

The Attackers: The Sabbatical Year & the 70-Year Captivity; Ezra's Return to Israel; Ezra Taught the Law but Did Not Commentate on It; the Development of the Oral Tradition: Talmud, Mishnah, & Gemarah; the "Tradition of Men" & "Cosmic Prototypes" in Col 2:8; Propaganda: from Benign Use to Active Measures

Sabbatic Year: the septennial rest for the land from all tillage and cultivation as enjoined by Moses (Exodus 23:10–11; Leviticus 25:2–7; Deuteronomy 15:1–11; 31:10–13). (p. 350)

The four names given by Moses express some feature connected with its observance. These names are (1) *Rest of Entire Rest* (Heb. *shebath shabbathon* Leviticus 25:4), because the land was to have a complete rest from cultivation; (2) *Year of Rest* (Heb. *Shenath shabbathon*, Lev. 25:5), because the rest was to extend through the year; (3) *Release* (Heb. *Shemittah*, Deuteronomy 15:9), because in it all debts were remitted; (4) the *Seventh Year* (Heb. *Shenath hashsheba*, Deut. 15:9), because it was to be celebrated every seventh year. (pp. 350–351)

The rest which the land was to keep in the seventh year was ... to afford true spiritual rest and quickening, with their attendant rest and blessing. "Thus Israel, as the people of God, was to learn two things: First, that the earth, though created for man, was not merely that he might turn its powers to his own profit, but that he might be holy to the Lord and participate also in his blessed rest; next, that the goal of life for the congregation of the Lord did not lie in that incessant laboring of the earth which is associated with sore toil in the sweat of the brow, but in the enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, free from care, which the Lord their God gave and ever would give them if they strove to keep his covenant.

Such an institution of the Sabbatic year might seem, at first sight, to be impracticable. The unavoidable inference from Leviticus 25:20–22 is that the owners of land were to lay by grain in previous years for their own and their families' needs.

The Sabbatic year seems to have been systematically neglected. Hence, Jewish tradition explains (see 2 Chronicles 36:21) that the seventy years' captivity was intended to make up for the neglect of Sabbatical years. After the return from captivity this year was most strictly observed.¹ (p. 351)

8. When the Jews returned to the land, they were to rebuild the temple, reestablish the order of worship, and restore observance of the Law.

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 350–351.

9. The construction of the temple was completed in 516 B.C. However, from that point until 458 B.C. with the arrival of Ezra, the Jewish observation of the Law had not developed.
10. Ezra 7 documents Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem among the second group of exiles released from Babylon. Verses 1-6 confirm that Ezra was a priest from the tribe of Levi, family of Aaron.
11. Under Ezra's leadership, the Law again became the guiding force in every aspect of Jewish life. He became the premier professor of biblical theology and devoted his time and efforts to study of the Word.

Ezra 7:9 - On the first of the first month [נִסָּן] (*Nisan*): first month of the ecclesiastical year (March–April)] he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month [אָב (Av): fifth month of the ecclesiastical year (July–August)] he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.

v. 10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach [לָמַד] (*lamath*)] His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

12. Over time, the Jews interpreted this to mean that Ezra issued oral commentaries on the Law when it clearly states that he is teaching it not commentating on it.
13. From this emerged the oral tradition in which it became fashionable for the Jewish religious leaders to pass down from one generation to the next their commentary on what the Law really meant.
14. This "oral tradition," or "oral Law," became known as the Talmud which contains the Mishnah and the Gemarah:

TALMUD. Legal code whose compilation extended over almost a thousand years. The Talmud interprets Biblical laws and commandments, and branches out into many fields of knowledge.

Mishnah. The Mishnah had its origin in the period following the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity (537 B.C.). Ezra the Scribe is believed to have founded the Great Assembly—a supreme Jewish religious and legislative authority. Out of the Great Assembly arose a group of men, called Scribes. The Scribes represented the official copyists of the Bible and taught its laws. They were followed by the Tannaim, sages who continued for several generations to develop methods of interpreting the laws contained in the Bible. (p. 303)

The discussions, arguments, ordinances, and interpretations of the Tannaim are known as the Oral Tradition, as distinguished from the Written Law—that is, the Bible itself. (p. 304)

Some time after the Mishnah was edited in its final form, or canon, the Amoraim, scholars in Palestine and Babylonia, began an intensive study of the Mishnah. In the course of interpreting and discussing the laws and decisions of their predecessors, the Tannaim, they often found obscure passages and contradictory opinions in the Mishnah. The Amoraim sought to reconcile the varying opinions, and to draw clear conclusions from the mass of conflicting material. For over two hundred years after the completion of the Mishnah, this intellectual activity continued. The commentaries on the Mishnah by the Amoraim are known as the Gemarah, the Hebrew for “completed.”² (p. 305)

15. The Talmud represents the written “traditions of men” in Judaism today. It is the final effort by the scribes to explain through commentary how the Jew is to apply the commandments found in the Torah.
16. During the time of Paul’s writing to the Colossians, these “traditions of men” were still in oral form.
17. By around 200 B.C., the Pharisees taught that the oral law had the same authority as the Torah. The Lord rejected this idea in:

Mark 7:8 - “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

18. Thus the term, “tradition of men” in Colossians 2:8, refers not only to Gnostic philosophy but to the influences of Judaism’s oral law as well.

² Naomi Ben-Asher and Haim Leaf, eds., “Talmud,” in *The Junior Jewish Encyclopedia*, 14th rev. ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 303–305.

Colossians 2:8 - “Constantly be on guard lest anyone despoil you through the agency of deluding propaganda of disinformation according to the tradition of men ...

19. Next in verse 8 is the preposition **κατά (katá)** plus the plural noun **στοιχείον (stoicheíon)**: the basic element of learning; the ABCs of philosophy and religion; fundamental principles.
20. *Stoicheíon* refers to the philosophy and the deluding propaganda of Gnosticism and Judaism. The verb form is **στοιχέω (stoichéō)**: to march in rank under a system of authority.
21. This verb always carries the connotation of advancing and is therefore associated with the doctrine of walking.
22. Here it is used in the negative sense of advancing inside the cosmic systems as a result of being taken prisoner by the agency of deluding propaganda and disinformation.
23. The negative intent of this word is further amplified by the prepositional phrase: **τοῦ κόσμος (τού κόσμος)**: “of the world.”
24. Paul identifies the foundational principles of Gnosticism and Judaism as reflecting the viewpoint of *cosmos diabolicus*.
25. Although Paul is directly attacking the two heresies which were prevalent in his day, the passage in effect looks on them as cosmic prototypes.
26. Future attacks on orthodox Christian doctrine will be modeled after these two:
 - (1) The pseudo-intellectual approach of Gnosticism with its stress on humanism.
 - (2) The ritualistic approach of Judaism with its stress on legalism.

27. Consequently, all the cults and religious charlatans from that day to this are included in the phrase “according to the fundamental principles of this world.”
28. To bring out the idea in a more powerful way we translate *stoicheion* “cosmic prototypes.”

Colossians 2:8 - “Constantly be on guard lest anyone despoil you through the agency of deluding propaganda of disinformation according to the tradition of men, according to cosmic prototypes ...

1. The verse concludes with the way in which the Colossian believer should be orienting his life but is not.
2. The entire phrase reads like this in the Greek: **καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν (kaí su katá Christón)**: “and not according to Christ.”
3. In this last phrase, Paul points out that the Colossians are using false standards for their guide to life and practice.
4. They should be using the absolute standards as exhibited by our Lord both in His life and as are revealed in His Word.
5. The expanded and corrected translation of the verse reads this way:

Colossians 2:8 - Constantly be on guard lest anyone despoil you through the agency of deluding propaganda of disinformation according to the tradition of men, according to cosmic prototypes and not according to the standards of Christ. (EXT)

6. The agency used by the attackers is propaganda and its disinformation. It should be remembered that the word propaganda comes from the Latin *propagation* which means “to propagate”:

to cause to spread out and affect a greater number or greater area; to foster growing knowledge of, familiarity with, or acceptance of an idea or belief.”³

7. The Latin derivative *propaganda* was first used by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 when he formed the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*: Congregation for Propagating the Faith. Its purpose was to help the Catholic Church recover many of its losses from the Protestant Reformation.
8. The word’s benign definition in the 1600s took on a more sinister meaning during the Soviet Union’s 20th-century development of active measures.
9. From Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828):

Propagandism. The art or practice of propagating tenets or principles.

10. From *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary: Unabridged*, 2d edition, (1962):

Propaganda. Any organization or movement working for the propagation of particular ideas, doctrines, practices. Any systematic, widespread, deliberate indoctrination or plan for such indoctrination: now used in a derogatory sense, connoting deception or distortion.

11. From the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971):

Propaganda. Any association, systematic scheme, or concerted movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine or practice. The name *propaganda* is applied in modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion.

12. From: *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition (2003):

The spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person; ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause.

³ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v.: “propagate.”

13. Believers without doctrine are vulnerable to the allurements of human good and because of this they are consistently attracted by cosmic ideas at the expense of their spiritual lives.
14. The rhetorical veils that often accompany propaganda and disinformation usually contain a human-viewpoint element.
15. Only doctrine in the soul can discern these traps and avoid falling victim to them.
16. A believer's production in phase two is expressed in two ways: **(1)** divine good and **(2)** human good. Knowing the difference between the two is imperative if a believer is to become an effective servant of the Lord.
17. Therefore the need to address the principles associated with divine good and human good.