



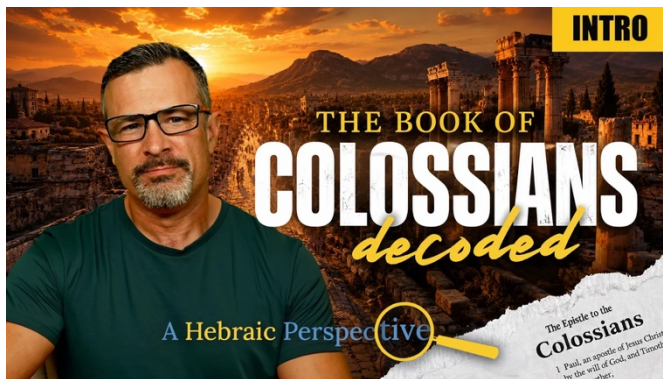
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Decoding Colossians: A Hebraic Perspective – Introduction

by Jim Staley

<https://youtu.be/qAXWth-CvBU>



Are you sure you know exactly what the book of Colossians is all about? Because if you've been taught from the original traditional Christian Western perspective and you haven't looked at it from the original Jewish Hebrew perspective, you are missing so much—it's not even funny. This introduction to the book of Colossians is going to unpack for you the culture, the idiomatic expressions. It's going to help you understand the two groups of Hillel and

Shammai—the *circumcision party*. Who is attacking the converts that are living in Colossae? What is Paul really trying to say when he says, "*Don't let them judge you for food and drink and new moons and festivals*"? What is he really talking about? Is he really talking about the Torah and the commandments of God, or is he talking about the traditions of men that are being imposed on them from outside of Christ? And what about the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the elevation of Christology? We're talking about all of it.

This is the book for you, and it all starts with the introduction right now. Hello, everyone. *Jim Staley*, [Passion for Truth Ministries](#). Welcome to this week's broadcast, where each and every week, every Saturday afternoon at 11 a.m. Central Standard Time, we walk through, verse by verse, through one of the Scriptures. We've gone through Romans, Acts, Hebrews, and now we're going to work through the book of Colossians. These writings by Paul can be difficult to understand if we don't go back to the original context, the Hebrew understanding of the scriptures from which it was originally penned. If you really want to dive into the scriptures and understand them from the original perspective in which they were written, then this is the channel for you. We go past Protestantism, we go past Catholicism, we go past even the church fathers, all the way back into the first century. We can understand the Bible only through the lens of the author, and that is exactly what we're about to do. So hit subscribe if that's you, and hit like if you're already subscribed to this channel, and make sure you share this content with someone else.

All right, today we're going to walk through the introduction to the book of **Colossians**, because if we don't have the backdrop from which the entire book is written, then we might actually fall into the same pattern of reading into the scripture something that's simply not. We're going to talk about the location, the backdrop, who it was written to, when it was written, a little bit about Greek philosophy, mysticism, the different Judaism sects of the first century, and so on and so forth. Understanding even the school of Hillel versus the school of Shammai in first-century Judaism—what those schools taught—really helps us understand the parties that are in a battle, because that is exactly what's going on. Paul is battling false teaching, and if we don't know what the false teaching is, and we don't know who's bringing the false teaching and what they believed, we're absolutely going to read into it what we think it believes, because every one of us already has a lens on that someone else likely put on us in denominational backdrops and biases, and those we just can't help but allow to do what they're designed to do, which is to color the text. Well, we're going to put on the first-century lens and let that color the text back to its original meaning.

Okay, first and foremost, where was the city of **Colossae**? As you can see on the map, it was an ancient city located in south-eastern Asia Minor, with the Colossians living along the east-west trade route between the Aegean coast and the Asian interior. Now, the road from Ephesus and Sardis made its way all the way to the Euphrates River and onto Mesopotamia. It's not difficult to see how the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians are related, especially since Colossae is only about 100 miles from Ephesus. And Ephesus was a significant city where the gospel spread like wildfire. Colossae was also located on the Lycus River along with Hierapolis and Laodicea, which is important because Paul's letter to the Colossians was intended to be read by the Laodiceans as well. And we also see the Laodicean church show up in the book of Revelation. So you can see from the map here how everything is fully connected.

All right, who's Paul talking to? Now, Paul is primarily talking to Gentile believers who feel spiritually inferior. All right, now why are they feeling spiritually inferior? Because there are groups coming down from Jerusalem that are Jewish, that have a Jewish background, that have a completely different understanding of what the gospel really is and what religious life looks like, and they are putting the Gentiles up against the standard of traditional rabbinic Judaism with all the traditions and doctrines that the men that before them created—not just the scripture or the Torah itself. This is where the rub is going to lie. This setup would create confusion for the Gentiles as they come into the faith, because you've got these counterparts coming from Jerusalem, like I said, and they're making the Gentiles feel like they're missing something, and that missing something is the traditions and doctrines of men. This is what Paul is fighting constantly. He's not fighting the Torah. He's not fighting the laws and the commandments of God. John says in 1 John chapter 5 that the only way to love God is to keep His commandments. This was about keeping the traditions and doctrines of men that they considered commandments, but it wasn't commandments from God. This created a gatekeeping effect where these Jewish counterparts that were bringing false doctrine into the church—they were preventing the Gentiles from truly growing in the knowledge of Christ because they were making it so difficult on them to enter into what they wanted to be—a club membership.

One of the main influences in almost all of these churches throughout the known world at that time was these mystery religions or syncretism, where different religions would completely

absorb different parts of other religions, which made their religion grow and evolve. Well, religion is not supposed to have an evolution component to it. It's supposed to be pretty clear, cut and dry, but that's not how it worked in the first century. If someone found something in a different religion to be very advantageous to their life—for instance, someone else served a god that had a benefit that their current religion didn't have—they would borrow from that religion and absorb it into their own. This happened in the church, especially when you get into the 4th, 5th, and 6th centuries, as the Roman Catholic Church began to evolve. They did the exact same thing. They began to take pagan things and begin to synchronize them into the church. They began to bring them into the church, and this is where we get Halloween, this is where we get some of our Christmas traditions and Easter traditions. All of those were originally pagan, cultic practices that were just brought into the church. A little holy water was put on them, they were scrubbed a little bit more white, and then given to the people to eat and feed, and no one's looked back since. As a matter of fact, if you want more information on Christmas or Easter, you can take a look at the links that we have in the description of ["December 25th on Trial."](#) I've got quite a few of those documentaries that go into the depth of some of those past holidays that have come into Christianity. But for now, it's important to know that the very same thing was happening in the first century, and this was what's going on in the Church of Colossae. They were adopting some of these pagan practices and practices from other sects of both Christianity and Judaism, and Paul was going to deal with it.

One of the most significant doctrines that Paul's going to hit head-on is Christology. What is Christology? It's the view of Christ. What does He look like? False doctrine, he defines it, is those that do not believe in a proper Christology. Meaning, if you do not believe that Yeshua is the Messiah and He's represented as deity, and Lord, and the head of all things, and everything was created through Him, then you are a false teacher, or at least that is a false doctrine from that teacher. And Paul's going to hit that very hard here in Colossians, and we're going to deal with that as well. So that's something that's really important. Even today, I see amongst even some of my own peers that some of them have slipped off into believing that Jesus, Yeshua, is simply a man. That He is nothing more than a man. He's the Messiah, and then there's God, and they use all the scriptures that talk about Jesus talking to His Father, and so on and so forth, and say that there is a hierarchy. And there is. While Yeshua is on earth, there is a hierarchy, without a doubt. But a hierarchy inside of the Godhead does not make one lesser. It means that their role might be in a different position, but it's certainly not a lesser position. And so, who is going to say that God the Father is greater than the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit is greater than God the Father? There is a difference. And so, I am not going to pretend to completely understand the Godhead without a doubt, although I did a four-hour teaching on it called ["Trinity on Trial."](#) If you're interested in that, you can click the link in the description. But this is something Paul was dealing with in his day as well.

Now, one of the problems that we do have with the book of Colossians is we don't have the original letters which tell us what all the problems were and all of the false doctrines that they were likely writing to Paul about. We're only getting the response from Paul. So, it's like reading one half of the letter, but we don't get the first half. And so, we have to kind of piece things together based on what we do know from Josephus, from Philo, from first-century writings, from other scriptures, from the Torah, the prophets, to put all of it into a puzzle that we can possibly understand. And some of it we don't have 100% without a doubt—this is what's going on. Most

scholars will agree that there is lots of room for debate here. Now what I'm going to do is show you what it looks like from the *original author's perspective*. And when you put all those pieces together, I believe we can get beyond a shadow of a doubt of what Paul is actually dealing with here.

So, the main core problem that Paul is actually battling here is what I call "**Messiah-plus**" theology. It's Messiah-plus angelic intermediaries, Messiah-plus ascetic rigor, Messiah-plus mystical knowledge (*Gnosticism*), or Messiah-plus Torah observance as identity enforcement or gatekeeping—all of these issues. It wasn't just one issue. Again, you have multiple sects of Judaism and everyone's trying to figure this out, and they're borrowing from pagan religions. Even sects of Judaism were doing the same thing, and Paul is fighting all of this because Paul's gospel was very simple: **Yeshua is the way, the truth, and the life**. No man comes to the Father except through Him. It is by faith—grace by faith. You **cannot** be saved by your works. You prove your love **by** your works. And that works in first-century Christianity was defined as following the Torah, believe it or not, even though Christianity doesn't teach that today. It's absolutely defined as that. That's why Paul says in Romans 3:31 that just because Christ came, faith came, does that mean that we get rid of the law of God? Does that make void the law of God? He says, "*No. It actually allows us to uphold the law of God.*" And that's why he says in Romans 8:6-7 that those that are spirit-led subject themselves to the law of God, but those that are carnal do not subject themselves to the law of God. So, in whole Romans 7, it's all about Paul wanting to keep the law of God, but we don't see that in traditional Christian theology because that doesn't play well with traditional Christian doctrine, which believes that God's law is the bad guy, instead of sin being the bad guy and the traditions and doctrines of men being the bad guy. And that's what Paul is fighting here. So, once we know what he's fighting, it really does allow us to understand the scriptures very, very well.

All right. Now, what most people think the problem is—is the Torah. Most believe Paul is trying to keep the Torah out of the congregations. Most have been taught that there's Jewish believers coming down from the church in Jerusalem, teaching the converts that they need to keep the Torah, and Paul's trying to tell them no. That is furthest from the truth, as we're going to show, and it's very clear from the text that it couldn't possibly be talking about that. The Torah is not the problem in the book of Colossians. Detaching the Torah from Messiah and turning it into a measuring stick is the problem. Paul's not confronting Torah obedience. He's confronting the **misuse** of God's law as an *identity gate* instead of a *covenant guide*. That's the problem. Is that the second you create keeping Torah as connected to salvation? Oh yeah, Paul's going to have a problem with that, and I'm certainly going to have a problem with that, because the gospel and salvation is only by faith—grace through faith in Christ. And anything added to that—that Yeshua-plus or Messiah-plus theology—is going to cause a problem. And that's what's going on. Paul's trying to protect, in the book of Colossians, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ—just Him alone. Two, he's trying to save the unity of the body, focusing that being unified is so important in so many ways. And then also the proper function of God's law under Christ. And then lastly, freedom from fear-based religions dressed up as holiness. And we'll talk about that as well, especially at the end of chapter 2. It gets very, very clear what's going on here. There are serious traditions of men that are dressed up as holiness that are simply going to be chains in the making.

And quite frankly, what's fascinating is I was writing this out—these four things that I believe Paul is really addressing in this book—and we see the same thing that we're fighting today. These same four things. We're fighting for the **sufficiency of Messiah**, right? Remembering that Christ is the only thing that we need to solve every problem. Two, the **unity of the body**. We see nothing but division almost everywhere—44,000 different denominations. And then inside of those denominations, there's fighting. And then inside local churches, there's division. Third, the **proper function of law under Messiah**. We have no clue what that looks like. Most people have no clue, at least. And then **freedom from fear-based religion**. This is what almost every religion does—instead of just following what God said is holiness and the definition found in the scripture, we create our own definition of holiness and then we impose it on other people and judge them if they don't follow it the way that we want to follow.

So, the bottom line: Colossians is a letter about who gets to define spiritual maturity. Paul's answer is extremely clear. It's not angels, it's not different sects of Judaism, it's not this rabbi, it's not that rabbi, it's not this head of the church, it's not rules, it's not zeal, it's not bloodline, and it's certainly not ethnicity. It's Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah alone. He's the one who defines fullness and maturity. And that's what I hope that we're gonna learn as we finish the book of Colossians—is we'll just be a little bit more mature because of it.

Now let's walk through a few facts about the book of Colossians and specifically about Paul and give you a background of who Paul is so that you can really understand his side of the argument. Along the way, we'll actually show you who he's debating so you can see both sides of the argument. And once you see who the people groups are of the debate, the content becomes extremely clear, and the scriptures just illuminate with beautiful clarity. One, Paul was born in Tarsus, but he was definitely Jewish through and through. He was a Pharisee according to his own mouth, training, and conviction. He was trained under **Gamaliel**, which was the head of the Sanhedrin at the time, and he was Gamaliel's top student. In order to be a student of Gamaliel, you had to have the entire Torah memorized word for word. Paul was at the top of the top of the top of his Ivy League school list, and he was fully committed to the Torah. He had a deep engagement with even the oral interpretation—what later becomes codified in what's called the Mishnah—all the written-down rules of the rabbis, all their traditions, all their doctrines, all amalgamated into one book. And Paul had a deep understanding of all of the oral traditions, along with the written five books of Moses. Paul believed in the resurrection, the angels, and the coming Messianic age, where a Messiah is going to come.

All right, now a couple other things that are important as we walk through this is to know which school was Paul from. In the first century, there were two schools. So, think of it as Republican and Democrat, conservative and liberal. This is very similar in the first century. You had the school of Hillel. This was a mercy-forward, flexible interpretation of the Torah. It prioritized intent and human dignity. It was open to Gentile inclusion without full conversion—that's where the *God-fearers* come from. And it emphasizes love of the neighbor as the guiding principle. Okay, so now you tell me if that sounds conservative or liberal. Here's the next one, the school of **Shammai**. The school of Shammai was much more strict, a very rigid interpretation of Torah. Basically, do or die. Do this or you won't pass the test. It prioritized precision—like tithing on the mint and cumin—and boundary enforcement. It was very resistant to Gentile inclusion unless full conversion occurred.

That's called a proselyte, which is someone who fully converted, which included circumcision. And they emphasized separation and national holiness.

So, which group do you think the Pharisees fell into? Most of them fell into the school of Shammai, and you can see that one was very conservative, one was very strict and rigid. All right, so in one line, Hillel asked how Torah brings people in; Shammai asked how Torah keeps people out. That is really the fundamental difference—Hillel was trying to figure out how to bring people into the community, and Shammai was trying to figure out how to keep people out, so they can keep it all holy and whitewashed. These two groups is where almost every Jew that was religious came from. That was their backdrop, that was their mindset. As we walk into these epistles from Paul, these schools of thought show up all over the place if you know their belief system.

Paul was also a zealot, without a doubt, for covenant faithfulness. Before encountering Yeshua, Paul persecuted the early movement, as you know, because he believed it threatened Israel's holiness and Torah fidelity. In his mind, he was defending God, not opposing Him. His encounter with Yeshua was prophetic, not anti-Jewish. God revealed Christ to him that day on the road to Damascus. Now, I know we've all been taught on the road to Damascus that Paul was blinded by the light, fell off his horse, and was converted to Christianity. Nothing could be further from the truth. He never stopped being Jewish. Never in his wildest mind did he think that that was happening. He simply began to see that Yeshua was the Messiah inside of his own Jewish context. And that's really important to keep in mind as we move forward through some of his writings.

Now I'm just going to bring up a couple of scriptures so you can get an idea of Paul and the fight that he's having with some of these Jewish groups that are coming in. One of the most misunderstood scriptures in all of Paul's writings is Colossians chapter 2, verses 16 and 17. It says, *"Let no one judge you in food, drink, festival, new moon, or Sabbaths."* This is not anti-Torah language, my friends. This is anti-Shemite. This group from Jerusalem was using the Law of God and all of their traditions that went along with it as a weapon of judgment against the Church of Colossae. This is what Paul is against. He's certainly not against the commandments of God, and we'll learn that in chapter 2, because it literally says right after that that he's defining all of the above as the traditions of men. So, he's not telling them that you shouldn't eat the right things, or celebrate the feast days, or the new moons, or the Sabbath. He's saying, *"Don't let these guys judge you for the way that you're doing these things. Do them the way that God tells you to do them. Do not find yourself being judged by these religious hypocrites that are wanting you to do it their way."* Paul's never teaching that the Torah was done away with or abolished. He's arguing against Gentiles becoming Jews through conversion rituals. And you have to know the two schools and what they believed and who the group is coming from Jerusalem and what they're trying to impose on the converts to really understand this. Paul is not arguing against biblical obedience to follow God's commandments or holiness standards or God's law rightly understood. He's fighting the law misunderstood. He's fighting all the traditions and doctrines that they're imposing on his Gentile converts.

You see, Paul's mission was Jewish first, and then it was very, very Gentile inclusive, as you know. That's his ministry. Paul sees Gentiles as being grafted into Israel's promises, not replacing Israel or creating a separate religion like most of us have been taught. Ephesians 2:12-13 says that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers

from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Brought near to what? Now you can be part of the covenants of promise. You're part of the commonwealth of Israel. Paul sees Gentiles as part of Israel. They're not separate from Israel. They're not a different church. They're not a different congregation. They're not even under a different covenant. It's one covenant for all. The head of that covenant is Christ, and then the law is the same. The administration is the covenant—that's the relationship players, the one who are in charge. The constitution is the law. The law never changes. Just because a new administration comes into town, it's the administration that changes. It's the authority of who administers the law. And so that's why you see all this language that the Gentiles are now just like the Egyptians that came out of the Exodus 1,400 years earlier—that they are joining Israel, and there is to be one law for the sojourner and the native-born. This is a lost concept in traditional Christianity, and it permeates all of Paul's letters. Without understanding it, you'll for sure misunderstand the scriptures almost on every level as it relates to what Paul is trying to fight. Because in Ephesians 2:19, he says, "Now therefore you're no longer strangers and foreigners, but you're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Citizens of what? The commonwealth of Israel. The remnant is called covenant Israel—separate from national Israel, separate from geographical Israel—it's covenant Israel, always about the covenant.

If Paul were alive today, my friends, he wouldn't even recognize traditional Christianity as we know it, as a religion separate from Israel. He saw himself as a Torah-trained Jew, proclaiming that Israel's Messiah had come, and that the nations were being brought into covenant faithfulness through him. The whole point was that modern-day Judaism of the time did not have room for Gentiles unless they went through a one-year process of conversion to either be a God-fearer, which was without circumcision, or a proselyte, which was full circumcision, and then they became Jewish. This was never in the mind of God to begin with.

So, as we kind of come to the end of this introduction to the book of Colossians, it's important that we know these things. It's important that we know the backdrop, we know the idiomatic expressions, the Hebraic foundation from which Paul is writing, the schools of thought that were present in the first century that were influencing these churches throughout all of the then-known world. You're talking about angel worship, you're talking about mysticism, Gnosticism—all an amalgamation of pagan religions, mystic religions, all coming together and influencing the church. And then on top of that, they had Jews that were coming from high-ranking positions accepting Christ, being convinced that Christ was Messiah, which is fantastic. But after that, they were pulling from the tradition, the dogma, and the doctrines of their rabbis and their elders that was a thousand years strong that they were still convinced in, and they were pushing that onto the Gentiles, forcing a yoke on them that they could not bear. This is the issue in Acts chapter 15 that they have to deal with—is how and what is the definition of salvation. And Paul's main fight was exactly that. They were saying that his converts were not saved unless they got circumcised a certain way, unless they wore a certain thing, did a certain thing, and did all these club membership traditions that were not found in Scripture. Paul's all for following Scripture. For crying out loud, he says in Romans 7, the very thing that he wants to do is keep God's commandments, but the very thing he doesn't want to do is break God's commandments, but he finds himself breaking the law of God, and there's another law inside of him—the law of sin and death—and he says with his mind, he's totally subjected to the law of God, but in the flesh, he

finds himself falling short, and all of us can find ourselves in that same exact position. We are following Christ, God's way, the best that we can, being led by the Holy Spirit, and hopefully on Judgment Day, we will have done well that we will enter in and He will say, "*Come in, you good and faithful servant.*" Salvation is only through Christ. Everything else is your reward. That's why it's important that we run the race to win. And that's exactly what we're gonna try to do.

So, as we move into Colossians chapter 1, get prepared, get your notes out, because I believe there is so much that we're not only going to be able to learn from this short book, but we'll be able to put it into practice, both in theology and in daily living. All right, my friends, thank you so much for spending a few minutes with us as we open up the book of Colossians and dive deep into it. Next week, we are going to do exactly that.

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