

## SABBATŌN IN COL 2:16

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**“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; . . . Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ”** (Col 2:14-17).<sup>1</sup> These words to the church at Colossae have been the center of considerable controversy, with much of the debate focusing on the last word in vs. 16, σαββάτων, which has been variously understood.

Some see in this passage a condemnation of any kind of sabbathkeeping, including first-day sabbatarianism.<sup>2</sup> Others say that there is no relationship between the word σαββάτων in this text and the seventh-day sabbath, the word actually referring to the ceremonial sabbaths.<sup>3</sup> Another group believes that the reference is

<sup>1</sup>Col 2:14, 16-17, KJV. All quotations from the Bible and the Apocrypha are from the RSV unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup>Among them Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 3: 224-225; Dudley M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, reprint of 14th ed. (Nashville, Tenn., 1948), pp. 282-299; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, Ohio, 1946), pp. 124, 127-128; Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1960), pp. 162-166; and Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, Penn., 1968), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Among first-day sabbatarians, examples are Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1963), 7: 267 (the 1st ed. of the volume on Ephesians through Colossians was published in 1845); and Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich., [1877]), p. 378. Among seventh-day sabbatarians, examples are John N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of*

to some Jewish aspect of the sabbath without the intent of abolishing the sabbath altogether.<sup>4</sup> Still others would propose that the reference is to the sabbath kept in honor of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, the “elemental spirits of the universe” of vs. 8 and 20.<sup>5</sup> The largest group of commentators recognize the seventh-day

*the Week* (Battle Creek, Mich., 1861), pp. 80-92; Donald F. Neufeld, “Sabbath Day or Sabbath Days,” *Review and Herald* 148 (15 Apr 1971): 13; and Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 (Washington, D.C., 1957): 205-206 (hereafter referred to as SDABC). Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible* 6 (New York, 1834): 498, holds a related view. He points out that σάββατον can also mean “week” and postulates that it is a reference to the feast of weeks, or Pentecost. So far as I know, he is alone in this conjecture.

<sup>4</sup>Among first-day sabbatarians, examples are H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, vol. 43 of *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge, Eng., 1894), pp. 109-110; and W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Christ Pre-eminent* (Chicago, 1923), pp. 82-84. Among seventh-day sabbatarians, examples are Richard W. Coffen, “Colossians 2:14-17” (Letter to the Editor), *The Ministry* 45 (Aug. 1972): 13, and William E. Richardson, “A Study of the Historical Background and Interpretation of Colossians 2:14-17” (M.A. Thesis, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich., 1960). W. E. Howell, “‘Sabbath’ in Colossians 2:16,” *The Ministry* 7 (Sept. 1834): 21, came close to the position outlined in this article. He felt that the word σαββάτων in Col 2:16 included both the ceremonial sabbaths and the ceremonial aspects of the seventh-day sabbath: “. . . when Paul . . . uses the word (sabbath) . . . he has the ceremonial sabbaths and the ceremonies on the weekly sabbath in mind and not the seventh-day institution as a memorial of creation. . . . Let no man judge you wrong when you interpret the word (sabbath) in Colossians 2:26 as being used generically in the singular. . . .” Apparently Howell was judged wrong by his fellow Adventists, for two years later he wrote a correction to his article in which he said, “Be it far from me, Brother Editor, ever to weaken or question the true interpretation of ‘sabbath days’ in Colossians 2:16, namely, that it means ceremonial sabbaths, and could not possibly mean the seventh-day Sabbath . . .” (Howell, “Anent Colossians 2:16,” *The Ministry* 9 [April 1936]: 19).

<sup>5</sup>Among them, Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 115-116, and *TDNT*, s.v. σάββατον; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians: The Church’s Lord and the Christian’s Liberty* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1972), p. 90, and *Colossians and Philemon* (London, Eng., 1974), pp. 90-91; and Arthur J. Ferch, letter to the author, 25 May 1976, outlining a speech presented to a west coast U. S. Adventist religion teachers’ conference at Walla Walla, Washington, on 3 May 1975. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 339-369, is hard to classify, but perhaps best fits with this group.

sabbath in the text but do not specify whether all sabbatarianism is condemned or not.<sup>6</sup>

One possibility that seems to have been overlooked is that Paul<sup>7</sup> was using a phrase derived from the OT and used by his opponents in Colossae in a special way. This possibility will be investigated below.

### 1. *Catch Phrases Used in Colossians*

That certain words and phrases in the letter to the Colossians are catch words has long been recognized. The most prominent example is the regulation, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" of Col 2:20. The "philosophy" of vs. 8 appears to be another example, and some further probable examples are the references to "the elemental spirits of the universe" (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου; vss. 8, 20), ἀρχὴ καὶ ἐξουσία or ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι (1:16 and 2:10, 15; variously translated in the RSV), "knowledge" (γνώσις or ἐπίγνωσις, 1:9,10; and 2:2,3), and "fulness" (πλήρωμα; 1:19 and 2:9). As Ralph Martin aptly puts it, Paul "seems to be actually quoting the slogans and watchwords of the cult."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Richardson, p. 22, summarizes the Patristic view thus: "... when the Fathers comment on the Sabbath of verse 16 (which is very rare) the predominant interpretation is that it is Jewish and thus abolished at the cross." Also see Bacchiocchi, pp. 339-342. This is as much comment as one gets from the ICC (30: 264); Charles W. Carter, gen. ed., *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967), 5: 500-501; *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (New York, 1930), 10: 52; and C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge, Eng., 1968), p. 102. These commentators do not say enough to enable one to put them in any of the other groups, although occasionally, as in the Tyndale series (Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1960], p. 72), one can gather that they lean toward one or another of the preceding opinions (in this case what might be called the libertarian position).

<sup>7</sup>Along with most scholars I opt for Pauline authorship, though I recognize that some scholars hold views to the contrary. Though I shall refer from time to time to Paul as the author, my line of argument regarding Col 2:16 is not related to the question of authorship.

<sup>8</sup>R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 8.

It would not seem unreasonable that the phrase “a festival or a new moon or a sabbath” (ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων) in Col 2:16 was also a slogan of the cult against which Paul was writing. This phrase had antecedent use in Jewish literature, mainly the OT, and we must now inquire as to the backgrounds there and to its meaning in this literature.

## 2. *OT and OT-Apocrypha Parallels to Col 2:16*

In the OT and OT Apocrypha there are seven passages where the LXX has the sequence ἑορτή . . . νεομηνία . . . σαββάτων (MT, תשב . . . שדח . . . מועד or לח), or the reverse, and one passage where μὴν substitutes for νεομηνία (MT has שדח here also)—namely, 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezek 45:17; Neh 10:33; Hos 2:11; 1 Esdr 5:52. A similar grouping with a wider separation between the terms is found in four other passages—Num 28-29; Isa 1:13-14; Ezek 46:4-11; Jdt 8:6. In addition, 1 Macc 10:34 has the three terms juxtaposed but out of order.<sup>9</sup> The most important of these parallels, and the one after which most of the others are modeled, is Num 28-29. As Walter Martin puts it, “Numbers 28 and 29 . . . list the very ‘ordinances’ referred to in Colossians 2:16-17, . . .”<sup>10</sup>

Num 28:1,2 begins, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Command the people of Israel, and say to them, “My offering, my food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take heed to offer to me in its due season.”’” Then vss. 3-8 describe the daily continual offering, morning and evening; vss. 9-10 mention the offering “on the sabbath day” (LXX, τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων); vss. 11-15 describe the offering “at the beginnings of your months” (LXX, ἐν ταῖς νεομηνίαις); and 28:16-29:38 depict the offerings for several annual festivals—Passover (28:16-25), Pentecost (vss. 26-31), Day of Trumpets (29:1-6), Day of Atonement (vss. 7-11), and Feast of Tabernacles (vss. 12-38). Then 29:39 closes with the statement that “these you shall offer to the Lord at your appointed feasts [LXX, ἐν ταῖς

<sup>9</sup>Several texts (Num 10:10; 2 Kgs 4:23; Ps 81:3; Isa 66:23; Amos 8:5; Lam 2:6; Ezra 3:5; Jdt 10:2; and 1 Macc 1:39, 45) have two of the three terms, but, with the exception of Ezra 3:5 and possibly Lam 2:6, have no other obvious relationship to the texts cited above. In addition, 2 Macc 6:5 has the verb σαββατίζω and the noun ἑορτή, again without another obvious relationship to the texts cited above.

<sup>10</sup>W. Martin, p. 166.

ἑορταῖς ὑμῶν], in addition to your votive offerings and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your cereal offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.”

It is important to notice the sequence of offerings given in this passage: First there is the daily, then the weekly, then the monthly, then the seasonal or yearly. This passage appears to be the prototype for a number of other passages in the OT. In fact, with the possible exception of Hos 2:11, whenever σάββατον, νεομηνία, and ἑορτή, or the equivalent σάββατον, μῆν, ἑορτή, are used together in the LXX, that which is treated is the *burnt offerings* on these days.

According to 1 Chr 23:30-31 the Levites were to stand thanking and praising the Lord morning and evening “and whenever burnt offerings are offered to the Lord on sabbaths, new moons, and feast days, . . .” (LXX, ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς νεομηνίαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς). In 2 Chr 2:4 (2:3 in the LXX) Solomon’s building of the temple was, among other things, “for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed feasts of the Lord our God [LXX, ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς νεομηνίαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς τοῦ Κυρίου θεοῦ ἡμῶν], as ordained for ever for Israel.” When the temple was finished, according to 2 Chr 8:12-13, “Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord . . . according to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts . . .” (LXX, ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς μηνσὶν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς τρεῖς καιροῦς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ). Hezekiah also contributed to “the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed feasts [LXX, εἰς σάββατα καὶ εἰς τὰς νεομηνίας καὶ εἰς τὰς ἑορτάς], as it is written in the law of the Lord” (2 Chr 31:3).

Ezekiel, in his vision of the Temple, mentions, in 45:17, that it is “the prince’s duty to furnish the burnt offerings, cereal offerings, and drink offerings, of the feasts, the new moons, and the sabbaths, all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel” (LXX, ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς νεομηνίαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς σαββάτοις καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἑορταῖς οἴκου Ἰσραηλ). Also, the close parallel of Ezek 46:4-15 with Num 28-29 should be noted. The burnt offering “on the sabbath day” (vs. 4; LXX, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων), and “at the day of the new moon” (vs. 6; LXX, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς νεομηνίας), and “at

the feasts and the appointed seasons" (vs. 11; LXX, ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς πανηγύρεσιν) are described in the now-familiar sequence.

Neh 10:33 (2 Esdr 20:34 in the LXX) makes reference to "the continual burnt offerings, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts . . ." (LXX, τῶν σαββάτων, τῶν νομηνιῶν, εἰς τὰς ἑορτὰς). And 1 Esdr 5:52 (1 Esdr 5:51 in the LXX) speaks of "the continual offerings and sacrifices on sabbaths and at new moons and at all the consecrated feasts" (LXX, σαββάτων καὶ νομηνιῶν καὶ ἑορτῶν πασῶν ἡγιασμένων).

Hosea may also be referring to the offerings on those days when he says, in 2:11, "I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts" (LXX, ἑορτὰς αὐτῆς καὶ τὰς νομηνίας αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ σάββατα αὐτῆς καὶ πάσας τὰς πανηγύρεις αὐτῆς [vs. 13 in the LXX]). The context does speak of "the feast days of the Baals when she burned incense to them" (vs. 13), although I feel that it is more probable that either Hosea was speaking of both the days and their offerings or he did not have the offerings, as such, in mind. However, in what are by far the majority of the OT and OT-Apocrypha passages containing the sequence of festival, new moon, and sabbath, that which is dealt with is the burnt offerings on those occasions.

### 3. "Partial Parallels" in Three Further Passages

There remain three other passages from the OT and OT-Apocrypha where σάββατον, νομηνία, and ἑορτή are used without their sequential juxtaposition—Isa 1:13-14; 1 Macc 10:34; and Jdt 8:6. In Isaiah, the main difference from the passages quoted in the last paragraph is that rather than a smooth sequence, there are two groups of two terms each. The passage reads, "Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates" (LXX, τὰς νομηνίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ σάββατα καὶ ἡμέραν μεγάλην . . . καὶ τὰς νομηνίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰς ἑορτὰς ὑμῶν . . .). Isaiah may be talking about offerings here, as the first part of the passage indicates (see also vs. 11). He certainly is contrasting what might be called ceremonial religion with basic morality (see vs. 17, 21-23). But the lack of a definite sequence of feast day, new moon, and sabbath makes it impossible to determine from this passage the meaning of that sequence.

Another passage wherein the sequence suffers somewhat is I Macc 10:34, where Demetrius says to the Jews, "And all the feasts and sabbaths and new moons and appointed days [LXX, αἱ ἑορταὶ καὶ τὰ σάββατα καὶ νομηνῖαι καὶ ἡμέραι ἀποδεδειγμένοι] and the three days before a feast and the three days after a feast—let them all be days of immunity and release for all the Jews who are in my kingdom." Here the days are not primarily thought of in terms of days of sacrifice, but as days when business pursuits should be laid aside (see vs. 35). But again the lack of the proper sequence means that the passage cannot be used to determine the meaning of the sequence.

A passage where the sequence is kept but the reference is not primarily to days of sacrifice is Jdt 8:6. Describing how devout Judith was, the author writes, "She fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the feasts and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel" (LXX, προσαββάτων καὶ σαββάτων καὶ προνομηνιῶν καὶ νομηνιῶν καὶ ἑορτῶν καὶ χαρμοσυνῶν οἴκου Ἰσραηλ). Here the reference is primarily to days on which one is supposed to be joyful and on which fasting is prohibited. This is probably the most outstanding exception to the general observation that the sequence ἑορτή—νεομηνία—σάββατον refers to days of sacrifice. However, there are two factors that make this exception less impressive. One is the inclusion of other days in the grouping—the "day before" or "preparation day" for the sabbath and for the new moon (προσαββάτον and προνομηνία). There were, of course, no special offerings on these days. The other factor is that the foregoing sequence is abbreviated in a later passage in the same book, Jdt 10:2, and that there the abbreviation is *not* σάββατα, νομηνῖαι, and ἑορταί, but it is shortened instead to only σάββατα and ἑορταί. Therefore I do not believe that Jdt 8:6 belongs to the category we have been discussing.

#### 4. *Significance of the OT and OT-Apocrypha Evidence*

It seems evident that Num 28-29 is the source of the expression σάββατον . . . νεομηνία . . . ἑορτή as used in later references we have noted. It is to be observed that in the majority of cases we have considered, the phrase is linked with the continual burnt offering. Indeed, twice the offerings are described as being offered "according

to the commandment of Moses,” or “as it is written in the law of the Lord” (2 Chr 8:13; 31:3).

The passage previously mentioned in Neh 10 deserves further elaboration. In vss. 29-30 the people “join with their brethren, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law which was given by Moses the servant of God. . . .” They will not intermarry with “the peoples of the land” (vs. 30; cf. Deut 7:3; Exod 34:16), buy on the sabbath or a holy day, plant crops in the seventh year (cf. Exod 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7), or exact debts (vs. 31; cf. Deut 15:1-2).

At this point the subject is changed to the temple service. The people lay upon themselves the obligation to pay one-third of a shekel yearly for the upkeep of the temple—for “the showbread, the continual cereal offering, the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings. . . .” There are other things that they promise to do, but the foregoing are the important ones to notice for our purposes. The *keeping* of the sabbath (vs. 31), significantly, is clearly differentiated from the *offerings* on the sabbaths, the new moons, and the feast days (vs. 33). The phrase “the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts” had reference to the sacrificial offerings on those days, not to the cessation of labor on those days, and particularly not to the matter of the keeping of the sabbath.

##### 5. Evidence from *1QM*, *Jubilees*, and *Enoch*

There are three further sources antedating Colossians that deserve attention here: the Dead Sea Scroll called “The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness” (*1QM*), the Book of *Jubilees*, and *1 Enoch*.<sup>11</sup> As the War Scroll contains the closest parallel, we will consider it first:

<sup>11</sup>Two noteworthy references that are both second century are Justin, *Dial.* 8.4, and the Mishna, *Zebah.* 10.1. The former has Trypho saying that if Justin will become circumcised and keep the precepts regarding the sabbath, feast days, and new moons (in other words fulfill the law), God will look with favor upon him (cf. 4 Ezra 1:31). The latter is a midrash stating that the daily whole burnt offerings should precede the additional whole offerings, and that the additional offerings for the sabbath should precede those of the new moon, which should precede those of the new year. *T. Ber.* 3.11, sometimes mentioned in connection with Col 2:16 (see, e.g., Lohse, *TDNT* 7:30, n. 234), bears no relation to it that I can see.



The major officials assigned to service shall take up their positions, in discharge of their duties, on the festivals, new moons, sabbaths or weekdays duly assigned to them. They shall be fifteen years of age and upwards. Their function shall be to attend to the burnt-offerings and the sacrifices, to set out the incense of "pleasant savor" for God's acceptance, to perform rites of atonement in behalf of all His congregation, and constantly to clear away the fat ashes which lie before Him on the "table of glory" (1QM 2.4-6).<sup>12</sup>

Here there is reference to their festivals (**מועדיהם**), their new moons (**חדשיהם**), and sabbaths (**שבתות**), in the context of the work of offering sacrifices. This passage also uses the sequence of feast day, new moon, and sabbath in association with the sacrificial system.

The Book of Jubilees contains eight series worth looking at, and there is one poor parallel in the Book of Enoch as well. The passage which provides the background for the others in Jubilees is found in *Jub.* 6. The writer was extremely interested in calendrical matters, the book professing to be a record of the first fifty jubilees in the history of the world. Events were dated as to day, month, year, week of years, and jubilee. As a part of this system, the writer has God give to Noah in *Jub.* 6 (to Enoch in *Jub.* 4 and *1 Enoch* 74:10-75:2) a calendar containing a 364-day year divided into four quarters of 13 weeks each. In this calendar, a given day of the year would fall on the same day of the week every year, and there was a quarter-by-quarter mathematical symmetry to the calendar.

The basic text of interest to us, as given in vss. 34-38, is a warning against tampering with the divinely revealed calendar:

<sup>34</sup>And all the children of Israel will forget, and will not find the path of the years, and will forget the *new moons*, and *seasons*, and *sabbaths*, and they will go wrong as to all the order of the years. <sup>35</sup>For I know and from henceforth will I declare it unto thee, and it is not of my own devising; for the book (lies) written before me, and on the heavenly tablets the division of days is

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<sup>12</sup>Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y., 1956), p. 283. For a Hebrew transcription, see Yigael Yadin, *The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 266.

ordained, lest they forget the feasts of the covenant and walk according to the feasts of the Gentiles after their error and after their ignorance. <sup>36</sup>For there will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon—how (it) disturbs the seasons and comes in from year to year ten days too soon. <sup>37</sup>For this reason the years will come upon them when they will disturb (the order) and make an abominable (day) the day of testimony, and an unclean day a feast day, and they will confound all the days, the holy with the unclean, and the unclean day with the holy, for they will go wrong as to the *months* and *sabbaths* and *feasts* and *jubilees*. <sup>38</sup>For this reason I command and testify to thee that thou mayest testify to them; for after thy death thy children will disturb (them), so that they will not make the year three hundred and sixty-four days only, and for this reason they will go wrong as to the *new moons* and *seasons* and *sabbaths* and *festivals*, and they will eat all kinds of blood with all kinds of flesh. [Italics mine.]<sup>13</sup>

Three times in this passage—in vss. 34, 37, and 38—there is reference to the series of “new moons, and seasons, and sabbaths,” “months and sabbaths and feasts and jubilees,” and “new moons and seasons and sabbaths and festivals,” associated with the declaration that “the children of Israel will forget” or “they will go wrong.” In each series, the “new moon” is mentioned first in the sequence, inasmuch as it was the major point of contention.

One other series in Jubilees has the same order as the second series in *Jub.* 6, presumably for the same reason:

And they will forget all My law and all My commandments and all My judgments, and will go astray as to new moons, and sabbaths, and festivals, and jubilees, and ordinances (*Jub.* 1:14).

In this passage, one notices a tendency to expand beyond what was included in the OT passages we have discussed. This tendency will become more evident as we proceed.

*Jub.* 23:19 has the feasts, months, and sabbaths in the regular chronological order, but other elements in the series are not in that kind of order:

<sup>13</sup>All material in Jubilees and 1 Enoch is quoted from *APOT*.

And they shall strive one with another, . . . on account of the law and the covenant; for they have forgotten commandment, and covenant, and feasts, and months, and sabbaths, and jubilees, and all judgments.

Two other series, including the one in 1 Enoch, lack one of the elements of the sabbath-and-new-moon-festival-sequence:

And many will perish and they will be taken captive, and will fall into the hands of the enemy, because they have forsaken My ordinances and My commandments, and the festivals of My covenant, and My sabbaths, and My holy place which I have hallowed for Myself in their midst, and My tabernacle, and My sanctuary . . . (*Jub.* 1:10).

And the account thereof [the four intercalary days and the year of 364 days] is accurate and the recorded reckoning thereof exact; for the luminaries, and months and festivals, and years and days, has Uriel shown and revealed to me, . . . (*1 Enoch* 82:7).

*Jub.* 1:10 is reminiscent of Lam 2:6 and may have been written with that text in mind. *1 Enoch* 82:7 differs from the preceding passages in not being overtly polemic. Two other passages which are not overtly polemic complete our survey.

*Jub.* 4:18 has an apparent duplication in its list; for “weeks of the jubilees” appears to be the same as “sabbaths of the years” (though the latter expression may refer to the 52 weeks in the calendar); and the list is also elaborated, instead of being merely stated:

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

One wonders if this passage refers to the Book of Enoch.

Finally, of the various passages in the Book of Jubilees, *Jub.* 2:9-10 has the closest parallel to the OT series and to Col 2:16:

And God appointed the sun to be a great sign on the earth for days and for sabbaths and for months and for feasts and for years

and for sabbaths of years and for jubilees and for all seasons of the years.

This series is remarkably well-ordered, perhaps due to the astronomical reference and the lack of an overt polemic.<sup>14</sup> Only the phrase "seasons of the years" is out of order.

Two generalizations concerning the above series from Jubilees and 1 Enoch can be made. First, the order of members in the different lists is highly variable. There is very little stereotyping of lists, either in content or in order. They generally do not preserve the order of "feast day, new moon, and sabbath," but tend to put the new moons first. Second, there is considerable stereotyping of the introductions to the various lists. All but three of the lists contain an introduction such as, "And the children of Israel will forget," or "They will go wrong." Then would follow the general type of statement calling to mind the calendrical conflict of Jubilees and involving a hodgepodge of calendrical occasions—monthly, weekly, yearly, and other.<sup>15</sup>

#### 6. *The Sacrificial-System Background to the Sequence of Col 2:16*

We thus have two groups of parallels to Col 2:16. One is centered around Num 28-29, and the other around *Jub.* 6. The former, however, shows a much closer parallelism to Col 2:16 than does the latter. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to interpret Col 2:16 in the light of the OT and IQM parallels which show affinity with Num 28-29. One of the things we have noticed about the OT material is that the phrase "festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath" is practically always associated with the offerings on those days, not just as incidental, but *as a way of describing those offerings*. So when the phrase was used in the epistle to the Colossians, the

<sup>14</sup>Although the polemic is there under the surface, for why else would the sun be a sign for sabbaths of years and jubilees—or for that matter, for sabbaths and months?

<sup>15</sup>I would propose that this is exactly what we have in Gal 4:10. The "days and months and seasons and years" are reminiscent of 1 Enoch 82:7, and weeks are skipped entirely, in contrast to Col 2:16.

reader or hearer acquainted with the OT parallels would immediately have thought of the weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices prescribed by Moses.

Is it too big a leap from Paul's phrase to the sacrificial system? I think not, for three reasons: First, the identification is very close to the surface in the OT, particularly when the latter parts of the OT were written (e.g., the use made of the phrase in Neh 10). Second, all through Colossians, as noted earlier, Paul "seems to be actually quoting the slogans and watchwords of the cult"<sup>16</sup> (e.g., his "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" of Col 2:21 is almost certainly quoted from the false teachers), and it seems quite likely to me that Paul is here quoting or parodying another slogan from the false teachers—only this time we know the antecedent, in contrast to some of the other slogans. Finally, I think this interpretation fits much better with vs. 17 than any other.<sup>17</sup> This last point is one which deserves a bit of elaboration here.

### 7. *The Sacrificial System and the Context in Col 2:17*

Col 2:17 begins with the wording, "which are a shadow of the coming things"<sup>18</sup> (ἃ<sup>19</sup> ἔστιν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων). The ἃ probably refers to the phrase ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων, rather than just to σαββάτων, inasmuch as the phrase is a unit and the latter interpretation would break it up. In fact, some commentators see in ἃ a reference to ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει as well,<sup>20</sup> but the grammar

<sup>16</sup>R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup>If my interpretation is correct, the false teachers may have advocated something similar to the 1/3 shekel tax mentioned in Neh 10:32-34. The temple in Jerusalem was still standing when Paul wrote the verse (and there is evidence from Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 28, that the Asian Jews paid the temple tax during this period), and it would not be surprising if someone advocated participation in the temple sacrifices during this period. That even apparently staunch Christians in the period after A.D. 70 did not entirely downgrade sacrifices may be gathered from *1 Clem.* 50-51.

<sup>18</sup>Author's translation.

<sup>19</sup>There is a slight textual variant here. B, G, and Marcion read δ. Accepting the variant does not make much difference in the exegesis (of course, the ἔστιν is correct either way).

<sup>20</sup>E.g., see SDABC 7:206.

does not call for this, and considering that βρω̄σις καὶ πόσις is probably a gnostic rather than an OT phrase,<sup>21</sup> it would seem unlikely that Paul would see in it a symbol of Christ.

It has recently been asserted that the word σκιά refers to the shadowy and unsubstantial nature of the ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων rather than to any foreshadowing function they may possess.<sup>22</sup> However, while σκιά doubtless has the connotation of nonsubstantiality and emptiness (especially when contrasted with σῶμα), σκιά is also connected with τῶν μελλόντων, "of the coming things." It would seem that something that was a shadow of coming things foreshadowed them by definition. In Heb 8:5 σκιά is parallel with ὑποδείγματι, "pattern," and in Heb 10:1 the law is spoken of as having a "shadow" (σκιάν) of "the good things to come" (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν).<sup>23</sup> These two texts have always, to my knowledge, been understood as using σκιά with a pointing or foreshadowing function,<sup>24</sup> and there is no real reason why σκιά in Col 2:17 should not be understood in the same way.

The word σκιά has been seen by other commentators to exclude the seventh-day sabbath, as the sabbath is said to have a commemorative function (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:8-11) rather than a foreshadowing function.<sup>25</sup> Those who see the sabbath as an institution in this text have answered this claim by pointing to Heb 4:1-11 as an evidence of its typical nature, and have mentioned that the Passover also had a dual function, pointing both backwards (Exod 12:11-17) and forwards (1 Cor 5:7), so why not the sabbath?<sup>26</sup> They have a point, and one cannot exclude the sabbath as an institution from the text by an appeal to σκιά alone. However, according to Gen 2:2-3 the sabbath was instituted before sin, and

<sup>21</sup>Richardson, pp. 69-73; R. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 90.

<sup>22</sup>Richardson, pp. 77-83.

<sup>23</sup>The verse goes on to say, "instead of the true form of these realities (οὐκ αὐτῆν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων)," thus making the parallel even closer.

<sup>24</sup>See, e.g., William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (1960), s. v. σκιά.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., see Earle Hilgert, "'Sabbath Days' in Colossians 2:16," *The Ministry* 25 (Feb. 1952): 43.

<sup>26</sup>E.g., see Canright, p. 294.

while the only other institution originating before the fall (marriage; Gen 2:23-24) was symbolic of Christ (Eph 5:31-32), marriage was not done away when Christ came. The sabbath might fit as "a shadow of things to come" (KJV), but it does not fit comfortably; and in view of the fact that the preceding phrase is probably a reference to the sacrificial system rather than to sabbath observance, as we have noted in our earlier discussion, there is no reason to try to force the sabbath to fit.

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

If the phrase ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων refers to the sacrificial system, the meaning of ἃ ἐστὶν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων is obvious. The sacrificial system pointed forward to Christ;<sup>27</sup> and when he came, that system had no more significance than a shadow. It may still be worthwhile studying, but it is no longer worth practicing.

The last part of vs. 17 reads, "But the substance belongs to Christ" (τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ). "'Substance' is in fact one rendering of the Greek term (*sōma*) for 'body.' This has suggested to some interpreters . . . that Paul has the church as Christ's body in view."<sup>28</sup> This interpretation accords well with Col 1:18 and 2:19, but it seems to detract a little from the centrality of Christ to say that the Jewish rituals only foreshadowed the church.

There is another very significant use of the word σῶμα, occurring in 1 Pet 2:24, as well as in Col 1:22. As C. F. D. Moule has said, the word σῶμα "probably suggested that famous verse which, in the prevalent LXX version of Ps. xl. 7, read (as quoted in Heb. x. 5) Θυσίαν καὶ προσφορὰν οὐκ ἠθέλησας, σῶμα δὲ κατηρίσω μοι: Christ's body, offered in sacrifice, was the reality to which the mere 'shadow'—the sacrificial system—pointed. Thus 'substance,' 'Church,' and 'final, perfect sacrifice' may all be ideas which would

<sup>27</sup>See John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; Heb 8:10 *passim*.

<sup>28</sup>R. Martin, *Colossians*, pp. 90-91.

have crowded into the listeners' minds when this phrase in our letter was read, or at any rate into the writer's mind when it was written."<sup>29</sup>

A parallel to Col 2:16-17 according to this interpretation, showing that the proposed sequence of meat, drink, and sacrifices was not unique in early Christianity, may be found in Heb 13. Vs. 9a warns about being led astray by "diverse and strange teachings" (cf. Col 2:8), vs. 9b urges the believer to have his heart strengthened by grace (cf. Col 2:10-15), and vs. 9c disparages food (cf. Col 2:16a). Then vs. 10a disparages the temple service (cf. Col 2:16b), and finally vss. 11-12 speak about the parallelism between the sacrificial system and Jesus (cf. Col 2:17).<sup>30</sup>

### 8. Conclusion

To summarize, the word σαββάτων in Col 2:16 has often been used to prove that the seventh-day sabbath has been done away; it has been interpreted as referring to ceremonial sabbaths and as having nothing to do with the seventh-day sabbath; it has been understood as referring to the seventh-day sabbath as a sign of Judaism and the Jewish regulations concerning the sabbath; and it has been read as decrying the observance of the sabbath in honor of the elemental spirits of the universe. But the weight of evidence indicates that what Paul actually had reference to was the sacrifices on the seventh-day sabbath prescribed in Num 28:9-10, which pointed forward to Christ and are no longer binding on the Christian since his death. The phrase "a festival or a new moon or a sabbath" appears to have been a catch-phrase tied to the sacrificial system, and referred to the offerings at the times designated. Whatever else Paul may have had in mind in making his statement in Col 2:16, his primary meaning in that text is that the sacrificial system pointed forward to Christ and therefore is no longer necessary now that Christ has come.

<sup>29</sup>Moule, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup>An interesting explanation of the parallels between Colossians and Hebrews is given in T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, ed. Matthew Black (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 242-258.