many Christians would not celebrate Christmas in the middle of the July Summer. But what does God think about those who discard His appointed times in Leviticus 23? Does He appreciate people ignoring the times when He wants us to meet with Him, in favor of their own appointed times? The common Christian handling of these verses in this regard is misguided, because when carried out to its logical end it allows us as Believers to do things *whenever we like*, which causes severe disarray. There must be a more proper interpretation of Romans 14.

The opening verses of Romans 14 have Paul speak of eating meat versus vegetables. He states, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*” (vs. 1-2). In regard to the Biblical dietary commandments, Paul is comparing vegetarianism and eating meat, even though many interpret these verses as relating to following the *kashrut* laws of clean and unclean versus eating all things. This is largely because of Romans 14:14, which reads, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Yeshua that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” This seems to present a problem, because just like the observation of days has been interpreted as being an issue of one’s personal conscience, likewise so would the dietary laws be considered an issue of personal conscience.

Almost all Bible versions read with “unclean” in Romans 14:14. The Hebrew word rendered as unclean in the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 is *tame* (טמא), employed in direct relation to “ceremonially unclean animals.”<sup>22</sup> In the LXX, *tame* was rendered by the Greek word *akathartos* (ακαθαρτος), “*impure, unclean,*” specifically “of foods.”<sup>23</sup> *Akathartos* does not appear in Romans 14:14, and the rendering of “unclean” is inaccurate. The Greek word that appears is *koinos* (κοινος). “This word

<sup>20</sup> Note that while there are many Christian books written on the prophetic significance of the appointed times, almost all of them are written by those *who do not keep them* as a standard element of the praxis of their faith. Should we accept prophetic interpretations related to the *moedim* by those who do not keep them, and hence do not understand them as fully as one who does keep them?

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1768.

<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Koehler, and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:376.

<sup>23</sup> *BDAG*, 34.

means ‘common’...in the sense of common ownership, property, ideas, etc.”<sup>24</sup> *Koinos* relates to “that which comes into contact w. anything and everything, and is therefore *common, ordinary, profane,*” and “of that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes.”<sup>25</sup> “Common food” is not the same as “unclean ‘food,’”<sup>26</sup> because common food would include those things which are Biblically clean, but perhaps considered inedible by a certain sector of people. It is possible that the situation that Paul is addressing here relating to food regards some Jewish Believers in Yeshua who were adopting vegetarianism because the Jewish slaughterhouses in Rome would not sell them kosher meat because of their faith. If they wanted to eat meat from clean animals, they would have had to have purchased it from the Roman marketplace. Kosher animals could have been slaughtered properly with the blood drained. However, such meat would have been considered “common” by these Jewish Believers, although it would have been perfectly acceptable for eating. Paul says that considering something “common” is a matter of one’s conscience, and it is not an issue that a Believer should “cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (RSV).<sup>27</sup>

In regard to Romans 14:5-6, about days and people choosing not to eat, we believe that the context of these verses is clearly speaking of days regarding fasting and when certain people were led to fast and abstain from eating. In Romans 14:3 Paul says, “The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him,” following it up with, “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). James R. Edwards makes a valid observation in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, stating, “Paul leaves *day* undefined, perhaps out of deference to the arguing parties. It may refer to Jewish fast days (Monday, Thursday).”<sup>28</sup>

The only Biblical time we are commanded to fast is on *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 23:27 specifies, “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD.” It is clearly identified in Acts 27:9 as “the fast.” However, other than references in the Scriptures to *Yom Kippur*, there is not very much more that it has to say about fasting. Fasting on certain days are times where each individual must be convinced in his own mind. Fasting is a matter solely of individual choice and spiritual conviction. However, in Second Temple Judaism there were some fixed, extra-Biblical fast days established by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile. Jacob Milgrom in *EJ* remarks,

“Fixed fast days are first mentioned by the post-Exilic prophet Zechariah who proclaims the word of the Lord thus: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth...’ (Zech. 8:19; cf. 7:3, 5). Jewish tradition has it that these fasts commemorate the critical events which culminated in the destruction of the Temple: the tenth of Tevet (the tenth month), the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem; the 17th of Tammuz (the fourth month), the breaching of the walls; the ninth of Av (the fifth month), when the Temple was destroyed; and the third of Tishri (the seventh month), when Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah, was assassinated.”<sup>29</sup>

These could be the days that Paul is referring to in Romans 14. Keeping these fasts would be something that is entirely optional as far as one’s faith practice is concerned. Remembering the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, fasting, and entreating the Lord for such events never to happen again, are worthy things to reflect on. But they are not required. With this viewpoint, Paul’s words take on a whole new meaning:

“The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the

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<sup>24</sup> F. Hauck, “*koinos*,” in *TDNT*, 447.

<sup>25</sup> *BDAG*, 552.

<sup>26</sup> In actuality, the term “unclean food” is an oxymoron, as Biblically something that is unclean and not on the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 cannot be considered food.

<sup>27</sup> Of course, Romans 14:20 says, “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.” The issue in Romans 14:14 relates to things that are *koinos* or “common,” and Paul says here that these things may be considered *katharos* (καθαρός) or “clean.” Only things that can be considered food, given on the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, can be considered clean. For a further discussion about the validity of the dietary laws for Believers today, consult the editor’s article “To Eat or Not to Eat?”

<sup>28</sup> James R. Edwards, in Harrelson, 2030.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Milgrom, “Fasting and Fast Days,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:3-5).

Note that here Paul clearly tells the Roman Believers, “let not him who is eating despise him who is not eating” (Romans 14:3, YLT). We are told that on some days some people choose not to eat, and others do. We are not to despise those who choose not to eat and fast. Tim Hegg resonates some of these same sentiments in his book *It is Often Said*:

“Paul...kept the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) and walked strictly according to the Torah (Acts 21:24). But some will say that in Romans 14 Paul speaks of the Sabbath as something that is non-essential and even irrelevant. But Romans 14 is not dealing with the Sabbath (the word Sabbath is not found in that context). It is most likely addressing the controversy over which day to celebrate the Festival of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-16—an argument which was well established between the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day) or even, perhaps, over which days to set aside for fasting. The fact that Paul labels the whole debate as a matter of ‘opinion’ (Romans 14:1) should alert us to the fact that he could not be talking about something clearly stated in the Scriptures, like the Sabbath command.

“Furthermore, it is unthinkable that with such a passing statement Paul could abolish a Torah commandment that was one of the central issues in his day. And all without even the slightest hint or backlash! If Paul had taught that the Sabbath was no longer viable, this would have been added to the offenses his opponents listed against him...”<sup>30</sup>

Hegg adds his opinion that the issue discussed in Romans 14 may also be about when to observe *Shavuot* or Pentecost, and whether or follow the Pharisaical or Sadducaical reckoning for it—a debate that still exists today, even in the Messianic community. Whether the issue is over fast days, be they customary weekly fast days or the fast days remembering the destruction of the Temple, established in First Century Judaism, or even the determining of when to celebrate *Shavuot*, the reality is that these are disputable matters that the Body of Messiah is not to be divided over.

Romans 14 is not talking about celebrating the Sabbath “whenever you like” or replacement holidays for the Lord’s appointed times, but discusses disputable matters. These disputable matters include issues such as fasting, and abstaining from eating on certain days, and/or determining the time of *Shavuot*/Pentecost. These are things that each individually must individually be convinced, and we are not permitted to look down on others about. We are to understand, as Paul admonishes the Romans, “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4).

## **What are we to do?**

These interpretations of Galatians 4:9-11, Colossians 2:16-17, and Romans 14:5-6 will likely not be popular in the Christian community as they do challenge some widely held views. But when understood in their correct context, and the logical outcomes of the widespread Christian interpretations of these verses, we are confronted with the reality that the Lord’s appointed times were not annulled in the Apostolic Scriptures.

The Galatians were returning to practices not of God; the appointed times of Leviticus 23 *are* of God. The Colossians were being persuaded by Gnostic philosophies *against* the Deity of Yeshua and Biblical practices; they are told not to let these men judge them for observing Biblical practices such as the Sabbath, festivals, and dietary laws, which are not vain traditions of the world and have their substance in the Messiah. The Romans were told not to look down on brothers in the faith who chose not to eat on certain day or observe *Shavuot* differently, because such matters one must be convinced in his own mind about; the Romans were not told that observing days such as the Sabbath is entirely an issue of one’s own opinion.

The Biblical appointed times of the Torah in Leviticus 23 are things of the Lord and they are extremely important for us to observe—even more so as the Messiah’s return draws near. They provide us every year with new insights as to how He will return, and the prophetic pattern that our Creator has set for the universe.

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Hegg, *It is Often Said*, 2 vols. (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2003), 1:18.

What are those of us who are Messianic to do about Christians who tell us that the Biblical holidays are no longer for us today? We must demonstrate by our praxis of faith, our faith lived out in the world, that celebrating the Lord's appointed times brings great blessings, spiritual insight, and above all fulfillment. Many Christians speak against the appointed times of God and do not know what they are speaking against. People such as these, sadly, often look down on us for obeying Biblical commandments that Messiah Yeshua likewise obeyed. In so doing, these people will reveal themselves to be, at the very least, immature in their spiritual walk. They require our prayers.

We need to take the higher road and not embroil ourselves in endless controversies with people such as these. We have to demonstrate to them that we are spiritually mature. Perhaps we should apply *their own interpretation* of Colossians 2:16 to *them* and not unfairly judge them for keeping replacement holidays for those of our Heavenly Father. Let God be the Judge of them if they do not see things a better way. He can certainly handle them better than we can. But let us also pray that these people will indeed repent and ask for forgiveness if they have wronged us. In the meantime, however, when criticized we need to be willing through the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive and forget and move forward.

In order to be fair, we fully realize that many Christians do not judge Messianics at all for celebrating the Lord's appointed times. They just do not fully understand why we celebrate them. In time, we believe that those loving Christians who believe in fully following Scripture will be wooed by the Holy Spirit as we have, realizing the importance that the Father's holy days have to us, and will be led to keep them. On the whole, we have much to look forward to, but helping others see the truth begins with us demonstrating a positive example, and not one of condemnation.

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