

Colossians Introduction

by Moshe Schwab

In my book on the letter to the Galatians, I first take some time to develop some background. We will not cover that background extensively in this book to the Colossians. Understanding Galatians properly will help you understand Colossians better; it would be a good and easy read for you. I only cover what is pertinent for understanding Colossians. For example, I have a Prayer Class that teaches material on prayer and the Holy Spirit. That would also be something good for you to read when you are ready to understand that. We don't cover that in this book.

Some denominations reinterpret the scriptures in terms of what they value, and reinterpret Shaul's Epistles and other scriptures in terms of their own understanding instead of what was meant when the Epistles were written. When something is taken out of context, we will not understand what is meant properly. We often hear that face-to-face communication is the best way to communicate properly. We only have letters, so to understand them, we have to consider the context of the time and not read our own understanding into the scriptures or the beliefs of our denomination.

If we do not consider the context of that time period, in some cases, we will be believing fiction instead of God's words and instead of biblical truths. 2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV says, "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." They are God's words written for the understanding of the people back when they were written. Since they are God's words, we do not have the right to misinterpret them out of their proper context.

First of all, Shaul was Paul's primary name because he is Jewish. His name didn't change as some say. Being a Jewish leader was an advantage for him as he traveled. This would obviously give him an opportunity to speak in synagogues wherever he went. He writes about Jewish matters because he is a Jewish leader. When he says that he is a Pharisee in Acts 23:6, the others present argue about the resurrection and never say that he is not who he says he is.

*Shaul said he was a Pharisee and
they accepted him as a Jewish leader.*

Although he was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, at some point he went to study in Jerusalem in the school of Hillel under the grandson of Hillel. The school of Hillel held to strict biblical beliefs and respect towards others. They believed that Gentiles could become Jewish while other sects did not. The Pharisees agreed with Yeshua's teachings in a number of areas but diverted in the area where the Pharisees believed they could add additional man-made commandments to God's law. The ancient rabbis built a fence around the law in order to make sure people observed the law by adding commandments and micromanaging the lives of the people.

Shaul, as one of the chief religious leaders in Jerusalem, would have memorized the entire Tanakh. We know that he becomes a believer in the Messiah Yeshua because he begins to understand who Yeshua is probably through his extensive knowledge of the Tanakh. Yeshua mentions this to Shaul when He visits Shaul on his way to Damascus. Yeshua tells Shaul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Acts 9:5 NKJV. A goad was a stick with a sharp object in it that was used to keep an ox going in the correct direction when plowing a field.

Shaul is blinded on his way to Damascus when he encounters Yeshua and then continues to Damascus where he is healed by God in the name of Yeshua. He then goes to Arabia where we know the real Mount Sinai is located. He must have spent some time considering the implications of his encounter with Yeshua and what he will do next. He goes back to Damascus and then after 3 years he goes to Jerusalem and then goes further north for some 14 years and eventually joins other believers in Antioch of Syria. He goes on several missionary journeys to the Jewish people of various regions near and westward of the area where he was born; He was born in Tarsus in the region of Cilicia just south of Galatia. Tarsus is in modern southeastern Turkey; he is sent out from Antioch to let his fellow Jews know who their Messiah is. Colossae is in western modern-day Turkey near Laodicea on the Lycus river in the ancient province of Phrygia. There has not been must excavation of this ancient city as of this writing.

*Shaul went to both the Jews and also
taught the Gentiles who were willing to listen.*

Shaul was also charged by Yeshua to go and teach the Gentiles about the Messiah and had managed to reach a number of Jewish people and Gentiles with the Messianic message on his journeys which some call the gospel. Gospel means Messianic message because the scriptures containing this usage in the Old Testament portion are about the Messiah. The Greek word used for gospel means a message from the emperor who was considered god. This sounds interesting and no doubt the people would have understood that usage, but Shaul was Jewish and he would have used language that fit within a Jewish biblical context. Gospel means Messianic message.

One of the primary reasons Galatians needed to be written was because Shaul teaches the Gentiles about the true God. In Galatians, Shaul talks about his encounter with Yeshua on his way to Damascus in Chapter 1. We know that Yeshua told Shaul during this encounter on his way to Damascus to go reach the Gentiles in Acts 26:18. Shaul also says in Galatians 1 that the leadership in Jerusalem recognized his mission to the Gentiles.

In Chapter 2 of Galatians, we find out that he subsequently needed to go back to Jerusalem because of some tension over circumcision and because of those who were keeping extra misapplied man-made commandments. In my book on Galatians, we talked about how adult circumcision was wrong because it put peoples' lives in jeopardy; it was extremely dangerous to do adult circumcision at that time. It is against the Torah to put life in jeopardy. Deuteronomy 22:4 NKJV, "You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again."

Naturally, the same care and concern applies to people because we are created in the image of God. We have the ability to choose whether to do good or evil. We have the ability to make things from God's creation. God gave us some of His characteristics and abilities. We are not God.

Yeshua references Deuteronomy 22:4 from the Torah and taught that we are to save life; he says that if an ox or someone's son was in jeopardy on Shabbat they should save them. Yeshua

says in Luke 14:5, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" Therefore, Yeshua taught that the saving of life superseded God's commandment to rest on Shabbat. We see that it is then against the Torah to put adult males in jeopardy and demand they be circumcised. Respecting life is a common teaching in Judaism; Judaism teaches to respect life because we are created in God's image.

We know there were problems associated with those who were not keeping the Torah in the book of Galatians and telling new adult believers they had to be circumcised. We identified the people who were doing this as **Torah breakers**. Judaizing was not the problem; it was people who were keeping misapplied man-made commandments. Judaizing often means to keep any of the Old Testament laws. Because of false teaching, people do not realize that the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. Both Yeshua and Shaul quoted from the Old Testament portion.

For example, when Shaul tells us to support our leaders, he bases that on the scripture from the Old Testament portion which says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain;" Deuteronomy 25:4 NKJV. Shaul said in 1 Timothy 5:18 NKJV, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" So, when some teach that people should give to them, they themselves are Judaizers by their own definition. That was not the problem; it was people who were not keeping the Torah properly.

*Perhaps we could think of Judaizing as putting
man-made laws over God's commandments or
for what it really is, theology.*

Yeshua is talking about supposed believers in these verses. They are doing things in God's name, but not keeping God's commandments: Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" The word for lawlessness is the Greek word *anomia*. *Nomia* was the word used by the ancient rabbis for the Torah in the Septuagint. The "a" in front of *nomia* negates it. So, Yeshua actually said, "Depart from Me, you who do not keep the Torah."

Yochanan said in 1 John 3:4 NKJV, "**Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness**, and sin is lawlessness." Lawlessness again is the Greek word *anomia* which means **not** to keep the Torah. Yochanan says that sin is not keeping the Torah. The translators must have been smart enough to see this and it is an obvious cover up. They changed the scriptures to reflect their false teaching that was handed down to them from the church of the Roman Empire. In the 4th century AD, the Roman Empire made laws saying that believers in the Messiah could not keep God's biblical feasts. Leviticus 23:2 NKJV says, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'" It was Constantine who started the pagan church of Rome in the early 4th century and secretly stole the faith of the early believers and made it into a pagan Roman church. Some

effort has been made to get back to our Jewish roots, but this is difficult when you even have translators and supposed pastors that are still following the doctrine of the Rome Empire.

Yochanan actually goes on to say that not keeping the Torah is of the devil. 1 John 3:7-8 NKJV, "He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning." A person is righteous for actually doing what is right. Righteous means to do what is right. Some people think they are given a stamp of righteousness and they don't have to actually do what is right. **Those who sin** and don't keep God's commandments are of the devil, Yochanan says. He had just said that those who don't keep the Torah commit sin. The early believers obviously kept the Torah; that was their only scripture for life and not modern false man-made theology.

Sometimes the scriptures refer to the law (*nomia*) as the law with the extra man-made laws that God says we are not to make up. We are not to make up man-made misapplied laws. Sometimes law (*nomia*) refers to the Torah and the Old Testament law which believers are to keep. It was the Roman/Greek Empire that created a religion without its original biblical laws. They changed God's law; they are heretics. Hosea 4:6 NKJV says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being a priest for Me; because **you have forgotten the law of your God**, I also will forget your children." Do you want your children to be in the future kingdom of God? Yeshua said, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness;" Matthew 7:23 NKJV.

Have you "forgotten the law of your God?"

There is a huge need for people to understand the Bible in its original context without the influence of the Roman/Greek church that has morphed into Christian religions without the context of the Bible. They have taken their new doctrine and formed a theology around it; they had to do this in order to protect the lies of the heretics. They have made up their own man-made fence around their theology just like the Jews did.

In ancient times on Sukkot, the rabbis would pour water on the altar. Only sacrifices were supposed to be done on the Temple altar. One time, the rabbi who was doing this poured the water on the ground instead of the altar because he knew it was wrong. The rabbis who were holding their etrogs (a softball size fruit) pelted him with their etrogs. The person who wanted to do what was right was vilified by the rabbi theologians.

Where does God draw the line on this wrong teaching about not keeping the Old Testament. People are okay with keeping the some 2 million laws in the United States, but the some 200 applicable laws of the Old Testament portion is too hard for them. For your sake, you'd better hope that God will overlook this obvious wrong teaching if you still subscribe to it. James 3:1 NKJV says, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." Maybe the people you are teaching will end up in God's future kingdom and you won't because you are teaching lies. Worse yet, you could be leading people to the lake of fire where you will also go.

When Kefa (Peter) gets up from eating with the Gentiles in Galatians 2:11-13, we know that it was because of those who were teaching extra man-made laws; they were therefore **Torah breakers**. It says in Deuteronomy 4:2-3, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

In the Torah, it says not to eat with Gentiles who were idolaters. Exodus 34:15-16 NKJV says, "Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods." Some took this to mean that that it was not allowed to eat with any Gentiles. That is an extra law; it was Gentile idolaters that they should not eat with so that they wouldn't form a covenant with them. The Gentiles Kefa was eating with were Gentile believers and not idolaters. It was because **Torah breakers** showed up that Kefa got up from eating with the Gentiles.

Yeshua taught us not to keep misapplied man-made laws. Matthew 15:9 says, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Where do you think we got Sunday worship from? "On March 7, 321, however, Roman Emperor Constantine I issued a civil decree making Sunday a day of rest from labor, stating: All judges and city people and the craftsmen **shall rest upon the venerable day of the sun.**"¹ We got **Sunday worship** from the Roman church; it **was a day of rest to the s-u-n god** and not to the true God. Some will theologize it and make an excuse not to keep God's commandment. Some will say, what's the difference?

History clearly tells us that Sunday worship is a man-made practice that was originally made for the worship of the s-u-n god.

God does not like anything associated with pagan practice. If your denomination is practicing false Sunday worship, you probably will not get the help of your priest or evangelical pastor in this matter. My experience has been they dug in and brainwashed with their false theology. Deuteronomy 12:31-32 NKJV says we are not to do anything the pagans do, "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

You are going to have to stand before God some day. Some say, we will stand before the judgement *seat* of the Messiah. The word for *seat* in 2 Corinthians 5:9 is the Greek word *Bema*. The *Bema* is where the Torah is read. Ask any Rabbi. What can we do to make sure we are following the Torah correctly? Start with doing the most obvious things like keeping Shabbat, the true day of rest, from Friday night at sundown to Saturday at sundown. Hillel taught people who wanted to become Jewish to love others and learn the Torah. Yeshua also taught to love others and keep God's commandments. Yeshua said in Matthew 5:17 NKJV, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets." If that's what He said, that's what He means. Stop

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_Christianity

contradicting Yeshua and putting up false theological man-made fences around your beliefs. You are not loving others when you are not teaching people the truth.

We are talking about Galatians some so that we see some of the Jewish issues that Shaul was dealing with in his time. This will help us understand Colossians to some extent. It will also help us determine the direction we need to take in order to understand Colossians. When Shaul says they do not live as Jews in Galatians 2, he is referring to them not keeping all the misapplied laws of the Torah breakers that the Jews were keeping. He also says in Galatians 2:18 that they do not want to make up another system of misapplied laws. If they do, they become transgressors. What about all the misapplied things that Christians are doing with the Bible? In Chapter 3 of Galatians, he talks about the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead of the thousands of misapplied laws that had been developed, they should follow the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that helps them to keep the Torah without unnecessary man-made laws.

Also, in Galatians 3:10, Shaul quotes a scripture that says that those who do not keep the law are cursed. Here is the scripture Shaul is quoting: "Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them." Deuteronomy 27:26 NKJV. That is exactly what he means. He goes on to say that Yeshua has redeemed them from the curse caused by the law; namely because people broke the Torah through making misapplied man-made laws. Yeshua taught the early believers not to keep the man-made misapplied laws; **he said they were worshipping God in vain**. By the way, what about the man-made law to worship God on Sunday which was incorporated into Christian worship?

Shaul then says that the law was their only means to keep the Torah until the Messiah came and gave them the Holy Spirit to help them keep the Torah. He says the law is not against the promises of God in Galatians 3:21. Shaul goes on to explain himself further in the rest of Galatians.

The context is the Jewish issues of that time.

We conclusively see in Galatians that Shaul is encountering specific issues like the issues of the Torah breakers. When he writes to the Galatians, he intends to help correct the problems associated with Torah breakers. He says in Galatians that he teaches the circumcision of baby boys (Galatians 5:11) and also makes a list from the Torah saying that those who are breaking the Torah will not be in God's eternal kingdom. Jewish lists should always be understood as short lists to represent the whole. Rabbis often made these short lists of two or a few things.

Shaul uses some of the more apprehensible and despicable sins when he says in Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**." There are some Christians who are crossing the line in these areas; be careful. I tell you these things because I care about you. I don't want anyone to go to the lake of fire and neither does God the Bible says. For more details on Shaul's

teaching to the Galatians, see my book entitled, A Hebraic Messianic Galatians. I use my pen name for writing, Moshe Schwab.

I talk about Galatians in order to get us started in the right direction. Namely, the issues in Colossians are also Jewish issues regarding the proper keeping of the Torah. Shaul is not interested in starting a new religion. He still considered himself to be a leading teacher for the Jews, but now he has believed in the Messiah Yeshua and has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Kefa said all true believers receive the Holy Spirit. Kefa said in Acts 2:38-39 NKJV, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." Isn't that wonderful! God wants to help us.

We are only interested in a true Messianic Jewish context. Without a Messianic Jewish context, we will simply come up with our own ideas and interpretations.

Kefa said in 2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

There was no New Testament at the time. The Old Testament portion scriptures were believers' values for life.

Kefa says that those who misinterpret Shaul are in danger of destruction. The eventual consequence that would ensue is the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). There is a lake of fire for those who do things their own way. Revelation 21:8 NKJV, "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Notice it says that those who are teaching lies will end up in the lake of fire, "all liars." God is the judge.

Kefa said in 2 Peter 3:15-16 NKJV, "Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Since there was no New Testament until 150 AD, these evil people who are untaught in the Torah were twisting Shaul's teachings. His teachings had their basis in the Torah. The false heretic church of the Roman Empire must have been the result of this twisting of the scriptures. So, we must make a concerted effort to understand Colossians correctly. I thought God told me to stop making excuses for people with poor biblical exegesis, so I am being a little more direct in this introduction.

Yeshua says He is the good shepherd who lays down His life. He laid down His life to free us from man-made doctrine. Will we listen to Him or to the man-made teachings that take the Bible out of its true biblical context?