

Hope of Israel Ministries (Ecclesia of YEHOVAH):
What, *Exactly*, Was Nailed to the Tree in Colossians 2:14?

"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" (Colossians 2:14 KJV).

Dr. Daniel Botkin (Edited By John D. Keyser)

What was nailed to the Tree? *Cheirographon*, that's what. It might be Greek to you, but it's a Greek word you should know if you want to understand what was nailed to the Tree in Colossians 2:14.

Many Christians erroneously believe that "the handwriting of ordinances" (*cheirographon tois dogmasin*) in Colossians 2:14 refers to the Old Testament Law of Moses. According to this misinterpretation, YEHOVAH's Law was "against us" and "contrary to us" because it was a heavy yoke of bondage. It was an impediment, a hindrance to man's attempt to be reconciled to YEHOVAH God. Therefore YEHOVAH had to "take it out of the way" and get rid of it. He did this by nailing it to the Tree. In other words, we are reconciled to YEHOVAH God by the Messiah's abolition of His Father's Law. So says this popular *misinterpretation* of Colossians 2:14.

This view is *flawed* for a few different reasons. First, it contradicts the Biblical truth that YEHOVAH's Law, properly understood, is neither "against us" nor "contrary to us." According to the Bible, YEHOVAH's unadulterated Law is a blessing -- not a burden. (See, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:5-9, Psalm 19, Psalm 119, Romans 7:22, 1 Timothy 1:8, and many other passages.)

A second reason this view is flawed is because it portrays the Messiah as a slick lawyer who finds a legal loophole to thwart YEHOVAH's justice. The Messiah gets us off the hook by simply abolishing the commandments that we broke. "You've been accused of breaking the Sabbath? No problem. I'll just abolish that commandment." But the Messiah said we are to *not even think* that he came to abolish the Law. (See Matthew 5:17-19.)

A third reason this view is flawed is because of the meaning of that long word *cheirographon*. A study of this word will reveal exactly what it was that got nailed to the Tree in Colossians 2:14. When you see what really got nailed to the Tree, you will find it far more liberating than believing that the Messiah blotted out his Father's commandments. The Greek word *cheirographon* is a compound word that is formed by combining the two words *cheir* ("hand") and *grapho* ("to write or engrave"). In its simplest sense, the word means a hand-written document.

Other than in Colossians 2:14, the word *cheirographon* appears nowhere else in the Greek New Testament, nor does it appear anywhere in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, the word does appear in extra-Biblical Greek documents. It is in these documents that we learn that ***cheirographon* is a legal term**. It is a word that was used to refer to the written evidence of a person's guilt in a courtroom. It is the written record of a person's crimes -- the laws he has broken and the penalty he owes for his law-breaking. In ancient times the accuser would present the *cheirographon* from the middle of the courtroom, called *tou mesou*, "the middle" -- the exact same term Paul uses when he says the *cheirographon* is taken "out of the way [*tou mesou*]."

Because *cheirographon* and *tou mesou* are legal terms, **you must think of *cheirographon* in a legal context** to understand its meaning and to appreciate the significance of Paul's statement in Colossians 2:14. You must picture yourself in the context of the Heavenly Courtroom. YEHOVAH God is the presiding Judge. You have been arrested and brought into the Courtroom of YEHOVAH God. You stand accused of breaking YEHOVAH's laws.

In YEHOVAH's Courtroom, there is a prosecuting attorney: Satan, the Adversary -- the Accuser of the brethren. In his hands the Adversary holds a *cheirographon*, a legal written document. It is a written record of every sin you have ever committed. It is a detailed account of every time you broke YEHOVAH's law. The *cheirographon* lists the dates, the times, the locations, the testimony of witnesses, and all the other details of your law-breaking. The information on this written document is not based on hearsay or unfounded suspicions. It is recognized by the Court as a legal and legitimate document. The Adversary holds in his hands the indisputable proof of your guilt, along with the penalties that the Court prescribes for such crimes, and he presents the *cheirographon* to the Judge.

Fortunately, you have an Advocate with you in the Courtroom of YEHOVAH God. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Your Advocate does not deny the truth of the charges brought against you. Your Advocate admits that the information on the *cheirographon* is true. You have indeed committed all these crimes, and you do indeed deserve the penalty which is prescribed on the *cheirographon*. However, your Advocate says, the penalty for all your crimes *has already been fully paid*. Your Advocate paid the penalty himself when he went to the Tree and took upon himself the sins of the world and bore the punishment for your sins.

Because the penalty has already been fully paid, the Judge tells Satan that his *cheirographon* is **inadmissible evidence in the Heavenly Courtroom**. Therefore the *cheirographon* that was against us, which was contrary to us, is taken out of the way. It is removed from *tou mesou* -- the middle of the Courtroom occupied by the Accuser. Then it is nailed to the Tree like a banner, proclaiming the Messiah's triumph over sin on our behalf. By paying the penalty for our sins, Yeshua spoiled the Adversary's plans to condemn us with the *cheirographon*. That is why the very next verse says "And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

This removal of the *cheirographon* is something entirely different from the *erroneous assumption* that YEHOVAH's Law got nailed to the Tree. The word "law" (Greek, *nomos*) does not even appear anywhere in the entire Book of Colossians, neither in the Greek text nor in the KJV translation. Of course YEHOVAH's commandments are alluded to in conjunction with the *cheirographon* (*tois dogmasin*, "of ordinances"), because in order to accuse us, the Adversary obviously has to list *which* commandments ("ordinances") we broke. But it is not the commandments of the Law which are removed. Rather, *it is the written record of our lawbreaking that is removed from the Courtroom*.

This understanding of the *cheirographon* as the legal record of a person's sins can be seen not only in Gentile Greek literature, but in Jewish Greek literature as well. The Greek text of the apocryphal book *The Apocalypse of Elijah* describes an angel holding a book. The book is called a *cheirographon*, and it contains the record of sins. The traditional Jewish *Avinu Malkenu* prayer likewise paints a similar picture. This prayer is in Hebrew, so it obviously cannot use the Greek word *cheirographon*. However, it describes a scenario similar to Colossians 2:14 when it asks YEHOVAH God to "erase all the documents that accuse us."

YEHOVAH God does more than erase all the documents that accuse us. If YEHOVAH merely *erased* the record of our sins, the Adversary could point to the smudged *cheirographon* and say that someone tampered with the evidence. So YEHOVAH God does something even better than just erasing the record of our sins. YEHOVAH takes the *cheirographon* and REMOVES IT FROM THE COURTROOM, leaving the Accuser empty-handed, with absolutely no evidence to condemn us -- and with no power to punish us. The *cheirographon* is nailed to the Tree like a banner to declare our victory. Thus the instrument that Satan intended for evil YEHOVAH God uses for good.

YEHOVAH God nailed the *cheirographon* to the Tree (verse 14) and thereby spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly and triumphing over them (verse 15). But what about verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days"? Does the removal of the *cheirographon* mean that we can now be gluttons and drunkards and Sabbath-breakers? Does the fact that the Messiah paid the penalty for our law-breaking mean that it is okay for us to return to a life of lawbreaking?

The Apostle Paul is not saying that YEHOVAH's dietary laws and holy days are unimportant. The context of these verses is in regards to the imposing of *man-made* rules and regulations. Six times the words *man* or *men* appear in Colossians chapter 2: "And this I say, lest any **man** should beguile you" (vs. 4); "Beware lest any **man** spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of **men**" (vs. 8); "Let no **man** therefore judge you" (vs. 16); "Let no **man** beguile you" (vs. 18); "why...are ye subject to ordinances (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of **men**?" (vs. 20-22).

The Sabbath and dietary laws of the Bible are not commandments of *men* -- THEY ARE COMMANDMENTS OF YEHOVAH GOD! Paul is not telling us we can disregard the commandments of YEHOVAH God; he is telling us we can disregard the commandments of *men* -- men who would impose heavy burdens upon YEHOVAH's people, burdens that YEHOVAH God did not command, burdens that turn Sabbath-keeping into a burden instead of a blessing. Some teachers in Colosse were doing this, just like some Pharisees did. "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4).

The Orthodox Judaism of today evolved from the Judaism of the Pharisees, and it still retains some of the leaven of the Pharisees. Like the Pharisees of old, modern-day rabbis expect Jews to abide by hundreds of rabbinical rulings that prescribe exactly how to keep the Sabbath and all the rest of the Torah. The rabbis prescribe how to keep the Sabbath *in such great detail that a person never has to be led by the spirit*; theoretically he will never find himself in a situation where he has to hear from YEHOVAH God and make his own decision about how to obey the Torah. The rabbis have already prescribed every detail. They even have man-made laws that govern bug-killing on the Sabbath. They tell Jews which kinds of bugs can be killed and under which circumstances these bugs can be killed. If you happen to kill the wrong kind of bug, or you kill the right kind of bug under circumstances that the rabbis have not authorized, then you have violated the Sabbath according to their view. This is just one of many examples of doctrines and commandments of men that put YEHOVAH's people in bondage.

YEHOVAH's unadulterated Law does not put people in bondage; it liberates. "So shall I **keep Thy law** continually forever and ever. And I will **walk at liberty**" (Psalm 119:44f). YEHOVAH God wants us to keep His commandments, but we can disregard man-made commandments that *men* have added to YEHOVAH's commandments. Adding to the commandments of YEHOVAH God -- as the rabbis do and as the Pharisees did and as some teachers at Colosse did --

perverts the Law and turns it into "a yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). In contrast to this man-imposed yoke, Yeshua says, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29f).

Yeshua does not say that the yoke of Torah is nailed to the Tree and abolished. He only says that his teaching of Torah is light compared to that of the Pharisees, who taught a Torah **weighed down with additional, excessive, man-made demands**. Then immediately after Yeshua's statement about his light yoke, the very next verse begins a story that demonstrates the contrast between the Pharisees' yoke and Yeshua's yoke. The Pharisees' interpretation of Torah would condemn the hungry disciples for plucking and eating a bit of grain as they walked through a field on the Sabbath. Yeshua's yoke would permit the hungry disciples to do what they did in those circumstances, just as David and his hungry men were permitted to eat the priests' showbread in their unusual circumstances.

As a Jewish grandmother once remarked about the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath, "You mean these were *hungry Jewish* boys with *no place to eat* on Shabbat? Why didn't those Pharisees invite them to dinner instead of scolding them?"

The *cheirographon*, THE RECORD OF OUR LAW-BREAKING, has been taken out of the Courtroom and nailed to the Tree because Yeshua paid the penalty for our law-breaking. But this does not give us a right to return to a life of law-breaking. As Yeshua said to the woman taken in adultery, so he says to us: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and **SIN NO MORE**" (John 8:11).

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