

Tenak Talk 819

Was the Law/Torah Nailed to the Cross?

Following is the outline of the teaching given by Rabbi Michael Skobac in this one-hour video, which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aYDOFMQtGA>

All uncited quotations below are from Rabbi Skobac in this video.

1. Pauline authorship

- a. Skobac wants to make it clear that not everyone accepts that Paul wrote Colossians.
- b. Traditionalists and most evangelicals believe Paul authored 13 or 14 New Testament (NT) books
- c. Many scholars (esp. modern scholars) only accept seven of the NT books as “undisputedly Pauline:” Romans, Galatians, 1 & 2 Cor, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Thessalonians
- d. Six letters attributed to Paul are questioned. “Scholars don’t think that Paul actually wrote these:” Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus
- e. Hebrews is anonymous. Traditionalists say it was written by Paul, but “most people dispute this.”

2. Paul feared the church at Colossae was coming under the influence of false teachers.

- a. Probably Gnostics or mystical Gnostics (“philosophers”)
- b. In this chapter, Paul will be disputing these teachers, whom he believes are misleading the Colossians; polluting and endangering the church at Colossae.

3. Colossians 2:2

- a. Its translation is “very murky;” it is “very difficult to get a handle on how to translate this verse, or even what the actual text should be.”
- b. Skobac reads from the KJV: “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;”
- c. Note: Skobac will use the Hebrew word *Messiah* (Mashiach) instead of the Greek word *Christ*.

4. Focus on the last phrase: “the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Messiah”

- a. This is “clearly a very awkward construction.”
- b. Skobac reads the same phrase from alternate translations: International Standard Version, Young’s Literal Translation, Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition, New American Standard Bible, Berean Literal Bible
 - i. As we look across these different translations of the Greek Testament, we see that it’s not really speaking about Messiah as God.

- ii. The text differentiates between God, and God the Father, and the Messiah.
 - iii. The Messiah is seen as some kind of a mystery *of* God, but not identified *as* God.
 - iv. The New KJV tries to smooth out the awkwardness of the KJV: “the mystery of God, both of the Father and of [Messiah]”
 - 1. This rendering comes closest to equating Jesus with God.
 - 2. John MacArthur says that this NKJV is “probably not the original text.”
 - 3. MacArthur cites as most accurate translation: “the mystery of God of Messiah”
 - v. The original text would “not come close to asserting that Messiah is God.”
- 5. Colossians 2:3 – “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” KJV**
- a. “Somehow the Messiah has all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Is that true? Did Jesus really know everything?”
 - b. Skobac looks at Mark 13:32 and reads the words of Jesus: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
 - i. Here Jesus is “straight out saying that He doesn’t know everything.”
 - c. Skobac concludes, “clearly when it says in Colossians that ‘in the Messiah are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,’ that’s not exactly the case.”
 - d. Acts 1:6-7: “Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.’”
 - i. The disciples had “a Jewish understanding of what the Messiah is supposed to accomplish and that’s what they were expecting.”
 - ii. In this passage the “allegedly risen Jesus” says that the time of the restoring of the kingdom of Israel is “only the knowledge of the Father;” it’s something “only the Father has.”
 - iii. “Obviously Jesus is admitting that this is something he is not able to reveal to them.”
- 6. Colossians 2:9 – “For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (NKJV)**
- a. The Zondervan Study Bible “equates God’s filling the Temple with God filling Jesus.”
 - i. God’s presence filled the Temple in the Tanakh; that did not make the Temple divine and we didn’t worship the Temple. We worship God *at* the Temple.
 - 1. The Christian misunderstanding is that they assume God’s presence dwells fully in Jesus, but that wouldn’t mean Jesus is God.
 - ii. Zondervan Study Bible cites Psalm 68:17 to “bring home it’s point about God dwelling in the Temple.” The passage says, “This is the mountain

which God desires to dwell in (which Skobac says is “obviously referring to the Temple Mount”). Yes, the Lord will dwell on it forever.”

1. The verse speaks about God’s presence being there forever, not temporary, as the Zondervan Study Bible states.
- b. Also consider to Ephesians 3:19, “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (KJV)
 - i. Here the verse talks about humans, not Jesus, being filled with “all the fullness of God.”
 - ii. No one assumes that the Colossians or Ephesians, because they are filled the “fullness of God,” are divine and should be worshipped.
- c. Skobac asks “Where does the Tanakh ever tell us that we should expect that one day God will come to us incarnated into the flesh of a human being?”
 - i. If that was the plan all along, where was that ever hinted at in the Hebrew Bible?
 - ii. None of the passages in all the Tanakh that, when read in context, talk about God and the nature of God, give any hint of a future incarnation.
 - iii. None of the Christological proof texts referred to by Christians “come from passages where the context of the passage is speaking about the nature of God or who God is or who we are supposed to worship.”
 1. Example: Genesis 18 when the three angels come to visit Abraham. What is that passage about?
 - a. The context of this passage is not about explaining who God is
 - iv. If incarnation was God’s plan all along, why would God say “man cannot see me and live?”
 - v. If incarnation was God’s plan all along, why would God say three times that he “is not a man?” Why would he mislead us like that?

7. Col 2:11-13 – In these three verses, Paul speaks about three ideas.

- a. A spiritual kind of circumcision, a water baptism (the ritual immersion Jews call mikvah), Jesus coming as a sacrifice
 - i. “In the times of the Temple these were the three critical elements of the conversion process.”
 - ii. We no longer have a Temple so we don’t have a sacrifice as part of the conversion process
 - iii. David Stern’s NT Commentary says, “Paul has in mind the elements needed to convert to Judaism. He intends to reassure the Gentile believers in the Colossian church that they are fully initiated members of God’s people.”
 1. Skobac interprets Stern as basically claiming, “Lest the Gentiles in the Colossians church feel like second-class citizens . . . that they’re not really the ‘real deal’ like the Jewish believers in Jesus” Paul is reassuring them that they have a form of circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice.

2. What Stern (and Paul) leave out is the most important conversion element: acceptance of all of the commandments.
8. **Col 2:14 – “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”**
- a. Paul is talking about Jesus wiping out the commandments of God, which were against us or contrary to us, and nailed them to a cross.
 - i. Some translations try to soften this by saying it’s not so much referring to the commandments (Torah) but the debt we have to God for violating the Torah.
 - b. Rabbi Blumenthal from Jews for Judaism said that the idea of the Torah being “against us,” as Paul writes, is exactly what the serpent claimed in the Garden of Eden. That’s “not a great precedent for Paul to be following.”
 - c. While Jesus tends to be pro-Torah, everything else “tends to have a very negative view of the commandments (mitzvot).”
 - i. E.g., Romans 8:2; Ephesians 2:14-15; Galatians 4:9, 5:1; 2 Corinthians 3:7, Hebrews 7:18-19; 1 Peter 1:18.
 - ii. These statements are opposed by the Tanakh, which teaches that the commandments are for our *benefit*, not against us. (Nehemiah 9:13, Psalm 119 (the longest chapter in the Bible; it’s theme is the commandments of God and how wonderful they are), Psalm 19 (speaks of the worth and beauty of keeping the commandments.)
 - d. In *First Things*, Meir Y. Soloveichik wrote an article, “Torah and Incarnation.” It contrasts “the Jewish focus on experiencing God through studying His Torah and Christian focus on experiencing God through His incarnation and eating His flesh in the eucharist.”
 - i. Beautiful quote from Soloveichik: *“What, then, makes the Torah, as the psalmist says, “sweeter than honeycombs”? The answer lies in the joy of discovering God’s mind. Talmud Torah demands intense engagement with God’s will in order to bring to light new facets of the Divine Mind. To study Torah leads to new insights. And with every insight there emerges a deeper sense of the infinity of insights still hidden, waiting to be gleaned. Truly, as the infinite horizons of the Torah bring us to see, the mind of God is without limit.”*
 - ii. The Soloveichik quote goes on to say, *“The Torah was given as an invitation into the infinite expanses and depths of his mind, precisely because God refuses to present himself in finite form. The Torah is not God incarnate; it is not a finite embodiment of God; it is a bridge to divine infinity. God does not make himself finite through the Torah; he gives finite, fallible human beings the means to commune with his infinite mind. Through the nature of the law and its sanctifying regard for even the most minute of human actions, we can conceive of the loving nature of the Lawgiver; in the infinitude of the Torah we are given a glorious glimpse of the infinitude of the Almighty.”*

- e. Paul is addressing non-Jews in this letter. Skobac asks, “Where does God give any commandments to non-Jews in the Tanakh?”
 - i. What commandments is Paul saying were “nailed to the cross?” None of the commandments were given by God to non-Jews.
 - 1. “Unless Paul is referring to the Noahide laws, which are not totally explicit in the written Torah.”
- 9. Col 2:15 – “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; He triumphed over them by Him” (NKJV)**
- a. “Virtually all Christian commentaries understand this to be referring to Jesus defeating Satan and the demonic powers.”
 - i. John MacArthur writes “While Jesus’ body lay dead, his living divine spirit went to the abode of demons and announced his triumph over sin, Satan, death, and Hell.”
 - ii. Skobac says, “Really? It seems to me that Christians struggle against these as much as anyone in the world since the advent of Jesus.”
 - iii. Christians are tempted by Satan, and sin and die so it’s hard to understand what it means that Jesus “triumphed over” demonic rulers and authorities.
 - iv. Because of this, some commentaries (such as the ESV), “dial back the victory” and limit it to Satan’s ability to *accuse* Christians before God.
 - v. This claim is “invisible,” meaning we cannot see its effects and it is impossible to verify.
 - vi. All Jewish messianic prophecies are empirically verifiable. The “Christian messianic criteria—basically all that Jesus accomplished—was forgiveness of sins is *not* something which is empirically verifiable.”
 - 1. Christianity has taken “all of the real messianic prophecies . . . that can be empirically verified and they pushed it off to the supposed second coming of Jesus.”
- 10. Col 2:16 – “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths”**
- a. Did Paul intend this comment be addressed to Gentile believers?
 - i. If so, why would it be necessary to admonish Gentiles about Jewish laws which they were never commanded to observe?
 - ii. If he was speaking to Jews, “How could he say to them they won’t be judged when it comes to these laws when it was God who said they *have to* observe these laws and they *will* be judged?”
 - b. There are biblical prohibitions against drinking (such as blood and milk in some cases)
 - i. Skobac accuses David Stern of putting a Jewish veneer on Christianity, and says Pauline Christianity is “more pagan than Jewish.”
 - c. This passage seems to be saying that when you’ve come to Jesus, you don’t need to worry about keeping the Jewish festivals. Yet in Zachariah 14:16 we’re told the exact opposite, that “when the Messiah comes . . . Gentiles will be celebrating at least the feast of Tabernacles.”

11. Col 2:17 – “which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of [Messiah].” (NKJV)

- a. John MacArthur says, “The dietary laws, the festivals the Sabbaths, the sacrifices, etc. were mere shadows pointing to [Messiah]. Since he has already come, the shadow has no value.”
 - i. That’s a typical evangelical take on the ceremonial/ritual commandments of the Torah: Who needs the commandments anymore?
 - ii. Galatians 3:24-25, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”
- b. “Where does the Tanakh ever say that the mitzvot are basically a shadow pointing to the Messiah? . . . It’s not mentioned once.”
 - i. This is a “totally non-biblical” teaching.
- c. “Where does the Tanakh ever say that once the Messiah comes, the observance of the ceremonial/ritual laws will no longer be obligatory? The answer is never.”
 - i. The Tanakh teaches the opposite: Ezekiel 37 is perhaps the clearest picture we get about the Messiah. “David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.” (Ezekiel 37:24)
 1. The Hebrew word for “statutes” in this verse specifically refers to ceremonial/ritual laws.
 2. When Messiah is here, *all* of Israel is going to observe these laws.
 - a. This verse is referring to how, when in exile, many Jews did not observe those laws.