

Colossians 1:1-4

“Opening Greetings”

“Paul, an apostle of Yeshua the Messiah by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Messiah *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Messiah Yeshua and the love which you have for all the saints.”

The Epistle to the Colossians certainly has a great deal to say about the nature of the Messiah, especially given Paul’s warning in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe” (NRSV).¹ That there was a false teaching which had affected the Colossian Believers, as something which was degrading to the view of Yeshua that they were to have, is clear enough. The Messiah had been sacrificed for human transgressions, wiping out the penalties which stood against sinners (Colossians 2:14). Proponents of either a low Christology of Yeshua being a created agent of God, or a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity, do at least agree that a *high orientation* of the Messiah is presented within this letter. Only a proper evaluation of some of the details of such a high orientation of the Messiah, will demonstrate whether or not the ascriptions given to Yeshua by Paul in his writing, reflect those which are given to a supernatural yet ultimately created entity, or an entity which is genuinely God.

Colossians opens with the greeting, “Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Messiah *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (Colossians 1:1-2, PME). Paul labels himself to be “an emissary of Messiah Yeshua by God’s will” (TLV), *apostolos Christou Iēsou dia thelēmatos Theou* (ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ), which at least serves as an indication of how Yeshua the Messiah and God proper do have a distinct relationship, involving a figure like Paul to go out into the world at large and declare what such a Messiah has accomplished for people.

Included in Paul’s opening greeting to the Colossians is the statement, “Grace to you and *shalom* from God our Father” (CJB/CJSB), *apo Theou patron hēmōn* (ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν). While this could be taken as a statement involving the nature of God, the author’s usage of “God our Father” is probably instead intended to stress the universal character of “God our Father.” As Ephesians 4:6 indicates, all Believers have “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” Dunn, who broadly holds to a low Christology, is correct for readers to consider that he has taken an Israel-specific claim and “appropriated it...[for] Gentile believers: ‘our God.’ Paul’s implicit claim is that by accepting the gospel of Christ and his Spirit Gentiles were incorporated into Israel/the family of God, now redefined as ‘the household of faith.’”² This is a theme that receives greater attention in Colossians’ companion letter (Ephesians 2:11-12; 3:6)—not as a means of non-Jewish Believers replacing the Jewish people, but being incorporated into the Kingdom via their Messiah faith.

In the further statements of his opening greetings to the Colossians, Paul writes, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, whenever we pray for you” (Colossians 1:3, TLV). Here, he references *tō Theō patri tou Kurīou hēmōn Iēsou Christou* (τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), with the intention obviously being how the One God of

¹ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

² James D.G. Dunn, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 52.

Israel is the Father of the Messiah. Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, integrated into the Divine Identity, would conclude how this is reflective of the Apostle Paul holding to a balanced view of the Godhead, as he recognizes God as “Father,” and Yeshua as “Lord” (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6; Deuteronomy 6:4).

Does Paul simply consider Yeshua to be a human but supernaturally-empowered master by calling Him *Kurios* (κύριος)?³ The title *Kurios* was notably used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Divine Name YHWH (יהוה),⁴ which does bear some importance, in its close proximity to God proper being called the Father. Here, it is critical to be reminded of how Paul could have employed the title *basileus* (βασιλεύς) or “king,” as in “God, the Father of our King Yeshua the Messiah” (Colossians 1:3, modified), and all Paul’s audience may have concluded is that Yeshua was to be viewed as some sort of supernaturally-empowered king or ruler, who had a special relationship with the God of Israel. But in calling Yeshua “Lord” or *Kurios*, which the Septuagint employed for the Divine Name YHWH, some more significant supernatural concepts are being invoked, as will be witnessed further on in the letter (Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9). Yeshua the Messiah is very much recognized as a part of the Godhead, using available terms familiar to and employed within First Century Jewish monotheism.

That the Apostle Paul has to be slightly reserved in his opening words to the Colossians, is due to how neither Paul nor his company have met their Colossian audience personally. It is witnessed, “we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints” (Colossians 1:4, RSV). They have only been told of the Colossians’ spirituality—something that is marked by love toward God’s people—via Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). Paul and Timothy have heard a relatively positive report about the Colossians’ life of faith, with the Colossians largely knowing Paul by reputation. Any of the Colossians who had actually known Paul, would have had to have been associates of Epaphras who had encountered him while he preached in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).

Paul and his associates have heard about *tēn pistin humōn en Christō Iēsou* (τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), “the faith of you in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:1, Brown and Comfort).⁵ O’Brien, reflecting one view, specifies how the faith of the Colossians is “‘in Christ Jesus’...an expression which does not denote the object to which their faith is directed but rather indicates the sphere in which ‘faith’ lives and acts,” further indicating how “Some of the implications of living under [Christ’s] lordship will be spelled out in the later sections of the letter.”⁶ The relationship that the Colossians have to the One God of Israel, is mediated through Yeshua, the One in whom “it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him” (Colossians 1:19), and in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

³ Cf. Romans 10:9, 13; Philippians 2:10.

⁴ Cf. L.W. Hurtado, “Lord: Appellation Formulas (3.3),” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 566.

As noted in this article: “[T]he single most frequently found use of *kyrios* [or ‘Lord’] in Paul (about 100 times in the letters we are considering here) is as the designation of Jesus without any other title, simply ‘the Lord.’”

⁵ Brown and Comfort, 696.

⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, Vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 11.