

## Colossians in One and a Half Lessons – Part A

(Overview of Paul's Letter to the Colossians)

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### I. Background for This Lesson

- a. In the course of studying the Law of Moses, and especially in **Leviticus**, we have referred many times to passages in **Colossians 2** to explain how:
  - i. On the one hand, the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross and canceled with the death of Jesus.
  - ii. On the other hand, the Law of Moses foreshadowed many things that have now been fully realized, through Jesus.
  - iii. Therefore, while we are no longer bound to follow the Law of Moses, it is still worthwhile for Christians to study it. This can give us insights regarding things that have now been fulfilled, which in the Law were in the form of shadows.
    1. Through this, we can get a deeper understanding of what God is calling us to today.
- b. **Colossians** and **Philemon** are two of four letters of Paul that are often referred to as his “prison epistles”.
  - i. In all four, somewhere in the letter Paul says he is in chains, or in prison.
  - ii. The four letters are: **Colossians**, **Philemon**, **Ephesians**, and **Philippians**.
  - iii. The most common ‘traditional’ explanation is that Paul wrote all four letters around the same time, during his first (roughly 2-year) imprisonment in Rome. That occurs at the end of **Acts 28**, and if that is the case, would be roughly 60-62 AD.
    1. However, it is hard to be 100% sure about that. Paul also was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years before he went to Rome and apparently was in prison other times during his ministry.
    2. “Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, *in prisons more frequently*, in deaths often.” (**2 Corinthians 11:23**, NKJV)

3. "If, in the manner of men, I have *fought with beasts at Ephesus*, what advantage is it to me? ..." (**1 Corinthians 15:32**, NKJV)

c. About Colosse

- i. Colosse was an ancient city in the Roman province of Asia, in what is now western Turkey. Today this region is sometimes referred to as 'Asia Minor'.
- ii. Ephesus, a port city on the coast, was the most influential city in that province. Paul had spent time in Ephesus, teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years, "so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (**Acts 19:8-10**).
- iii. The city of Colosse was inland in a river valley and on a major east-west highway route, about 10-15 miles (15-25 km) from Laodicea.
  1. Within Paul's letter to the **Colossians**, Paul also mentions the church in Laodicea. It appears that there were connections between these two churches; they were encouraged to exchange their respective letters from Paul.
  2. Laodicea was one of the 'seven churches of Asia' in **Revelation 2-3**. This was to become a church referred to as wealthy and "lukewarm".

d. About the church in Colosse

- i. Paul's letter to **Philemon** was addressed to a member of the church in Colosse.
  1. Due to the obvious overlap between these two letters, I think it is a great idea to study **Philemon** and **Colossians** together.
  2. See Pike, Chuck, *Philemon in One Lesson*, November 29, 2021, [www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/new-testament/philemon](http://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/new-testament/philemon).
- ii. Paul mentions that the church had been taught by Epaphras, who apparently had become a fellow prisoner with Paul (**Colossians 1:7, 4:12, Philemon 23**).
- iii. Apparently, Paul knew a lot about the church in Colosse from Epaphras and others. There is no indication that at the time of writing these letters, that Paul had ever visited that church.
- iv. The church at that time was meeting in homes.

- v. The church included free men and women, slaveholders as well as slaves (similar to other cultures throughout the ancient world).
- vi. It appears that most of the church members were from Gentile backgrounds, based on Paul's statement:
  - 1. "... the mystery [*of the gospel which Paul preached*] which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them, God willed to make known what are *the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" (**Colossians 1:26-27**, NKJV)
- vii. Paul says he is sending the letter to the Colossians along with Tychicus and Onesimus. He identifies Onesimus as "a faithful and beloved brother, who is now one of you".

## II. Why Did Paul Write this Letter?

- a. Roughly, the basic structure of this letter is as follows:
  - i. The letter begins with a greeting and thanksgiving. (**Colossians 1:1-1:14**)
  - ii. Paul then discusses the nature and the role of the Son of God. (**Colossians 1:15-1:23**)
    - 1. His divine nature.
    - 2. His role in the creation of all things.
    - 3. His role in reconciling us to God.
  - iii. Paul talks about his own concern and struggles on behalf of the Christians in Colosse and elsewhere. (**Colossians 1:24-2:3**)
  - iv. Paul warns about false teaching and then makes his case that Christ has fulfilled the things of the Law. The Law of Moses was taken away and nailed to the cross, so we are no longer bound by it. (**Colossians 2:4-2:15**)
  - v. Based on the case just made by Paul, he then draws several conclusions. (**Colossians 2:16-4:1**)
    - 1. These conclusions are often introduced by words like "So, ABC..." or "Therefore, DEF...".
    - 2. The first two applications are related to specific false teachings that are threatening the church in Colosse.

- a. These two issues are ones that most churches today *do not* struggle with.
- 3. The rest of the applications that follow those first two are things that are more general in nature and actually can be extremely useful for us.
- vi. The letter closes with general admonitions, a number of greetings, and closing instructions. (**Colossians 4:2-4:18**)
- b. Something I found especially significant in Paul's introductory greeting in this letter.
  - i. "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us *from the power of darkness* and *conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son* of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (**Colossians 1:12-14**, NKJV)
  - ii. This statement suggests that 'the kingdom of God' was already present when Paul was writing his letter. Therefore, this passage has been used by many to support the idea that the kingdom of God is equivalent to the church. This understanding typically assumes that the kingdom 'came' on the Day of Pentecost, at the founding of the church. HOWEVER...
    - 1. While the church is one significant part or aspect of the kingdom of God, there is more to it than that.
    - 2. Also, not all Scriptural references to 'the coming of the kingdom' refer to what happened on the Day of Pentecost.
      - a. For more on this, see lesson and notes from the message dated 12/5/2021, on "*The Kingdom of God and the Church*", [www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/topical-lessons/lessons/the-kingdom-and-the-church](http://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/topical-lessons/lessons/the-kingdom-and-the-church).
- c. Paul's drive to write this letter: out of great concern, to warn the Christians in Colosse regarding heretical teachings that were coming into the church.
  - i. "Now this I say lest anyone should *deceive you with persuasive words*." (**Colossians 2:4**, NKJV)
  - ii. "*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*" (**Colossians 2:8**, NKJV)

- iii. For the primary concerns of Paul and the case he makes in response, read **Colossians 2:8-23**.
- iv. He alludes to the problems related to false teaching that he is concerned about (two different or perhaps inter-related problems).
  - 1. First problem: Some are advocating that the Christians follow portions of the Law of Moses.
    - a. “So let no one judge you in *food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths*,” (**Colossians 2:16**, NKJV)
    - b. The reference to “a festival, a new moon or sabbaths” is a reference to the responsibilities of the Levites related to the temple worship of the Jews.
    - c. Read **1 Chronicles 23:24-32**.
      - i. The temple worship system responsibilities included making offerings to the Lord on the:
        - 1. Sabbaths,
        - 2. New moons, and
        - 3. Feasts.
      - ii. In the Greek of the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX), the same three terms are used that Paul also uses in **Colossians 2:16**.
    - d. Note that circumcision is mentioned in **Colossians 2:11-13**.
    - e. Since the Law of Moses and the temple sacrificial system are in view here, the references to “food and drink” in **Colossians 2:16** presumably refer to Levitical Law requirements related to food and drink.
      - 1. This might refer to the rules regarding clean and unclean foods in **Leviticus 11**.
      - 2. Perhaps it refers to the special food that was eaten by the priests, associated with the temple sacrifices.
      - 3. Or, perhaps it refers to both of the above.

- ii. Therefore, it appears that the Colossian Christians, who had started with a good spiritual foundation, were in danger of being influenced by teachers who wanted to pull them back into following practices associated with the Law of Moses.
- 2. Second problem: Apparently, some were advocating *the worship of angels*.
  - a. “Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and *worship of angels*, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,” (**Colossians 2:18**, NKJV)
    - i. We are not to worship angels. Recall that in **Revelation 22**, when John fell down at the feet of an angel, that angel replied, “Don’t do that! ...Worship God.” (**Revelation 22:8-9**)
    - ii. Apparently, some people were infiltrating the church and advocating *worshiping angels* and other strange religious practices.
      - 1. Some think this was referring to practices that came from some Jewish-influenced sect.
      - 2. Others think this reference to worshiping angels referred to a local pagan practice that was seeping into the church.
      - 3. I don’t know which one is right. Regardless, it was a heretical teaching that had no place in a Christian church.
  - b. Early Christian writer Tertullian (from Carthage, North Africa), writing c. 197 AD, listed heresies that traced back to the times of the apostles. These were heresies that the apostles themselves had condemned.
    - i. “CHAPTER 33. — PRESENT HERESIES (SEEDLINGS OF THE TARES NOTED BY THE SACRED WRITERS) ALREADY CONDEMNED IN SCRIPTURE. THIS DESCENT OF LATER HERESY FROM THE EARLIER TRACED IN SEVERAL INSTANCES

- ii. “Besides all this, I add a review of the doctrines themselves, which, existing as they did in the days of the apostles, were both exposed and denounced by the said apostles. For by this method they will be more easily reprobated, when they are detected to have been even then in existence, or at any rate to have been seedlings of the (tares) which then were.
- iii. “...The doctrine, however, of Simon’s sorcery, [see **Acts 8**] which inculcated the worship of angels, was itself actually reckoned amongst idolatries and condemned by the Apostle Peter in Simon’s own person.”
  - 1. (Source: Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, chapter 33; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 258-259)
  - 2. Tertullian here asserted that during the time of the apostles, Simon the Sorcerer had introduced the heretical practice of worshiping angels.
- c. In his work *Against Marcion*, Tertullian discussed Paul’s letter to the **Colossians**. He said that some people in Colosse had claimed to receive visions of angels who had told them not to eat certain meats.
  - i. “Now tell me, Marcion, what is your opinion of the apostle’s language, when he says, ‘Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath, which is a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ.’? [**Colossians 2:16-17**]
  - ii. “We do not now treat of the law, further than (to remark) that the apostle here teaches clearly how it has been abolished, even by passing from shadow to substance—that is, from figurative types to the reality, which is Christ. The shadow, therefore, is His to whom belongs the body also; in other words, the law is His, and so is Christ. If you separate the law and Christ, assigning one to one god and the other to another, it is the same as if you were to attempt to separate the shadow from the body of which it is the shadow.

Manifestly Christ has relation to the law, if the body has to its shadow.

- iii. “But when he blames those who alleged visions of angels as their authority for saying that men must abstain from meats—‘you must not touch, you must not taste’—in a voluntary humility, (at the same time) ‘vainly puffed up in the fleshly mind, and not holding the Head,’ [**Colossians 2:18-21**] (the apostle) does not in these terms attack the law or Moses, as if it was at the suggestion of superstitious angels that he had enacted his prohibition of sundry aliments. For Moses had evidently received the law from God.
- iv. “When, therefore, he speaks of their ‘following the commandments and doctrines of men,’ [**Colossians 2:22**] he refers to the conduct of those persons who were ‘not holding to the Head,’ even Him in whom all things are gathered together; for they are all recalled to Christ, and concentrated in Him as their initiating principle—even the meats and drinks which were indifferent in their nature.
- v. “All the rest of his precepts, as we have shown sufficiently, when treating of them as they occurred in another epistle, emanated from the Creator, who, while predicting that ‘old things were to pass away,’ and that He would ‘make all things new,’ [**Isaiah 43:18-19, Isaiah 65:17, 2 Corinthians 5:17**] commanded men ‘to break up fresh ground for themselves,’ [**Jeremiah 4:3**] and thereby taught them even then to put off the old man and put on the new.
- vi. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 5, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 471-472)
- d. Paul’s statement here in **Colossians**, combined with what Tertullian writes regarding this, calls to mind what Paul wrote in the beginning of **Galatians**:
  - i. “But even if we *or an angel from heaven* should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we



have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"

(**Galatians 1:8-9**, NIV)

- ii. Perhaps the phrase in **Galatians 1:8**, "even if ...an *angel from heaven* should ..." was not just a rhetorical flourish.

- 1. **Open Question:** Is it possible that some in the church were claiming that *angels* had spoken with them in ways that contradicted the gospel message originally handed down by the apostles?

- e. Clearly, we are not to worship angels nor let them lead us astray! At the same time, angels play a prominent role throughout Scripture - perhaps contributing to the reasons some apparently were taking this veneration too far.

- i. For more about the role of angels, see Pike, Chuck, *On the Angels*, December 19, 2021, <https://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/foundations/lessons/angels>.

### III. Paul Builds His Case

- a. Read **Colossians 1:13-23**.

- i. Points made by Paul regarding Jesus that pertain to the reason he wrote the letter.
  - 1. Christ has brought us into His kingdom.
  - 2. He is the image of the invisible God (establishing the divinity of Christ).
  - 3. By Him all things were created.
    - a. That includes the *invisible* things.
    - b. That includes thrones, principalities, and powers (in the spiritual realm). That would include all of the angels.
  - 4. Note that the **Hebrews** writer makes very similar points in **Hebrews 1-2**.
    - a. Christ is greater than the angels.

- b. "Let all the angels of God worship Him" (**Hebrews 1:6**, likely pointing back to **Deuteronomy 32:43** in the LXX)
  - c. God (the Father) said to His Son (but never to the angels), "Sit at my right hand...." (**Hebrews 1:13, Psalm 110:1**)
  - d. The angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who will inherit salvation (to us). (**Hebrews 1:14**)
  - e. Jesus, although the Son of God and above the angels, "was made a little lower than the angels". In other words, He was made human just like us. (**Hebrews 2:5-9, Psalm 8:5-7**)
- 5. The divinity of Christ and His relation to the Father
  - a. Best place to start: **Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, and John 1**.
  - b. The nature of the Son of God was described by explaining Him in reference to the Father and to the angels (which the Christians in Colosse presumably already were familiar with, based on their knowledge of the Old Testament).
  - c. Keep in mind that the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek by the Jews about 200 years before the birth of Jesus) was the Bible of the churches in the beginning; even in the churches that were predominantly composed of Gentiles.
    - i. There are direct quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures in **Colossians**. However, many things are referenced which indicate the author assumed his readers were very familiar with the Old Testament.
  - ii. Paul explains Jesus, the Son of God, created all the angels and the invisible powers. He has pre-eminence over all of creation.
    - 1. Therefore, it follows that:
      - a. We worship Him and the Father, not angels (who are created beings). All the fullness of the Father dwells in the Son.

- b. God reconciled all things to Himself through His Son (not through the angels).

- b. Read **Colossians 2:1-15**.

- i. This text contains the core of Paul's argument, the case he is making.
  - 1. Most of the remainder of this letter (what follows this section) consists of "Therefore..." type passages, which develop conclusions and implications that directly result from the points Paul made in **Colossians 2:1-15**.
- ii. Paul is concerned that the Colossians are being led astray by false teaching.
  - 1. He emphasizes the supremacy of Christ. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him.
    - a. Therefore, we do not need to look to angels for wisdom, nor do we need to turn back to the Law of Moses.
  - 2. "Now this I say lest anyone should *deceive you with persuasive words*." (**Colossians 2:4**, NKJV)
  - 3. "Beware lest anyone *cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit*, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (**Colossians 2:8**, NKJV)
- iii. They should not return to the Law of Moses (even though most of them were from Gentile backgrounds). This strikes me as rather similar to the challenges Paul addressed in his letter to the **Galatians**.
  - 1. The Law of Moses, "the handwriting of requirements that was against us", was taken away and nailed to the cross. (**Colossians 2:14**)
  - 2. Through the cross, the spiritual forces of evil were defeated. (**Colossians 2:15**)
  - 3. The Christians in the Colossian church do not need Jewish circumcision. Paul says that they already have been circumcised, by Christ, *in baptism*. (**Colossians 2:11-12**)

#### IV. A Few Thoughts Regarding Baptism

- a. Baptism is *supposed to be* something that unifies all Christians.

- i. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*;" (**Ephesians 4:4-5**, NKJV)
  - ii. Of the six "elementary teachings of the faith", in **Hebrews 6:1-2**, the first three are faith, repentance and *baptism*.
  - iii. However, in the modern Christian world, this is one of the most divisive subjects. Consider how the Christian world is badly fragmented on just these three aspects:
    1. Is infant baptism effective, or does the person need to be old enough to have personal faith at the time of their baptism?
    2. What is the relationship between water baptism and salvation? Are your sins forgiven before or upon baptism?
    3. Mode of baptism: how should it be administered? Are immersion, pouring and sprinkling all appropriate?
- b. My own life experience, regarding baptism.
- i. I was 'baptized' as an infant, in the Roman Catholic church, which my mother belonged to, based on her desire to raise me as a Christian.
    1. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that baptism is for the remission of sins. However, they baptize (unbelieving) infants as well as believing adults.
  - ii. In my late twenties, I returned to faith in Christ and attended a Church of Christ where they taught adult baptism for the remission of sins.
    1. After solidifying my own faith in Christ, I wrestled with questions regarding my own baptism, such as:
      - a. Does one need to have faith in Christ before they are baptized?
      - b. If so, did I need to be 'baptized again' (or perhaps truly for the first time), as an adult?
    2. I studied passages in the New Testament regarding baptism. The ones that impacted me especially, seeing the importance of faith (and repentance) along with baptism included:
      - a. The version of the Great Commission at the end of Mark's gospel: "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who

*believes and is baptized* will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (**Mark 16:15-16**, NKJV)

- i. Notice that Jesus said, “He who *believes and is baptized* will be saved”. He did *NOT* say, “He who is baptized and is saved will believe (later on)”!
- b. From Peter’s speech to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost: “Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’” (**Acts 2:38-39**, NKJV)
- c. The passage in **Colossians 2:12** was especially significant to me, as well.
  - i. Paul told the Colossian Christians that they had been, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (**Colossians 2:12**, NKJV)
    1. According to Paul, baptism was a participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. See also what Paul wrote in **Romans 6:1-11**.
    2. Paul says we were buried with Jesus in baptism and raised through faith.
  - d. Since faith and baptism are tied together here. I concluded that it was important to have faith (as well as to repent, based on what Peter said in **Acts 2:38**) at the time one was baptized, for it to be effective. Therefore, I concluded that my ‘baptism’ as an infant was not a true Biblical baptism that would lead to salvation. As a result, I decided to be baptized as a believing (and repentant) adult.
- c. Later in my spiritual journey, I encountered believers who had been influenced by the Protestant Reformers. Many of the modern Protestants I encountered believed that a believer *should* get baptized. However, they did not see any connection at all between water baptism and one’s salvation.
  - i. The case they made was as follows, typically:

1. They assert, like Martin Luther, that we are saved “by faith alone”.
  2. They pointed to **Ephesians 2:8-9** to say that we are saved “by grace through faith”, not by works.
    - a. They then insist that baptism is a *work*, since it is something that you do.
    - b. Therefore, they reason, *baptism* cannot have anything to do with salvation.
  3. They pointed to Scriptures like **Romans 10:9** that mentioned belief and salvation, but which did not mention baptism.
    - a. “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (**Romans 10:9**, NKJV)
- ii. Discussions with Christians from Protestant backgrounds led me to study this issue more deeply (whether/how water baptism is related to salvation).
1. The only place that “faith alone” is mentioned in the New Testament is in **James 2**.
    - a. “Thus, also *faith by itself*, if it does not have works, is dead.” (**James 2:17**, NKJV)
    - b. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and *not by faith only*.” (**James 2:24**, NKJV)
    - c. James made the point that merely believing in Jesus (without obeying what He taught) is useless. He said, “*even the demons believe*”! (**James 2:19**)
  2. Protestants tended to define ‘faith’ as nothing more than simple belief.
    - a. Rather than turning to a dictionary or commentary, let us look to the Scriptures for a Biblical definition of “saving faith”. **Hebrews 11** defines saving faith by citing dozens of examples from the Old Testament. In that chapter, we learn that the faith that saves includes *three elements*:
      - i. Believing something you can’t (yet) see.

1. "Now faith is the *substance of things hoped for*, the evidence of things not seen." (**Hebrews 11:1**, NKJV)
- ii. Obedient action in response to a command of God.
  1. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, *prepared an ark* for the saving of his household ..." (**Hebrews 11:7**, NKJV)
  2. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he *went out*, not knowing where he was going." (**Hebrews 11:8**, NKJV)
  3. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, *offered up Isaac* ..." (**Hebrews 11:17**, NKJV)
  4. "By faith they [the Israelites] *passed through the Red Sea* as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned." (**Hebrews 11:29**, NKJV)
  5. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days." (**Hebrews 11:30**, NKJV)
- iii. Persevering to the end.
  1. "By faith he [Moses] *forsook Egypt*, not fearing the wrath of the king; *for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible*." (**Hebrews 11:27**, NKJV)
3. *Repentance also* is required for salvation, but it is not mentioned in passages like **Romans 10:9**.
  - a. No single passage of Scripture outlines *everything* necessary for salvation (including belief, repentance, baptism and perseverance to the end).

- i. In many cases, only one (**1 Peter 3:19-21, Luke 13:2-5**), or perhaps two (**Mark 16:15, Acts 2:38**) of the key elements are mentioned.
- 4. We should look in books where non-Christians are being converted (such as **Acts**), *rather than* letters written to people who are already Christians (for example, **Romans**) to learn how to become a Christian.
- 5. If trying to use Paul to make the case (based on taking some of his statements out of context) that baptism is not necessary, consider what Paul relates regarding *his own conversion*.
  - a. We have more information about Paul's conversion than any other conversion in the New Testament. It is recorded three places in the **Book of Acts**; in **Acts 9**, then recounted in **Acts 22** and **Acts 26**.
  - b. After having a life-changing encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and after praying and fasting for three days, Ananias told Paul:
  - c. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (**Acts 22:16**, NKJV)
- d. Still later, I encountered conservative Anabaptists. They seemed to be 'all over the map' regarding baptism. Some saw it important for salvation, while others just considered it something you do to become a member of a church. Likewise, they varied regarding mode of baptism (immersion vs. pouring vs. sprinkling).
  - i. Unlike many Protestants, conservative Anabaptists tend to hold to the idea that we actually need to *obey* the teachings of Jesus to be saved.
  - ii. In researching early Anabaptist teaching on baptism, I noticed that several prominent early Anabaptist leaders closely associated water baptism with "the new birth".
  - iii. Quotes from early Anabaptists regarding the significance of baptism:
    - 1. Conrad Grebel (1524): "Baptism is for those who want to better themselves, take on a new life, die to immorality, get buried with Christ and rise out of baptism to newness of life... Baptism is the mark of a new birth, a washing away of sin, and a promise to walk according to Christ."



2. Menno Simons (c. 1542): "We find but one baptism in water that is pleasing to God. This is baptism on confession of faith, commanded by Christ Jesus and practiced by the apostles, a baptism administered and received for the forgiveness and remission of sins."
  3. Jan Geerts (1564): "Baptism is a grave for sin, a gateway into the Lord's commune, a putting on of Christ, a fleeing from the wrath of God, a washing of rebirth, and the seal of a good conscience or assurance toward God."
  4. All three of the quotes immediately above, and other similar ones, can be found in: Hoover, Peter, *The Secret of the Strength: What Would Anabaptists Tell This Generation*, chapter 11 - On to Baptism, pp. 94-117; Benchmark Press (1998)
  5. More information on early Anabaptist views regarding baptism also can be found in: Armour, Rollin Stely, *Anabaptist Baptism, A Representative Study*, Wipf & Stock Pub. (1998)
- iv. I like to encourage my Anabaptist friends to read the passages on baptism the same way they read the New Testament passages on nonresistance, head covering, separation from the world, roles of men and women, and permanence of marriage.
1. Take what the Scriptures say in their most natural meaning, and just do what it says!
- e. The Bible is the one and only standard regarding doctrinal truth for Christians. When faced with a situation where one or more verses of Scripture might be interpreted in more than one way, I find it helpful to consider the perspective of the early Christian writers.
- i. The goal should be to seek *the original, historic faith as handed down by Jesus and the apostles*, rather than just accepting whatever doctrine my own denomination currently advances.
    1. As Jude admonishes us, we are to "contend earnestly for *the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*" (**Jude 3**, NKJV)
  - ii. Considering the views of the early Christians (especially during the first two centuries after the apostles) offers some advantages over simply consulting modern teachers and commentaries. The advantages that early Christian perspectives can provide include:

1. Early Christian writers were closer to the apostles (in some cases only one or two human links removed).
  2. They were naturally fluent in ancient (Koine) Greek, the language of the New Testament text.
  3. They were not influenced by religious fads and innovations to the original faith that were introduced centuries later.
- iii. If you care to find out how the early Christians viewed baptism, helpful resources include:
1. Bercot, David (ed.), *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, article on 'Baptism'.
  2. Audio lesson: "What the Early Christians Believed about Baptism", by David Bercot. This is available through Scroll Publishing, or accessible online via the Scroll Publishing YouTube channel or The Historic Faith website.
  3. In Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, we find his explanation to the leaders of the Roman government regarding how someone becomes a Christian:
    - a. "I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them.
    - b. "Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.
    - c. "For Christ also said, 'Except you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' (**John 3:3-5**) Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all.

- d. "And how those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins, is declared by Isaiah the prophet, as I wrote above; he thus speaks: 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from your souls; learn to do well; judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow: and come and let us reason together, says the Lord. And though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white like wool; and though they be as crimson, I will make them white as snow. But if you refuse and rebel, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.' (Isaiah 1:16-20)
- e. "And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone.
- f. "For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness. And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed."
  - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 61; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 183)
- f. Jesus said that the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins would go out to the whole world, starting from Jerusalem.
  - i. Jesus pointed to the events that would take place in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.
    - 1. Jesus said, "...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name *to all nations, beginning at*

*Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”*  
**(Luke 24:47–49, NKJV)**

- ii. While the apostles were waiting in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came down upon them powerfully, and Peter preached Jesus as the Christ, the one who would reign on the throne of David over the eternal kingdom.

- 1. In **Acts 2**, we find the conclusion of Peter’s message:
- 2. “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*”  
**(Acts 2:37–39, NKJV)**
- 3. Throughout the rest of **Acts**, we see many stories of conversions where people who come to faith respond as Peter first outlined in **Acts 2:38**.
- 4. Peter had said this promise would apply not only to those in Jerusalem, but to people far off as well, and to their descendants.

g. Consider Some Old Testament Foreshadowings of Baptism

i. The four most prominent ones

- 1. First foreshadowing: The Flood of Noah (**Genesis 6-8**)
  - a. Read **1 Peter 3:19-21**.
  - b. Peter says that the Flood of Noah was a ‘type’, that foreshadowed the ‘antitype’ of Christian baptism.
  - c. A righteous few people were saved through the water.
  - d. Peter says here that baptism “saves us”. However, that fact does not in any way contradict that we are saved by faith (since ‘saving faith’ includes not only belief, but an obedient response as well).
- 2. Second foreshadowing: Israelites Crossing the Red Sea (**Exodus 14**)

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 10:1-5**.
  - b. Paul explains that the story of the exodus journey from Egypt to Canaan provides a figurative map of our own spiritual journey, as Christians.
  - c. Paul said the Israelites, “all were *baptized* into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”. (**1 Corinthians 10:2**, NKJV)
  - d. Considering this ‘map’:
    - i. Physical slavery in Egypt foreshadowed our own spiritual slavery, before we became Christians.
    - ii. The Red Sea crossing foreshadowed baptism
      1. Their ‘baptism’ in “the cloud and the sea” corresponded to our rebirth through “the water and the Spirit” (**John 3:3-5**).
      2. This marks the beginning of the liberating journey.
      3. The people are delivered from slavery, and the forces of the wicked king are destroyed in the water.
    - iii. The 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness, a time of temptation and testing, foreshadowed the Christian life.
    - iv. The Promised Land, Canaan, foreshadowed the inheritance promised to the righteous who remain faithful to the end of their spiritual journey.
3. Third foreshadowing: Naaman Healed from Leprosy (**2 Kings 5**)
- a. Read **2 Kings 5:1** and **5:9-14**. (This book is designated **4 Kingdoms** in Bibles based on the LXX text.)
  - b. In **2 Kings 5:14** in the LXX Greek text it says, “he baptized himself” seven times in the Jordan River.
    - i. This is the same Greek word (βαπτίζω/ baptizo), typically translated “baptize” throughout the Greek New Testament.

- c. Early Christian writer Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (in modern-day France) had as a boy been taught by Polycarp, who in turn had been taught by the apostle John. Writing c. 180 AD, Irenaeus made the following statement regarding baptism:
  - i. “[Scripture] says, ‘And he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan.’ (**2 Kings 5:14**) It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being *baptized*. Rather, this was a symbol for us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord.
  - ii. “We are spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, just as the Lord has declared: ‘Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’” (**John 3:3-5**)
    - 1. (Source: Bercot, D. W, editor, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, article on ‘*Baptism*’, p. 52, Hendrickson Publishers; adapted from Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 574)
    - 2. Note also, the detail that says his skin became *like that of a baby* after he was ‘baptized’. This reminds me of what Jesus said in **John 3:3-5** about being “born again”.
- d. Fourth foreshadowing: Circumcision (**Genesis 17, Joshua 5, Colossians 2**)
  - i. Note that all the examples of Old Testament foreshadowings of baptism discussed thus far prominently feature *water*. Circumcision, unlike the other three, does not!
  - ii. I found an account of an interesting discussion between Balthasar Hubmaier (an early Anabaptist leader) and Huldrych Zwingli (Protestant Reformation leader in Switzerland; his first name is sometimes spelled Ulrich) in the 1520s, regarding baptism. While both rejected

the Roman Catholic sacramental view of baptism, the two men landed in different places regarding infant baptism.

1. For more information on early Anabaptist views on baptism in contrast with those of Zwingli, see Armour, R. S., *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (1998).
2. Zwingli used the passage on baptism from **Colossians 2:11-12** to support his position advocating the baptism of infants.
  - a. There Paul said: "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (**Colossians 2:11-12**, NKJV)
3. Zwingli then reasoned along the following lines:
  - a. Christian baptism was foreshadowed by circumcision (based on what Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:11-12**).
  - b. Circumcision was supposed to be done to infant boys, on the 8th day following their birth (**Genesis 17:14 LXX, Leviticus 12:3**). Through this ritual, the parents were expressing their commitment to raise the child in the Jewish faith.
  - c. Therefore, Zwingli concluded, it was appropriate for Christian parents to baptize their infant children (to express a similar

commitment to raise them in the faith).

iii. Let's take another look at the circumcision/ baptism connection.

1. In the Old Testament, the Lord said that the *real* circumcision He was looking for was the circumcision of the heart.
  - a. "Therefore, *circumcise the foreskin of your heart*, and be stiff-necked no longer." (**Deuteronomy 10:16**, NKJV)
  - b. "And the LORD your God will *circumcise your heart* and the heart of your descendants, *to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*, that you may live." (**Deuteronomy 30:6** [MT], NKJV)
  - c. "*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts*, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings." (**Jeremiah 4:4**, NKJV)
2. From Cyprian, bishop of church in Carthage, writing c. 250 AD:
  - a. "TITLE: *That the first circumcision of the flesh is made void, and the second circumcision of the spirit is promised instead.*
  - b. "In **Jeremiah**: 'Thus says the Lord to the men of Judah, and to them who inhabit Jerusalem: Renew newness among you, and do not sow among thorns: circumcise yourselves to your God, and circumcise the foreskin of your



heart; lest my anger go forth like fire, and burn you up, and there be none to extinguish it.' (**Jeremiah 4:3-4**)

- c. "Also, Moses says: 'In the last days God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord thy God.' (**Deuteronomy 30:6**, MT)
- d. Also in Jesus the son of Nave [*Greek names corresponding to Joshua son of Nun*]: 'And the Lord said unto Jesus [= *Joshua*], "Make for yourself small knives of stone, very sharp, and set about to circumcise the children of Israel for the second time.'" (**Joshua 5:2**)
- e. "Paul also, to the Colossians: 'You are circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands in the putting off of the flesh, but with the circumcision of Christ.' (**Colossians 2:11**)
- f. "Also, because Adam was first made by God uncircumcised, and righteous Abel, and Enoch, who pleased God and was translated; and Noah, who, when the world and men were perishing on account of transgressions, was chosen alone, that in him the human race might be preserved; and Melchizedek, the priest according to whose order Christ was promised. Then, because that sign did not avail women, but all are sealed by the sign of the Lord."
- g. (Source: Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise 12: Three Books*)

*of Testimonies against the Jews,*  
book 1; found in Ante-Nicene  
Fathers vol. 5, p. 510)

- iv. Paul speaks of baptism as the circumcision that is “done by Christ”.
  1. Recall that Joshua’s original name was Hoshea. He was originally “Hoshea, son of Nun”, but his name was changed to ‘Joshua, son of Nun’ (or in the Greek of the LXX ‘Jesus son of Nave’).
    - a. See **Numbers 13:8** and **13:16** (designated **Numbers 13:9** and **13:17** in the LXX), where the name of Hoshea is changed to Joshua (= *Jesus* in the Greek LXX text).
    - b. Also, compare **Hebrews 4:8** and **Hebrews 4:14** in an interlinear Greek New Testament, where both men (the Old Testament ‘Joshua’ and the New Testament ‘Jesus’) are referred to by the same name ‘Jesus’ in Greek (Strong’s #2424).
  2. Read **Joshua 5:1-9**.
    - a. Joshua (Jesus in the LXX) is told to *circumcise all the men with stone knives* after they cross the Jordan River. This is right before they proceed to enter the Promised Land.
    - b. God had instructed that all Jewish boys be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. However, for some reason it appears that many of the Jewish men *still needed to be circumcised*, at Gilgal.
  3. Read **Joshua 24:30-32**. (It is VERY IMPORTANT to read this passage in a Bible based on the Septuagint, since a highly relevant detail is not included in

the Masoretic Text). This passage is provided from two different English translations of the LXX, below.

- a. “Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. They buried him within the boundary lines of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, on Mount Ephraim on the north side of Mount Gaash. In his grave they placed with him the stone knives with which he circumcised the sons of Israel at Gilgal, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord ordered them. They remain there to this very day.” (**Joshua 24:30–32**, Orthodox Study Bible, LXX)
- b. “And it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Naue the servant of the Lord died, at the age of a hundred and ten years. And they buried him by the borders of his inheritance in Thamnasarach in the mount of Ephraim, northward of the mount of Galaad: there they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day.” (**Joshua 24:29–30**, Brenton LXX En)
- c. Keep in mind that the LXX was a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek by Jewish scholars, made approximately *200 years before* the time of Christ. In contrast, the Masoretic Text used

as the Old Testament base text for most modern Protestant Bibles is based on manuscripts dated within the time period of 900-1000 AD.

- d. Note (from the account in **Joshua 24** in the account recorded in the LXX text) the unusual detail regarding the burial of Joshua. It says that the stone knives of the circumcision done at Gilgal (an event that occurred about 30 years before the death of Joshua) were *buried with him*!
- e. **Question:** Why was this unusual burial detail (knives of circumcision buried with his body) mentioned?
  - i. Recall that Paul said Christians have received the *circumcision done by Christ*, having been “*buried with Him* in baptism”. (**Colossians 2:11-12**)
  - ii. I believe that in **Colossians 2** Paul is pointing back to the imagery of the circumcision done by Jesus (Joshua) at Gilgal, with the stone knives. Those stone knives were “buried with Jesus”, according to **Joshua 24** in the LXX account.
- f. **Question:** For the circumcision done by Joshua (= *Jesus*, in the LXX Greek), why did the Lord specify *stone* knives, rather than sharper ones that could be made from iron or from some other metal?
  - i. Throughout the Old Testament, *unusual stones*

are used to foreshadow Christ.

- ii. The first example of such a 'stone' I think of is the stone pillow on which Jacob slept, in **Genesis 28:10-22**. He had an unusual dream, with angels ascending and descending on a stairway or ladder connecting heaven and earth. He ends up anointing this stone with oil and setting it up as a pillar. Recall that the word 'Christ' means 'the Anointed One'. Jesus later would point to this as a prophecy regarding Himself (the Son of Man), in **John 1:51**.
- iii. Other places where Christ is foreshadowed by an unusual stone include **1 Peter 2:4-8** (referencing **Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14**); **Daniel 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 10:4** (referencing **Exodus 17:1-6**)
- iv. Through these 'stone' prophecies, Jesus is described as the Anointed stone connecting heaven and earth, the stumbling stone, the stone rejected by the builders who became the chief cornerstone, the stone that provided life-giving drink in the Wilderness desert... as well as *the stone that would circumcise our hearts*.

- e. Now, let us put together the things we have learned from these four 'baptism' foreshadowings from the Old Testament (Noah's Flood, Red Sea, Naaman's cleansing and Circumcision). A multi-faceted picture of Christian baptism emerges that includes:
  - i. A righteous few saved through the water (and involving wood);
  - ii. This event marks the beginning of the journey, escape from slavery, and the death of our enemies (including the sinful passions that had power over us);
  - iii. It involves a washing, new birth, and cleansing from sin; and
  - iv. It cuts away our fleshly, sinful nature, and through it, we are *buried with Jesus*.
- f. With the benefit of a more complete understanding of baptism, which was planned by God from the beginning for our deliverance, let us help other Christians to recognize the importance of baptism. Through that, may this lead to greater unity among all believers, who can share "one Lord, one faith... *and one baptism*".  
(**Ephesians 4:5**)

## V. Shadows vs. Realities

- a. "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a *shadow of things to come*, but *the substance is of Christ*." (**Colossians 2:16-17**, NKJV)
- b. **Question:** Why should Christians study the Old Testament?
  - i. Not to restore and follow the rules contained in Law of Moses!
    - 1. Paul explained that Jesus took the Law of Moses out of the way, having "nailed it to the cross" when He was crucified.  
(**Colossians 2:14-15**)
  - ii. We can see in the Old Testament shadows of the realities that have now been revealed to us.
    - 1. The spiritual realities were foreshadowed by the prophecies and figures.

2. They were “a shadow of things to come”. Understanding those things can strengthen our faith and help us to appreciate what we now have received through Christ.  
(**Colossians 2:16-17**)

**VI. Lesson Notes are Continued in Part B**

- a. **NOTE:** *In the Part A audio lesson, material from **Colossians chapters 3 and 4** was discussed very briefly at the end of the recording. After recording this lesson, the decision was made to add a second lesson, devoted to covering important material in **Colossians 3-4** in more detail.*
- b. *Therefore, notes pertaining to material related to **Colossians 3-4** has been consolidated into the Part B notes.*