



Removing an Arrow from the Supersessionist Quiver: A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Colossians 2:16–17

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ABSTRACT When constructing the occasion in Col 2:16–17, the prevailing interpretation presumes that the Colossians were being criticized for noncompliance to dietary instructions and the Jewish calendar and that Paul disparages Jewish practices by identifying them as a “shadow” juxtaposed to the “substance” of Messiah. Through a broad survey of recent scholarship, New Testament texts, the Didache, and grammatical analysis, this study challenges traditional readings by changing the scenario: the Colossians were being criticized for living in accordance with the Jewish calendar.

KEYWORDS Colossians, Col 2:16–17, post-supersessionism, supersessionism, shadow, Cynics, Sabbath, Paul, Judaism

In conventional Christian interpretation, Col 2:16–17¹ functions as a primary text authenticating the cessation of the torah of Moses: in particular, the Sabbath, festive holidays, and dietary instructions. It is commonly accepted that these distinguishers, which Paul calls a “shadow,” were once valuable, but now that the “substance” has arrived they are insignificant.² But is this interpretation what Paul

1. “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 that are a *mere* shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” All Scripture citations are taken from NASB unless stated otherwise.
2. That Paul authored Colossians has been an issue of contention for nearly two centuries. Linguistic and theological differences from other Pauline epistles serve as the basis for dismissing Pauline authorship. For a comprehensive overview of various perspectives on authorship, see Paul Foster, *Colossians*, BNTC (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 73–78. While I favor Pauline authorship and will assume it here, space precludes an examination regarding authorship. For authentic Pauline authorship, see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, AB 34B

intended to convey to his Colossian recipients? The aim of this study is to offer an alternative interpretation that challenges supersessionist readings of Col 2:16–17. In this article, I will argue that, rather than the Colossians' being judged for rejecting Jewish practices, the situation is reversed: the Colossians were being critiqued by ascetics for eating and drinking on Sabbaths, festivals, and the new moon.³

Generally, the interpretation is determined through assessing what the occasion was and who the opponents were. According to Troy Martin, "Identifying the Colossian opponents is the central exegetical issue in Colossian studies since the identity of these opponents affects the interpretation of the entire letter."⁴

The majority of interpreters contend that the opponents at Colossae are situated within Judaism. Locating the occasion and opponents, Dunn suggests that "we need look no further than one or more of the Jewish synagogues in Colossae."⁵ Stettler agrees, commenting, "Those who 'condemn' the Colossian Christians must then be the local Torah-observant Jews."⁶

(New York: Doubleday, 1994), 114–26; Ian Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae*, LNTS 326 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 6–16; Douglas Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 260–309. For a recent and refreshing discussion on authorship, see Scot McKnight, *Colossians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 5–18.

On the insignificance of the "shadow," see Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 117, who explains, "The commands spelled out in the 'regulations' are nothing but the 'shadow of what is to come' . . . it becomes apparent under the sign of the fulfillment in Christ that the regulations are merely shadows of things to come, i.e. 'the body belongs to Christ'. Since reality is with Christ alone, the shadowy appearances have lost all right to exist. . . . The reality which exists solely with Christ is shared only by those who, as members of the body of Christ, adhere to the head (2:19). Therefore, for them the shadows have become completely meaningless." See also Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 106, who remarks, "Food regulations and calendrical observances, and all such legal prescriptions that belonged to the transitory old age, were merely pale adumbrations of a coming permanent reality now realized in the person and gospel of Christ. The implication is that the shadows not only are now superfluous but actually disappear with the appearance of the 'Substance.'"

3. For similar studies, see Troy Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique*, JSNTSup 118 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996); Herold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 132–46; Daniel T. Lancaster, *Torah Club: Chronicles of the Apostles*, 6 vols. (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2016), 3:881; idem, *From Sabbath to Sabbath* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2016), 197–204; Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), 326–42; Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 47–52.
4. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 205.
5. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 34.
6. Christian Stettler, "The Opponents at Colossae," in *Paul and His Opponents*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Pauline Studies 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 169–200.

Judaism regularly provides the substratum from which a variety of interpretive options derive, including a Judeo-Gnostic heresy affiliated with Essenism, a syncretistic diaspora Judaism, a group of Middle Platonists attracted to Judaism, a folk religion that drew on mystical Jewish traditions, a Jewish mystical movement,⁷ and so on. Hooker suggests that there were no opponents at Colossae, and the intent for Paul's writing was to alert his recipients not to adopt the practices of their Jewish and pagan neighbors.⁸ Sumney argues the opponents are not Judaizers or Gnostics (they could, however, be influenced by apocalyptic Judaism) and concludes "there is no wider group within which they can be securely placed."⁹ Bevere, however, critiques those who argue for syncretistic opponents, insisting that Jewish elements are "clearly present," while "syncretistic aspects are more vague" and are not the best way to explain Colossians.¹⁰ His thesis seeks to make Colossians analogous to Galatians, as a polemic against

7. *Judeo-Gnostic heresy*: J. B. Lightfoot, "The Colossian Heresy," in *Conflict at Colossae: A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Selected Modern Studies*, ed. Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, SBLBS 4 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973), 13–59. Recently, the possibility that the identity of the opponents could stem from a Qumran-type of Judaism was revisited by David Mathewson, "A Reexamination of Paul's Opponents in Colossians," in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honour of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday*, ed. Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and Andrew W. Pitts, BibInt 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 660–79.

Syncretistic diaspora Judaism: Gunther Bornkamm, "The Heresy of Colossians," in *Conflict at Colossae*, 123–47.

Middle Platonists: Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae*, JSNTSup 96 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 132.

Folk religion: Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

Jewish mystical movement: Smith, *Heavenly Perspective*. See also McKnight, *Colossians*, 8–34, who follows Smith and posits that the opponents are "Halakic Mystics."

8. Morna D. Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315–31. Following Hooker, Shkuk proposed that opponents were not the threat but "cultural baggage" was. This baggage was connected to Jewish tradition. Minna Shkuk, "New Identity and Cultural Baggage: Identity and Otherness in Colossians," in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 367–87. Influenced by Hooker, Adam Copenhaver recently propounded that Paul used rhetorical warnings against both Judaism and Pagan religions in *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians*, LNTS 585 (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
9. Jerry L. Sumney, "Those Who 'Pass Judgment'—Colossians," in *Servants of Satan, False Brothers, and Other Opponents of Paul*, JSNTSup 188 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 188–213.
10. Allen R. Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance: Identity and the Moral Life in Colossians*, JSNTSup 226 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 43.

Judaism.¹¹ Bevere concludes that “the target of the Colossian philosophy is essentially Jewish. The letter is a response to issues raised by the synagogue in Colossae that the Christians there have no right to claim a share in the inheritance of Israel.”¹² In the text, “Let no one judge you” and the seemingly Platonic juxtaposition, “shadow” versus “body,” lead commentators to suggest that the Colossians have obtained the “substance” of the “shadow,” while those who judge them for not participating are blinded to the “substance” and are limited to only “shadows.”¹³ Whether interpreters recognize the opponents and occasion as exclusively Jewish or seek a more syncretistic explanation, the consensus is that “the Philosophy was clearly indebted to Judaism in some form.”¹⁴ Consequently, the dietary instructions, Sabbath, festivals, and new moon in Col 2:16–17 are predominantly disparaged by interpreters.

There is another factor to consider, one that is frequently assumed when establishing the interpretation: the interpreter’s perception of Paul. Some contend that to claim “Paul still belonged to Judaism after his call to proclaim the

11. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 108, who notices a different tone in Colossians than that of Galatians. He suggests that it is a mistake to lump all of Paul’s letters together as if they were all meant for the same occasion and the same community. See also Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 11; Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 48; Dunn, *Colossians*, 34–35.

12. Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance*, 255.

13. See Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* (*Republic* 514a–18b). For studies that interpret Col 2:16–17 through this Platonic tradition, see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 116; Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 176–77; Smith, *Heavenly Perspective*, 118; Sumney, *Colossians*, 152; Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCCS (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2009), 84–85; David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 186; Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background*, 209–10; Fred O. Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18,” in *Conflict at Colossae*, 194 n. 73; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 119; W. C. Vergeer, “Σκία and Σωμα: The Strategy of Contextualisation in Colossians 2:17: A Contribution to the Quest for a Legitimate Contextual Theology Today,” *Neot* 28 (1994): 379–93; James Waddell, “The Shadow and the Substance: Early Reception of Paul the Jew in the Letter to the Colossians,” in *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew: Text, Narrative and Reception History*, ed. Isaac W. Oliver and Gabriele Boccaccini, LSTS 92 (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 75–87. For studies that recognize the Platonic imagery and do not interpret the text with Platonic definitions but nevertheless still understand the “shadow” as something that has ceased with the “body,” see David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 174; Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance*, 88; cf. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 340–41, who acknowledge the Platonic tradition but do not interpret through it. They offer two possible readings, one that does not degrade the Jewish practices. For a rebuttal of the Platonic influence, see Sang-Won Aaron Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” in *History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in Honor of Dr. E. Earle Ellis for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Sang-Won Aaron Son (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 222–38.

14. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 17.

gospel is unsustainable,”¹⁵ situating Paul outside and against Judaism. Others claim that Paul discarded the external identity markers of Judaism but emphasized its moral standards.¹⁶ These two views and those in between are part of a greater theological edifice termed *supersessionism*.¹⁷

Rather than accept Paul as averse to Judaism and its identity badges, we will proceed to set Paul within the Judaism(s)¹⁸ of his day. Paul delighted in Sabbaths, festivals, new moons, dietary instructions, and other facets of his ancestral faith.¹⁹ Consequently, we will abandon the supersessionist perspective in favor of a post-supersessionist perspective.²⁰

15. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Response to Mark D. Nanos,” in *Four Views on the Apostle Paul*, ed. Michael Bird (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 196.
16. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1048.
17. “Supersessionism” is an equivocal term. It connotes that the Church has replaced the Jewish people as God’s chosen people; that God’s covenant with the Jews is now eradicated because the new covenant has arrived; that the Law of Christ displaces the Law of Moses; that the sacrifice of Christ supplants the Levitical sacrificial system, and so on. See R. Kendall Soulen, “Supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413–14.
18. Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 316, describes how Judaism was not monolithic: “[In] the Second Temple period, there were major changes and developments, and the variety found at the end was at least as great as at the beginning. For this reason, we can also speak of ‘Judaisms,’ indicating the fact that each individual Judaic system can be called a Judaism. ‘Judaic religion’ is the container which holds all the different and diverse Judaisms of the time.” On the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, see also Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
19. Space precludes a detailed analysis of Paul’s relationship to Judaism, but for the purpose of this essay, I will work from the assumption that Paul remained torah-observant and transitioned from one group of Pharisees to a different group of Pharisees that recognized the Messiah Jesus. See Mark Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” in *Reading Paul within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos*, vol. 1. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 3–59, specifically pp. 30–31; David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 44–45, 201–4. Paul calls himself a Pharisee in Phil 3:5. Luke documents Paul’s claim as a Pharisee in Acts 23:6, where Paul declares, “I am a Pharisee,” using not a past tense but a present tense; see David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), 309. Paul again asserts in Acts 26:5, “I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion [Judaism].” See Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–15), 4:3489, who observes, “Paul’s claim that he ‘lived’ [ἐζῆσα, aorist tense] as a Pharisee’ does not mean that he has since abandoned Pharisaism.”
20. R. Kendall Soulen, “Post-supersessionism,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, 350, states, “Post-supersessionism designates not a single viewpoint but a loose and partly conflicting family of theological perspectives that seeks to interpret the central affirmations of Christian faith in ways that do not state or imply the abrogation or obsolescence of God’s covenant with the Jewish people, that is, in ways that are not supersessionist. Positively expressed, a theology is post-supersessionist if it affirms the present validity of God’s covenant with Israel

Considering the New Testament evidence, it is plausible that Paul continued in these practices and encouraged other communities of Jews and Gentiles to do the same.²¹

The Jewish Calendar

Justin Hardin observes, “Paul was not at all critical of the Jewish calendar, but even continues to orient his life around it.”²² This statement is substantiated by considering several passages in 1 Corinthians and Acts.²³ 1 Corinthians portrays Paul (and his audience) as having a cognizance of the Jewish calendar and observing it as well. Paul uses vocabulary associated with Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread as he deals with the issue of sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:6–7). He also mentions the keeping of the festival in 1 Cor 5:8, “Therefore let us celebrate the feast.” The language used in 1 Cor 10:16–21 and 11:17–34 likewise provides a strong impression that Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were approaching.²⁴

as a coherent and indispensable part of the larger body of Christian teaching.” Cf. Joel Willitts, “Jewish Fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) in Post-supersessionist Water: Messianic Judaism within a Post-supersessionistic Paradigm,” *HTS Theological Studies* 72.4 (2016): 1–5.

21. Some make an exception that Paul is only warning Gentiles here and that Jewish people are free to observe these, e.g., McKnight, *Colossians*, 269; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 611.
22. Justin Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First Century*, WUNT 2/237 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 120. This observation was made earlier by Troy Martin, “Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4:10 and Col 2:16,” *NTS* 42 (1996): 120–32 and later developed by Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 257–71.
23. The influence and traditions of F. C. Baur and John Knox have caused scholars to approach the Paul of Acts with suspicion. Consequently, the traditions and speeches of Paul recorded in Acts are treated as unreliable in many studies of the historical Paul. For a survey of this development, see Thomas E. Phillips, *Paul, His Letters, and Acts*, Library of Pauline Studies (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 30–49. Despite this influence, this trend is shifting toward Acts as a reliable source for Pauline studies. See James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 73–87; Keener, *Acts*, 1:221–57; James H. Charlesworth, “Why Should Experts Ignore Acts in Pauline Research?” in *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew*, 151–66. For this study, Acts will be regarded as reliable for reconstructing the life of Paul.
24. The “Cup of Blessing” in 10:16 is the third cup of the Passover Seder, e.g., Craig Keener, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87. Cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, AB 32 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 390. Also notable is the allusion to Jesus’s Passover meal, particularly Luke 20:19–20, in 1 Cor 11:23–25, see Keener, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 98. David Rudolph, “Passover in Corinth—1 Corinthians 5:7–8,” *Messiah Journal* 107 (2011): 58–59, declares, “There are several reasons why we should not preclude the possibility of a literal Passover celebration (of some kind) at Corinth. First, the congregation grew out of the local synagogue. Crispus, the president of the synagogue, and his family were

Again in 1 Cor 16:8, Paul's itinerary is based on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, with which the readers are no doubt acquainted. Raymond Collins argues that "Pentecost' might simply indicate a time rather than the feast *per se*."²⁵ However, I concur with Keener, who observes, "It is unlikely that either Luke or Paul preserved such designations as merely chronological markers."²⁶ It is plausible then, that the Corinthians acknowledged and participated in the Jewish calendar system.

Paul's itinerary in Acts also correlates with the Jewish calendar. Translated from the Textus Receptus, Acts 18:21 (NKJV) reads, "I [Paul] must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.' And he sailed from Ephesus."²⁷ The exact festival Paul was intending to be in Jerusalem for is debatable, though Pentecost seems likely.²⁸

Subsequently, in Acts 20:6, Luke mentions that they departed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, perhaps to celebrate the festival with the Philippians.²⁹ Lancaster surmises, because of the paucity of Jews in Philippi, that "Paul decided to use the occasion of the festival to teach the Philippians the observances of Passover."³⁰

Unlike Acts 18:21, all manuscripts confirm the presence of Pentecost in Acts 20:16, which echoes Paul's determination to be at Jerusalem both for the festival and to present the financial collection to the leadership: the "firstfruits' of his ministry to the Gentiles."³¹

founding members of the Messianic congregation, and they were joined by Pricilla, Aquilla and Apollos—all Messianic Jews who celebrated [the festivals]. Secondly . . . a Gentile form of Passover was widely observed in the early *ekklesia*. Thirdly, Paul refers to a second Jewish festival, in clearly non-figurative terms, at the end of the letter. The passing comment—'But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost'—suggests that the Corinthians knew when Pentecost would occur. Moreover, since Pentecost is calculated by counting fifty days after 'the day after the Sabbath' during Passover week, Paul implies that the literal day of Passover was not insignificant to the community." See Keener, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 51.

25. Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 593. See also Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1428 n. 59.

26. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2960.

27. Modern translations (NASB, ESV, RSV, NIV, NET) omit the part about keeping the feast in Jerusalem. For tenable information supporting the TR reading of Acts 18:21, see J. M. Ross, "The Extra Words in Acts 18:21," *NovT* 34 (1992): 247–49.

28. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2793; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 291; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 399.

29. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2960.

30. Lancaster, *Chronicles of the Apostles*, 3:703. Cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 666.

31. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2989.

Another indication of Paul's functioning by the Jewish calendar is Acts 27:9: "When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them." "The fast" (τὴν νηστείαν) is almost unanimously understood to be Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.³² The intimation is subtle here: Luke's readers must be familiar with the Jewish calendar to be able to comprehend the use of the time-keeping terminology he uses; and what better way to be familiar with them than to participate within the calendar?³³

Space precludes defending the view that Paul remained Sabbath observant. It is noteworthy, however, to mention that a good portion of Paul's documented ministry in Acts takes place in Synagogues on Sabbaths.³⁴ Interestingly, there is a seeming assumption in Acts 15:21 that Gentiles might attend Synagogue on Sabbath to learn more about their new faith "since he [Moses, that is, the Torah] is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." Isaac Oliver forcefully contends:

Such a spontaneous embrace of Jewish customs among Gentile followers of Jesus should not be surprising, since Sabbath keeping was popular among Gentiles during this period of history. Luke may have even welcomed Sabbath celebration among non-Jews, interpreting their observance of the fourth commandment as an expression of their release from idolatry and commitment to the God "who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them" (Acts 14:15). In any case, Acts 15:21 may at least indicate that Luke is not *opposed* to Gentile followers of Jesus (and certainly not Jewish followers of Jesus!) keeping the Sabbath.³⁵

The Didache also has a section worth consideration vis-à-vis the Gentile observance of Sabbath. Didache 8:1 reads, "Your fast days should not coincide with those of the hypocrites, for they fast on the second day of the week

32. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 216; Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 656; Bruce, *Acts*, 515; Keener, *Acts*, 4:3597–98; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 320; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 775.

33. A forceful argument to support this is made by Keener, *Acts*, 4:3597–98; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century*, WUNT 163 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 215; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 320.

34. Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4. Acts 20:7 is possibly a Havdalah setting, e.g., Lancaster, *Chronicles of the Apostles*, 3:704–6; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 297–98; cf. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2967, who argues for a Sunday evening into Monday morning interpretation of Acts 20:7.

35. Issac W. Oliver, *Torah Praxis after 70 C.E.: Reading Matthew and Luke–Acts as Jewish Texts*, WUNT 2/355 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 215–16. See also Lancaster, *Chronicles of the Apostles*, 2:499–500.

and on the fifth day. But you are to fast on the fourth day and on the preparation day.”³⁶ Significant here is the numbering of the days, which is a practice, according to Janicki, that is “inherently Jewish and points back to creation.”³⁷ In this arrangement of days, the “first day” would be equivalent to Sunday, the “second day” to Monday, and onward. One would assume that Friday would be the “sixth day”; however, it was normally known as the “Preparation Day.”³⁸

Employing again the methodology I did above concerning Paul and Luke’s use of Festival terminology, why would the author(s) of the *Didache* use specifically Jewish calendrical designations for the days of the week if the audience was not functioning within that calendar system? It is practical to suppose the *Didache*’s audience adopted the Jewish religious calendar. Janicki contends that the “reference to Friday as ‘the preparation day’ is another indication that the new Gentile believers were well aware of the Sabbath day and marked it out weekly.”³⁹ Lanfranchi comments, “for the *Didachist* the ideal believer submits to the complete observance of the Law: ‘For if you can bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you cannot, do as much as you can’ (6:2) It is very unlikely that ‘the entire yoke of the Lord’ did not include Sabbath, one of the central pillars of life under the covenant.”⁴⁰

I acknowledge that there is no mandate found in the New Testament that necessitates the Gentile believers to adopt the Jewish calendar. Nevertheless, there are numerous injunctions that instruct the Gentiles to withdraw from their prior idolatrous lifestyles,⁴¹ which functioned around a pagan polytheistic calendar. An appropriate means to accomplish this would be to embrace the Jewish calendar. Troy Martin observes:

36. Translation from Toby Janicki, *The Way of Life: The Didache: A New Translation and Messianic Jewish Commentary* (Marshfield, MO: Vine of David, 2017), 37, 293.

37. Janicki, *The Way of Life*, 307.

38. Cf. BDAG, “παρασκευή”: “acc. to Israel’s usage it was Friday, on which day everything had to be prepared for the Sabbath, when no work was permitted.” See also Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31.

39. Janicki, *The Way of Life*, 310.

40. Pierluigi Lanfranchi, “Attitudes to the Sabbath in Three Apostolic Fathers: *Didache*, Ignatius, and Barnabas,” in *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge*, ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander, and Johannes Tromp, *NovTSup* 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 243–59, esp. p. 248.

41. 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Cor 5:10–11; 6:9; 10:7, 14; Gal 5:20; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5. See also Gal 4:8–11, specifically v. 10, “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” The calendar in 4:10 can denote a Pagan calendar to which Paul is petitioning the Galatians not to return. See Martin, “Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4.10 and Col 2.16,” 112–13; Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 257–71; Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult*, 116–47.

Paul does indeed consider time-keeping an important aspect of the Christian life. Only by avoiding time-keeping altogether or by adhering to the Jewish calendar can the Pauline communities escape idolatrous alternatives. Other time-keeping systems name the days and the months after pagan deities and mark out the seasons by pagan rites. In contrast, the Jews distinguish the seasons by festivals that obviously have no pagan connotations. . . . The only options available to Paul and his communities are Jewish, pagan or no time-keeping system at all, and the evidence indicates they opt for the former.⁴²

The evidence surveyed suggests that the early Gentile believers assumed the Jewish religious calendar and that the Jewish believers perpetually observed their God-given holy days. We are now ready to explore the options for a post-supersessionist interpretation of Col 2:16–17.

Reassessing the Occasion and Identity of the Opponents

As stated above, the purpose of this study is to offer a post-supersessionist interpretation of Col 2:16–17: the Colossians are being criticized for eating and drinking⁴³ and for partaking in the Jewish time-keeping calendar. The NASB reads, “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 Christ.”

This translation displays tremendous translator bias. The condescending “*mere*”⁴⁴ that modifies “shadow” is not present in the Greek text; rather it is supplied by the translator betraying their biased reading of the passage.⁴⁵ Additionally, the verb “belongs” in “belongs to Christ” is also absent from the Greek. A literal and almost unadulterated translation is found in Young’s Literal Translation, which reads “Let no one, then, judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of the coming things, and the body *is* of the Christ.” This is an adequate rendering

42. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 126.

43. Against the subsequent NASB citation, I opine that βρῶσις and πόσις should be understood as “eating” and “drinking.” Cf. Young’s Literal Translation; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 115, esp. n. 4; Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 337; BDAG, “βρῶσις,” (1) the act of partaking of food, *eating*; BDAG, “πόσις,” (1) act of drinking, *drinking*.

44. See NASB, “mere”; RSV, “only.”

45. Some translations (NIV) change the future tense “what is to come” to a past tense “were to come.” Translator bias is also seen in Heb 10:1, “For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come” where “*only*” is added by the translator; see Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 611, “If one is going to add to the inspired text, the word to add is ‘definitely’ or ‘indeed’: ‘These are definitely a shadow of things to come.’”

of the text; however, the verb “is” does not appear in the Greek. We will travail with the syntax below.

One post-supersessionist suggestion is to read eating, drinking, Sabbath, festivals, and new moons within not a Jewish calendar but a pagan calendar.⁴⁶ This approach succeeds in avoiding denigration of Judaism and its practices but is dubious because it is problematic to understand Paul as referring to pagan holidays as a positive shadow of things come.⁴⁷ To me, these recognized Jewish practices are central to the Colossians’ religious expression.

It is probable that the early Gentile followers of Jesus in Colossae were initially drawn to the synagogues and the praxis of Judaism prior to their introduction to the Messiah.⁴⁸ Accordingly, they would be accustomed to the Jewish calendar and practice to some extent. When Epaphras⁴⁹ taught that the Gentiles could share in the inheritance of the Saints (Col 1:12) through faith toward Messiah without becoming proselytes to Judaism, he did not entreat them to discard the godly living instructions they were learning from the conversations at the synagogue or the anti-imperial calendar they were beginning to practice. In addition to teaching them about Jesus the Messiah, Epaphras communicated the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:23–29)⁵⁰ to these God-fearers and to the new Gentiles being drawn into the Messianic movement. Thus, they were well acquainted with the Jewish time-keeping system. Whether they kept holidays within the synagogue, the personal gathering place of Philemon, or somewhere else is indeterminate. Wherever they gathered, ascetic critics began to join in and submit criticisms such as “*Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!*” (Col 2:21). It is vital to realize that food and drink in v. 16 do not refer to Levitical dietary instructions.⁵¹ Rather, their mention is actually a clue that ascetics were criticizing the Colossians for their lavish feasts during Sabbaths, festivals, and new moons, times that were not normally associated with fasting and affliction.

46. Pace Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism*, NTAS (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 216, who suggests that “The list of practices in v.16 should not be understood as a comprehensive list of Jewish observances” and that they are better understood as “elements of various pagan religious systems” that “had incorporated Jewish elements.” Windsor follows Foster, *Colossians*, 278–82.

47. See, e.g., Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 174, who observes that “Paul would never describe pagan rituals as a shadow or outline of what was to come in Christ.”

48. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 1037.

49. Paul had not visited Colossae. Epaphras imparted the message of the Jewish Messiah to the Lycus Valley (Col 1:7; 4:12–13). See Ulrich Huttner, *Early Christianity in the Lycus Valley*, trans. David Green, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 27.

50. Although Phrygia was not addressed in this letter, we can assume that these directives or something similar were a common apostolic introductory teaching. See also Col 2:7, as well as the Didache.

51. Pace Dunn, who insists “Jewish food laws” are in view (*Colossians and Philemon*, 174).

Eby interprets Col 2:16–17, “let none of these preachers of asceticism criticize you for enjoying food or partaking of wine. They should not pass judgment on you for participating in celebration, relaxation, and mild indulgence on the holidays, new-moon celebrations, or the Sabbath day. These observances are a ‘shadow of things to come.’”⁵²

Troy Martin, who proposes that the ascetic critics are of a Cynic philosophy, makes a convincing case that a Cynic would critique practices that involved drinking wine and enjoying festive foods centered on a specific time-keeping system.⁵³ Cynics taught their followers to “Accustom yourselves to eat barley cake [μᾶζα] and to drink water, and do not taste (μὴ γεύεσθε) fish and wine.”⁵⁴ This is very close to the prohibition in Col 2:21. Martin explains that instead of indulging in “cultural foods, the Cynic prefers foods that grow naturally of themselves. Because these foods are naturally replenished and available to all, they provide liberation from culture and dependence upon others.”⁵⁵ The Cynic’s want for independence from these cultural food customs would “result in a repudiation of foods and beverages that are products of human society. Wine is avoided because it makes the Cynic dependent upon the wine industry. Cakes and delicacies are refused since they bind the Cynic to the accomplished chef.”⁵⁶ Someone with this worldview would undoubtedly take issue with Jewish festive celebrations.

Colossians 2:17 equates eating and drinking, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths with “a shadow of things to come.” It is worth mentioning that “things to come” means they have not arrived yet.⁵⁷ For the readers of this letter, they had not come and were understood as projected future events, that is, the hope⁵⁸ of the Colossians, the resurrection of the dead, the Messianic Kingdom, and

52. Eby, *Biblically Kosher*, 51.

53. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 65, observes that “Cynics practice an extreme asceticism that not only forbids eating but also touching or handling commodities not naturally produced.” Regarding the critique of time, see pp. 131–2, “Cynics disregard time beyond the hours of the day, and these hours are only of relative usefulness. Instead of organizing their lives according to a system of time, they prefer to live day by day. . . . The Cynic considers this practice [communal life by a religious calendar] a useless waste of effort that detracts from the true pursuit of morality and happiness.”

54. *Ibid.*, 67 n. 1.

55. *Ibid.*, 120.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Pace Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 186, who claims, “‘Of the things to come’ refers to the acts of God through Christ that have already been accomplished, thus justifying a translation that makes this temporal aspect explicit: ‘these are a shadow of the things that were to come’ (TNIV, NIV).”

58. Col 1:5, 23, 27; 3:1–2, 4.

so on. These things that are “a shadow of things to come” are unequivocally eschatological.⁵⁹

Isaiah 66:23 describes the eschatological calendar: “And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the LORD.” Whether this is understood literally or symbolically, it portrays Sabbaths and new moons as a “shadow” of things to come. According to F. F. Bruce, “Paul could have been adapting principles which he had learned in the course of his rabbinical education. Many Jews looked on their festivals and sacred seasons as adumbrations of the messianic age.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he jettisons this submission.⁶¹ Concerning rabbinical education, the Talmud describes the Sabbath as “one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come.”⁶² Eby comments, “By calling the Sabbath ‘one-sixtieth part of the age to come,’ it expresses that it represents a barely discernable hint of what the future world is like.”⁶³ Lancaster summarizes quite well how these ostensible Jewish features can positively be associated with a shadow of the things to come:

The Sabbath and the holy days foreshadow the redemption, the Messianic Era, the Kingdom on earth, and the World to Come. . . . Every appointed time on God’s calendar teaches about the end times and the coming of the Messiah. For example, Passover, the festival of redemption, points toward the final redemption. Just as God redeemed Israel from Egypt at the first Passover, he will redeem his people from the nations in the future. Pentecost, the festival of the giving of the Torah, points to the Messianic Era, when the Torah will go forth from Zion and the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD. The Festival of Trumpets points to the day when the trumpet of Messiah will sound. The Day of Atonement is a picture of the final judgment. The Festival of Booths foreshadows the kingdom, when each man will sit in the shadow of the Almighty under his own vine and fig tree, and there will be peace on earth. In this way the holy days are shadows of things yet to come; specifically, they foreshadow the Messianic Era.⁶⁴

59. Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 136–37, notes, “The shadow of what is to come does not refer to shadows of the Christ who has already come and made these observances obsolete. In this case, the ‘shadow’ is the present blurred manifestation of a hoped-for future reality. In its shadow the expected future is seen as coming. . . . In reference to this future, he declares that the dietary and calendric observances his readers are involved in are a ‘shadow,’ or an intimation of the future. This is clearly a way of giving them value.”

60. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 116.

61. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

62. B. Ber. 57b.

63. Eby, *Biblically Kosher*, 179 n. 32.

64. Lancaster, *From Sabbath to Sabbath*, 200.

Lancaster, however, does not mention how the new moon is a “shadow of things to come.” ראש חודש (“the new moon”) is depicted in 1 Sam 20 as a festive banquet. It is celebrated at the beginning of each new month, “when the moon begins its renewal by reappearing in the sky.”⁶⁵ חודש comes from the verbal root חָדַשׁ, which means “to renew” or “to restore.”⁶⁶ Schechter posits that renewal is one of the central themes of the new moon celebration.⁶⁷ Perhaps if we understand the new moon celebration as a symbol of renewal or restoration then we can perceive how it can logically be termed “a shadow of things to come.” Consider that there are still things to come that manifest renewal, namely, the restoration of our bodies from perishable to imperishable and the new Heaven and Earth.⁶⁸

Martin explains that the “anticipation of the Parousia causes serious consternation for the Cynic who pities the deluded Christian’s eating and drinking to proclaim their Lord’s death until He returns.”⁶⁹ He continues, “This vain hope in the Parousia . . . would prompt a stern, pejorative judgment against Christian eating and drinking.”⁷⁰ He also adds clarification, “The Cynic lives from day to day without expecting anything from the future. Hope for anything poses a great threat to happiness because hope can lead to disappointment.”⁷¹

Martin provides a welcome robust alternative to understanding who the Colossian opponents were. It is probable that, instead of being Jewish legalists, the critics at Colossae held a Cynic worldview.⁷² Whether we find Martin’s case convincing (that the opponents are of a Cynic philosophy) or we understand

65. Shira Siev Schechter, “A Time for Renewal,” in *From Within the Tent: The Haftarat*, ed. Daniel Z. Feldman and Stuart W. Halpern (New York: Maggid, 2011), 509–14.

66. George M. Landes, *Building Your Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary: Learning Words by Frequency and Cognate* (Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 125. See also Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Tel-Aviv: Massadah, 1965), 717.

67. Schechter, “A Time for Renewal,” 512.

68. *Restoration of our bodies*: 1 Cor 15:50–54. *New Heaven and Earth*: Isa 66:22; 2 Pet 3:11–13; Rev 21:1.

69. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 123.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Abraham J. Malherbe has also suggested a Cynic background for 1 Thessalonians in “Gentle as a Nurse’: The Cynic Background to 1 Thessalonians 2,” in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity*, ed. Carl R. Holladay et al., NovTSup 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 53–67. Mark Nanos suggests that Paul’s “beware of the dogs” in Phil 3:2 could refer to Cynics instead of Jews, in “Paul’s Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles ‘Dogs’ (Philippians 3:2)” and also in idem, “Paul’s Polemic in Philippians 3 as Jewish-Subgroup Vilification of Local Non-Jewish Cultic and Philosophical Alternatives,” in *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism: Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos*, vol. 4 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 111–93.

them as a group of Gnostic ascetics,⁷³ we have demonstrated that there are other ways of discerning the situation and opponents than solely locating them within Judaism.

Grammatical Analysis

We now proceed to the grammatical analysis of Col 2:17, which describes the attributes mentioned in the previous verse, ἃ ἐστὶν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“which are a shadow of the things to come but [and] the body of Christ”).⁷⁴ It is essential to recognize that this section is not an easy section to translate and interpret.⁷⁵ Martin discerns that “The short clause τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ at the end of Col 2:17 is misunderstood by an exegetical tradition that ignores the grammatical structure of the clause in favor of a semantic antithesis between shadow (σκιά) and body (σῶμα).”⁷⁶ Son also detects that “The vast majority of translators and commentators assume that there is a semantic antithesis between σκιά and σῶμα in this verse and understand σῶμα as the ‘reality’ or ‘substance’ of what is foreshadowed, often in the sense of a Platonic dualism.”⁷⁷ Son is concerned, and rightly so, because “This dominant understanding, however, involves a number of questionable assumptions.”⁷⁸

The phrase τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ is predominately translated to fit into Platonic imagery. Nevertheless, Son and Martin⁷⁹ both offer forceful arguments against this default exegetical tradition. The phrase τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“but the body of Christ”) in Col 2:17 is almost never translated as such. The NASB, RSV, and ESV translate it “but the substance belongs to Christ.” The NIV reads “the reality, however, is found in Christ.” The NET translates the phrase “but the reality is Christ!” The KJV comes close with “but the body is of Christ.”

73. Lancaster, *Chronicles of the Apostles*, 3:881; idem, *From Sabbath to Sabbath*, 203; Eby, *Biblically Kosher*, 51.

74. Cf. Sumney, *Colossians*, 151, who insists, “This verse is one of the most difficult to translate in the letter. Rendered most woodenly, it says: These things are a shadow of the things to come, but [or ‘and’] the body of Christ.”

75. Referring to Col 2:16–23, Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 124–25 n. 86, observes, “This section cannot be translated. A person can only just sample the meaning of the passage and then try to reproduce it to some extent with reference to the Greek text.”

76. Troy Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 249–55, esp. p. 249.

77. Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” 222–23.

78. Ibid.

79. Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17”; Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17).”

Last, the CJB reads “but the body is of the Messiah.” Many more translations follow this motif.⁸⁰

There are two textual concerns to inspect here. First, there is no reason to translate σῶμα (“body”) as “substance” or “reality.” Son observes:

σῶμα occurs 91 times in the thirteen letters traditionally attributed to Paul. It is used both in the individual sense and in the corporate sense. When σῶμα is used in the individual sense, it denotes either the physicality of a person or the whole person in a certain mode of existence. When used in the corporate sense, however, it denotes primarily the sexual union or the church as the “body of Christ.”⁸¹

He concludes that “Whether it is used in the individual sense or in the corporate sense, one thing is clear: the word σῶμα is never employed in Paul’s letters to denote a ‘reality’ or ‘substance.’”⁸²

Second, as we have seen, many translations and commentators insert an ellipsed⁸³ ἐστίν (“is” or “belongs to”) into Col 2:17b. The ellipsed ἐστίν is grammatically sustainable, but it is not the only option unless we want to fit this text into Platonic vernacular. The phrase σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, literally, “body of Christ,” is translated in other places without a supplemental verb. Romans 7:4 reads “you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ (σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ).” 1 Corinthians 10:16 says “Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ (σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)?” Again in 1 Cor 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ (σῶμα Χριστοῦ)” (RSV). Likewise, Eph 4:12 reads “building up of the body of Christ (σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ).” Notice how other texts with σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ would be perplexing if the verb *is* or *belongs to* were added, so why is this nonexistent verb positioned in this common NT phrase? Is “the body of Christ” in Col 2:17 an exception?⁸⁴ The

80. NKJV, NLT, ASV, Modern English Version.

81. Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” 229–30. BDAG, “σῶμα,” lists no other sources that translate σῶμα as a substantive reality in addition to Col 2:17.

82. Ibid.

83. BDF (p. 253) defines ellipsis: “Ellipsis in the broad sense applies to any idea which is not fully expressed grammatically and leaves it to the hearer or reader to supply the omission because it is self-evident.” Galatians 3:5 will serve as an example of ellipsis. ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως “So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” The verb “provides” (ἐπιχορηγῶν) is present at the outset of the verse but “do it,” that is, “provide,” is absent from the Greek in the second half. Thus, by understanding ἐπιχορηγῶν as an ellipsis, the verse makes logical sense, or else it would read “So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?”

84. Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” 230.

translation of σῶμα as “substance” or “reality,” as well as the assumed and inserted verb *is* or *belongs to* to portray an antithesis of shadow and body (yielding a Platonic view), is only notional.⁸⁵ It is not, however, an accurate interpretive option for understanding the verse.

I have demonstrated that σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ is not to be rendered “the substance [reality] is of Christ”; rather, it should be understood, as it is everywhere else, as “the body of Christ.” The “body of Christ” is equivocal. I argue that it should be understood as the corporate body of Messiah. The use of σῶμα in the context of Colossians permits this reading.⁸⁶

Son understands σκιά in the sense of a “type” that points forward to a future reality. He renders the conjunction δὲ as “namely” and translates σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “the body of Christ.”⁸⁷ This allows for the following translation of Col 2:17: “which are a shadow of what is to come; namely, the body of Christ.”⁸⁸ Son provides a wonderful translation of the text, one that is quite literal and lacks translator bias along with textual issues. While Son’s translation is sustainable, it may be unsatisfactory for some readers because it does not seem to solve the complexity of this text. Additionally, his interpretation of “the body of Christ” leaves much ambiguity. Consequently, another endeavor should be considered.

As mentioned above, most translators and commentators supply an ellipsed ἔστιν into Col 2:17b. Troy Martin argues that Col 2:16–17 should be understood as a complete sentence. He forcefully asserts that τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“but the body of Christ”) is an independent clause and consequently cannot be associated with the unequal relative clause ἃ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων (“which are a shadow of what is to come”) because δὲ is a coordinating conjunction and when used to link clauses it only links clauses that are equivalent.⁸⁹ Martin

85. Ibid., 233. See also Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 341, who observe, “The possibility exists that in v 17 the words ‘shadow’ and ‘body’ are not placed opposite each other as contrasting concepts. Even the particle *de* used here does not necessarily need to indicate a contrast.”

86. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 341, discern that “*sōma* (body) is used repeatedly in Col to designate the Church as the body of the Messiah (1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).” See also Sumney, *Colossians*, 152–53.

87. Δὲ is a flexible conjunction, see BDAG, “δὲ,” (1) a marker connecting a series of closely related data or lines of narrative, *and, as for*; (2) a marker linking narrative segments, *now, then, and, so, that is*; (3) a marker with an additive relation, with possible suggestion of contrast, *at the same time*; (4) marker of contrast, *but, on the other hand*; (5) marker of heightened emphasis, *but also*.

Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” 237. Son interprets “the body of Christ” to be the individual body of the Messiah crucified on the Cross, but he does not preclude the corporate body of believers as an interpretive option.

88. Ibid.

89. BDF (p. 225) observes that coordinating conjunctions are “those which connect elements in the sentence structure which are on a par with each other.”

proposes that τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“but the body of Christ”) be connected with the independent clause at the beginning of Col 2:16, μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω (“Therefore no one is to act as your judge”). This resolution makes grammatical sense.⁹⁰

Martin and Weiss also advise that, if we are going to elide a verb, it should not be ἔστιν; rather, the elliptical verb should be κρινέτω (“judge”) in 2:16.⁹¹ By connecting the independent clause μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω (“Let no one judge you”) with τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“but the body of Christ”), an antithesis is created. “The antithesis is formed by the negative adverb μὴ in the first member and the adversative conjunction δὲ in the second. . . . The verb κρινέτω determines the action that is forbidden by the first member and then enjoined by the second member of this antithesis.”⁹² Additionally, in this antithesis, the subject of the verb is also adjusted. Influenced by Smyth,⁹³ Martin notes, “In the first member of this antithesis, the subject of κρινέτω is specified as *no one* (μὴ τις). When a restrictive reference such as *μηδείς* or *μὴ τις* occurs in the first member of an antithesis, the following member takes an understood subject such as *everyone* (πᾶς) or *each* (ἕκαστος) that includes all persons excluded by the first subject.”⁹⁴ As an example of this method, Martin provides 1 Cor 10:24, which reads, μηδείς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ζητεῖτω ἀλλὰ τὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου (“Let no one seek his own good/benefit, but that of his neighbor”). The verb ζητεῖτω (“seek”) is elided and the subject of the verb is changed from “no one” to an implied “everyone”: “Let no one seek her or his own benefit, but *let everyone* seek the benefit of another.”⁹⁵ This same linguistic strategy can be applied to Col 2:16–17.

Martin also mentions that “The prohibition in the first clause of the antithesis in Col 2:16 indicates that the nuance of κρινέτω is negative. . . . However, the action enjoined by the second clause requires a positive nuance.”⁹⁶ Thus, the first use of κρινέτω will serve as a negative while the elliptical κρινέτω will serve as a positive. Although it is not a verse with an elided verb, the double meaning of the verb is manifested in Rom 14:13, “Therefore let us not judge one

90. Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17),” 250–52; Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 135.

91. Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17);” idem, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 118–19; Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 135.

92. Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17),” 253.

93. Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 676.

94. Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col 2:17),” 254.

95. Ibid., 252; See also BDF 253.

96. Ibid. See, especially, Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, 676, “From a preceding word its opposite must often be supplied, especially an affirmative after a negative.”

another anymore, but rather determine this.”⁹⁷ Dunn observes, “The wordplay on κρίνειν is obvious, and we should have no qualms in translating the verb differently here. The word κρίνειν clearly has a range of meaning that no single English equivalent matches.”⁹⁸

We will now take the linguistic points above to assemble an alternative reading of Col 2:16–17: “Therefore no one is to judge you regarding food or drink or in respect to a festival, or a new moon, or Sabbaths, things which are a shadow of what is to come; but [let everyone consider] the body of Christ.” This is greatly influenced by Troy Martin’s rendering, but not as verbose.⁹⁹ This translation escapes the problem of syntax that overlooks the common New Testament phrase “the body of Christ.” The contrast displayed by δὲ (“but”) is not between shadow and body; rather, it is between who should judge and what should be judged.¹⁰⁰ Paul is not writing to the Colossians to exhort them not to let legalistic torah-observant Jews condemn them for their erroneous observance or lack of observance altogether. Rather, Paul is writing to encourage the Colossians in their praxis, by equating their praxis with a “shadow of things to come” and not to let others judge the Colossians’ participation in these practices. It is the corporate body of Christ, and its practices are to be judged and considered by the critics so that those critics might also be persuaded to join this Messianic movement and share in the hope and inheritance.

Conclusion

Colossians 2:16–17 is habitually interpreted to validate the termination of the torah, namely the Jewish time-keeping calendar and the dietary instructions. However, when Paul is recognized as a Messianic Pharisee who did not break fidelity with the torah and biased translations of Col 2:16–17 are scrutinized,

97. *Judge*: BDAG, “κρίνω,” (2.b) “pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn.” Used in the same way in Col 2:16. *Determine*: BDAG, “κρίνω,” (3) “to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, judge, think, consider, consider, look upon.”

98. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 817. See also BDAG, “κρίνω,” (2.b.) “a play on words w. κρίνειν used in two different mngs. in the same vs.”

99. *Pace* Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:17),” 254, who renders Col 2:16–17 as follows: “Therefore do not let anyone critique you by *your* eating and drinking or by *your* participation in a feast, new moon, or Sabbaths, which things are a shadow of future realities, but *let everyone discern* the body of Christ *by your eating and drinking or by your participation in a feast, new moon, or Sabbaths, which things are a shadow of future realities.*” Martin’s rendering of the text has been recognized as grammatically plausible. See Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 135; Son, “τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Colossians 2:17,” 232 (“From the grammatical and syntactical point of view, this construction may be possible”); Sumney, *Colossians*, 152 n. 33; McKnight, *Colossians*, 271 n. 211.

100. Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 135.

this view is challenged. Numerous texts portray the early believers in the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile, involved in the Jewish calendar. The critics likely hold a Cynic philosophy and operate outside Judaism. The textual difficulties and biases associated with Col 2:16–17 sanction a search for fresh translation options. Analysis of the sources surveyed leads to a post-supersessionist interpretation and conclusion, where σκιά is understood favorably and a Platonic juxtaposition between σκιά and σῶμα is absent. The addressees of the epistle function within a Messianic subset of Judaism where Gentiles are included through allegiance to the Messiah. It is the Jewish time-keeping calendar, which their religious lives are organized around, and indulgence of the festive food and drink on the holy days for which they are criticized. Paul wrote to encourage the Colossians that no one should condemn them for eating and drinking, especially on Sabbaths and festivals, “which are a shadow of things to come.” Paul wanted everyone (including the critics) to consider the corporate body of Christ not as a group to be condemned but as a group that they could join. Consequently, this text should no longer be utilized in Christian denigrations of the Jewish calendar. The removal of this important arrow from the supersessionist quiver encourages us to place Paul (and the early followers of Messiah) within Judaism, creating the need to reexamine other New Testament passages from a post-supersessionist perspective, sequentially yielding readings that do not disparage Judaism.¹⁰¹

101. For the history of this perspective, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 127–63. Even N. T. Wright, who is outside the field of post-supersessionism, offers this suggestive remark in his recent work: “This so-called ‘post-supersessionist’ position, however, is itself well on the way to becoming a new ‘consensus’” (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1445).