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the ISabbath series
the Tradition of Men

by haRold Smith

a citizen of the Commonwealth (Ephesians 2:19)

"Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or Sabbath days, things which are a (**MERE**) shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Yeshua." Colossians 2:16-17

"Watch, that there not be one robbing you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to **THE TRADITION OF MEN**, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Yeshua." Colossians 2:8



...nullifying the Words of YaHoVeH by the tradition of men

After reading the article, [Keeping the Sabbath](#) (click on highlighted words to view content), Dan wrote, first quoting Colossians 2:16-17 above, then continuing with: "Jesus is our Sabbath. In Hebrews 4:9-10 it is said, 'There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His (God's) rest has himself rested from his works, as God did from His.' So, we enter His rest through faith in Christ and rest in His finished work of the Cross, which is also God's rest we enter into."

This argument appears to be the standard evangelical answer concerning Sabbath observance by those who embrace the idea that the Messianic Writings (re-named the NT) present a "**new covenant**" between God and man. However, in spite of its popularity, the phrase, "Jesus is our Sabbath", is not found in scripture. This is a clear-cut example of the use of *eisegesis* (reading into the text) rather than *exegesis* (reading out of the text) - projecting our own preconceived ideas onto the text and calling the process "Biblical interpretation" instead of simply reading the words for what they actually say and mean. This article advocates the position that a non-biased translation of Hebrews 4:9 and Colossians 2:16-17 commands Sabbath observance for the people of the God presented in scripture and **advocated** by His Son, Yeshua. The Greek word translated as the English "remains" in **Hebrews 4:9** is the verb **apoleipo** and Thayer's Lexicon indicates that the Sabbath is "remains, is reserved" - meaning that *it still remains*. *Apoleipo* is in the present tense indicative mood. The present indicative asserts a statement of fact which is occurring while the speaker is making the statement. The Greek word translated as the English "rest" in this verse is *sabbatismos* which occurs just this once in scripture and it means a Sabbath observance. An examination of **the original Greek text** shows the use of the word "rest" to have been **added** by **replacement theologians** in an effort to hijack and change the commandment to keep the Sabbath into some kind of "spiritual faith" cartwheel. Words mean things, however, so the correct translation should be: "**There is left behind a keeping of the Sabbath by God's people.**" Conservative scholarship dates the book of Hebrews from the mid to late 60's CE. The writer is expressing a statement of fact about keeping the Sabbath approximately thirty years after the resurrection of Yeshua. The definition of the English word "tradition" comes from the Greek word **paradosis** meaning *to give up, to surrender*. We give up access to the Truth when we surrender ourselves to someone else's interpretation of the Truth - consequently, **we miss Truth** altogether. Why do we embrace tradition? Because it is comfortable and it gives us a convenient place to point to for answers to things we neither entirely understand nor have the desire to sort out on our own. It is easier to place the responsibility on some teaching of men instead of going to the Father and digging it out for ourselves. The main component of this approach results in an embrace of the doctrines of others that are wrapped in their own interpretations. (**1John 2:27, 2Peter1:20**). The sole purpose of these articles is to encourage you to simply look at the words written on the pages of scripture for the meaning they contain in the light of the original language and the context they were assembled in with an appreciation of the Hebrew culture, mindset and perspective they were written from. The refusal to look at scripture just for what it says without overlaying a pre-conceived theological template upon it is the definition of tradition Yeshua gave in **Mark 7:7-8**. The embrace of tradition is the **ONLY** attribute Yeshua ever pointed to that He said would bring to "none effect" the Power of those Words in our lives

([Mark 7:13](#)). Reflecting on my early walk (then as a Christian), I remember hearing the verse from Colossians 2:8 above proclaimed as a warning against worldly views. Forty years later, I am quite sure that Paul meant nothing like the preacher I heard. Now, this is not an endorsement of the world's nihilism, but simply an illumination that Paul wrote to a particular audience and his message must be understood within that audience before we can draw out any trans-cultural applications.

The [second verse of Colossians 1](#) tells us that this letter was addressed to the "saints and faithful brothers in Colossae". Throughout the Original Books (re-named the OT), those within the Hebrew family of Israel were addressed as the English word "[saints](#)" meaning "holy ones" - those set apart to the purposes of YaHoVeH. We also find the Greek word [hagios](#) also translated as the English "saints" in Colossians to mean the same. This is not a new word introduced into these NT letters, but is a "carry-over" from what was a familiar phrase written before to describe a particular people - those who are faithful in keeping the Words of YaHoVeH. The plural Greek word [adelphoi](#) (translated as the English "brethren") refers to siblings in a family. Paul wasn't writing about materialism, socialism, communism, fascism or the world's hedonism. He was writing about what it meant to become a follower of the Hebrew Messiah (not the "Christ" - that phrase had not yet been formulated) in a Hebrew synagogue in the Roman city of Kolossai in Turkey - the only place in the city where people congregated who worshipped the One True God of Israel, YaHoVeH. So, what were the "traditions of men" that concerned Paul enough to address them in this letter? Imagine yourself in that congregation. Every week, on the Sabbath, you attend a service where the Hebrew Scriptures were read and taught. You knew Moses. You knew Torah. In fact, you lived a Torah-observant life as best you could, celebrating the festivals, making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem if you could afford to do so, listening to the famous Pharisee, Rabbi *Sha'ul* (Paul), student of *Gamaliel*, explain your place in [the Kingdom of YaHoVeH](#) that has now been restored through [the Resurrection](#) of the promised Hebrew Messiah. Do you really think *Sha'ul* considered the Deuteronomic law to be the "traditions of men"? Impossible! Nothing in YaHoVeH's Word could be considered the "traditions of men" - in fact, every premise *Sha'ul* put forth was supported by the words of the *Tanakh* (re-named the OT) and used as his proof text. The traditions of men would have to be those proclamations and practices represented by the pagan environment. In other words, anything that opposed the Torah. Paul's warning to the Torah-observant community is to not be swayed by the claims of those who did not live according to the Torah - the law LESS. Now think about how we have turned this verse from Colossians 2 (above) upside-down. Today we often hear this verse read the way it was presented earlier, as if Paul is telling believers not to follow the Torah. We interpret "traditions of men" to be the very instructions that YaHoVeH gave Israel. We think that keeping Sabbath, dietary laws, festivals, court proceedings and property rights according to Moses' revelation are traditions only for Jewish people that no longer apply to the "enlightened" Christian. Can you imagine the reaction of the synagogue if that's what Paul meant? They would have been flabbergasted. They would have gone away completely and utterly confused. How could this Torah scholar, this exemplary student of the most honored rabbi of the time, this man who claimed that he kept Torah his whole life, suddenly proclaim that the Scriptures were "traditions of men" ([Acts 24:14](#), [Romans 2:13](#), [Romans 7:22](#))? No, I'm afraid that we are the ones who read it backwards. We are the ones who have been robbed by philosophy, empty deceit and the traditions of men. We are the ones who practice according to the elements of the world, those religious rituals which are nothing more than an accumulations of [pagan beliefs](#) that we have been taught are harmless additions to our belief structure.



Yeshua is the fulfillment, the substance, of YaHoVeH's promise to restore the Kingdom to His family [of Israel](#) thus, everything that came before pointed to that fulfillment. Christianity's traditions have nullified Yeshua's Words of [Matthew 5:17-23](#) by twisting them into a teaching that says to "fulfill" something means everything west of the book of Matthew has been done away with and replaced by a new order - but the Greek word [pleroo](#) (translated as the English word "fulfill") contains no hint of such in its definition. It means "*to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to fill to the brim*" - there is nothing in that definition that even remotely lends itself to something "done away with". When a cup is "filled to the brim" it means it is whole or complete so that nothing else can be added - it does not mean to throw the cup away, for then there would be no way to partake of what refreshment the cup holds. Every letter Paul wrote

fits into the cultural context of the audience he addressed - not to some future audience. The first principle of biblical interpretation is to determine that cultural context. Unless we know what the original audience understood, we are almost certainly going to read the text from our own cultural perspective - and that causes all kinds of problems. This verse from Colossians 2:16-17 is a classic example of reading the message as if it were written yesterday just for us - not two thousand years ago to a particular body of faithful saints who were struggling with issues in a city in Turkey. What do we know about these saints - the faithful? Well, we know they were Hebrew followers of YaHoVeH - either born into the Hebrew family or proselytes in the process of conversion to the Hebrew faith. We know that they had a good grip on the scriptures (what we call the Old Testament and the only ones in existence at the time). We know that there were Gentile proselytes to the Hebrew faith within this group (not solely Gentiles just "believing in Jesus" - as we have traditionally been led to believe). We know that the only thing that distinguishes them from others in the Hebrew faith is their belief in Yeshua as the promised Hebrew

Messiah, sent from YaHoVeH to restore the Kingdom of *gan edan* (Hebrew for the Eden Garden) to the children of Israel through His obedience to YaHoVeH's Word that was lost through the disobedience of **the first son, Adam**. And we know that there were those in the city who accused them of religious fanaticism. With just this much in mind, let's try reading this verse again from Paul's Hebrew perspective.

Paul tells the disciples in Colossae to allow "no one" (Greek: *me tis humas*) to act as judge. The sentence construction is important. The first word, *me*, is a Greek word for the conditional "no". This is not *ou*, a word that also means "no" but is without conditions. *Me* would be used in a sentence like "*I might not make it for lunch.*" *Ou* would be used in "*I will not break the commandment.*" So, Paul is telling his readers not to let something happen as a matter of the present circumstances. In other words, do not let the circumstances of your situation cause you to be judged. Who would do such judging? Well, Paul uses the Greek *tis humas*. This is literally "*someone or anyone*" (second person personal pronoun). Ah, this means someone you know. Not simply an external acquaintance or third party, this is someone familiar to you. "*Don't let anyone who has a familiar relationship to you become your judge.*" OK, judge over what? Well, now we see the real concern. Everything that Paul lists here is a part of Torah obedience. What you eat and drink, what festivals you celebrate, what calendar you follow (the Hebrew calendar is lunar, not the Greek solar) and keeping Sabbath are all found in YaHoVeH's instruction book of Life. Paul tells his readers in this pagan city, "*Don't let anyone you know stand in judgment over you with regard to keeping these instructions.*" Uh - that's not the way we read this verse today, is it? We read it just as it was presented earlier - backwards. Instead of seeing that Paul is defending those for keeping Torah, we side with the pagans and claim that Paul is advocating on behalf of those who want to push Torah-obedience out of the picture. Why would there be a need to repeat an instruction about keeping Sabbath when that instruction already exists and is observed within the family? That would have been impossible from Paul's perspective. He was Torah-observant all his life. He says so on numerous occasions. He even fulfills a vow ritual proclaiming his endorsement of Torah. Why would he side with the ones who want to argue that Torah observance doesn't matter? No, we read this verse from the pagan perspective. We are the accusers, not the defenders. Paul might as well include Christians in the "no one" category for they are the ones primarily judging those who keep the Torah. Can you now see how the preconceptions we have already formulated about scripture affect their meaning? Maybe it's time to read these verses in the right direction.

"Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or Sabbath days, things which are a (MERE) shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Yeshua." Colossians 2:16-17

When you read the word "mere" in this verse, does it communicate the idea that those things which Paul has just described are of lesser importance? We see that Paul lists those activities that would be part of Torah observance, but when the translators introduce the word "mere" into this verse, they change the emphasis, don't they? Since there is no Greek equivalent for the word "mere", the translators put the word in brackets. They better! What they have done is to alter the text so that it reads according to their theological bias - that word does not appear in the original Greek. Subsequently, it makes the text appear to discount Torah observance. Try reading the verse without the word "mere" and you will get a different message. The NASB is committed to a two covenant theology and the translators put this word into the verse without giving the reader any explanation or justification. The NIV is worse. The translators of the NIV actually change the tense of the Greek so that this verse reads, "*These are a shadow of things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*" This is blatant theological propaganda disguised as accurate translation. You will also notice that the rest of the verse has been changed to further diminish the connection to Torah by adding the word "however." You might refer to the NIV as the "Nearly Inspired Version." The translators alter, add or subtract from the Greek and Hebrew in order to communicate their particular theological position. Of course, they don't tell the reader anything about these decisions, so the poor reader doesn't know that they are being spoon-fed theological propaganda, not an accurate translation. The NIV and NASB aren't alone in this anti-Semitic view. The New Living Translation changes the tense and the secondary phrase. The RSV adds the word "only" instead of "mere" - with the same effect. Only the KJV, NKJV, ESV and the NRSV actually translate the verse as it is written in the Greek text. Unless you know something about the bias of the translating committees, you will always be subject to their interpretations hidden in the choice of words. There is no English translation that accurately conveys the full meaning of the Greek or Hebrew. As you can see, this is not simply the result of the difficulty of capturing the nuances and depth of meaning in one language and converting it to another - there are deliberate alterations in play here as well. So, what are we to do? If you find this discouraging, don't despair. Yes, you will have to be a lot more careful about what you claim to be God's Word if you are reading a translation, but now you know some of the red flags. At least the NASB puts the words in brackets. The NIV doesn't even bother to show you that they have changed the text. Now you know that you will need several different English Bibles to get closer to the original. And, of course, you could start exploring an interlinear version. It's more work, but its yield is more substantial.

If you are still struggling with Paul's view of the Torah, try reading the story in [Acts 21:17-26](#). James' instructions to Paul should settle the issue once and for all. Here's a recap: When Paul returns to Jerusalem after his *third journey* among the Gentiles, James and all the elders of the Jerusalem assembly greet him. As Paul recounts his experiences these men glorify God (obviously approving what Paul has accomplished). Then they raise an issue. It seems that a nasty rumor has been circulating in Jerusalem. The rumor is that Paul is teaching "...to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." In other words, this



...the Nature of Spirit

rumor is precisely what the Christian Church teaches about Paul's theology. James wants to *dispel* this rumor. As proof that Paul is not teaching such atrocities, he asks Paul to pay for and participate in a Nazarite vow taken by four men in the congregation. James reasons that when people witness Paul's active participation in this vow, they will realize that the rumor is not true and see that Paul "...walks orderly, keeping the Law (*the Torah*)". Paul does exactly this, demonstrating that James' request is consistent with his beliefs. How can it be any clearer? The authority of Ya'akov (James) stands behind the assertion that Sha'ul (Paul) was Torah-observant. There are only two possible conclusions about this passage. The first is precisely what James wants to establish - that Paul is Torah-observant and continues to teach Torah-observance. The second is that Paul and James concoct this little drama in order to fool everyone about the truth and lie about the fact that Paul actually isn't Torah-observant but will perform this charade in order to make the those in Jerusalem think he is. Which one of these scenarios seems reasonable to you? If you have any serious doubts about Paul's Torah-observant position, read the rest of the story where he is beaten, chained and nearly killed but never changes his claim. The only remaining issue is if Torah applies to Gentiles. That answer is found in [Acts 15](#). And the answer is a resounding "YES". After someone is **grafted into** the commonwealth of Israel, they are no longer treated differently than any other citizen of the Kingdom from **the perspective of Torah**. James makes that clear with his comment that all are taught Moses every Sabbath. To suggest that Acts 15 exempts Gentiles from Torah who are now in the community is to claim that YaHoVeH has TWO sets of instructions - one for ethnic Hebrews and one for "others". That view is incompatible with the rest of Paul's teaching and the instructions of Yeshua and only found in the oral traditions of **Judaism's Talmud**. If this demonstration was so convincing that the elders and the head of the Jerusalem followers of **the Way** considered it proof of Paul's Torah obedience after being in the field with Gentiles for so long, then why has the Christian Church taught something else for centuries? Why has the Christian Church basically endorsed the very rumor that James attempts to squash? What motivation could the Church possibly have for so distorting this story? It seems to me that there is one explanation that fits this story and the subsequent distortion of the Church. John Gager and Lloyd Gaston (among others) point out that the very identity of the Church rests on its opposition to Hebraic thought and there is nothing more opposed to the Hebrew way of life than the denial of the authority of Torah. In this regard, Christianity is essentially anti-Semitic. The problem this presents is that Paul wasn't anti-Semitic. Here, the Truth is pretty black and white.

All of this information leaves us with an enormous issue. After being exposed to the Truth of the words are we going to continue to follow an anti-Semitic religion or are we going to follow the Way according to James and Paul as recounted in the only **back-of-the-book** scriptures Christianity accepts? Words mean things. If we are to be mentally honest (the definition of the Greek word *haplotes* - translated as the English "simplicity" in [2Corinthians 11:3](#)), at the very least, you have to admit what has been written here has some merit in supporting the backwards reading of scripture. Is our heart given to an accurate portrayal of Truth - or just an accommodation to what has been handed down to us?

"Do not think that I have come to abolish Torah or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Matthew 5:17-20

the Sabbath Series

Part One: Keeping the Sabbath

Part Two: the Tradition of Men

Part Three: In Their Own Words

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???Questions???

Please feel free to email me at harold@hethathasaneer.com. While not claiming to have all the answers, it would be an honor to partake with you of what Spirit is uncovering.

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