

Colossians

Original Historical Setting

Author: Paul

Written: ~61 A.D.

Audience: Christians living in the town of Colosse

Occasion: As the founder, or one of the founders of the church at Colosse, Epaphras seems to have traveled to Rome to bring Paul news of the churches in the Lycus River Valley. He told Paul of false teachers who were distorting and minimizing the person and work of Christ. Paul wrote to the Colossians to combat these false teachers.

Timeline:

~35 AD – Paul's conversion

~53-57 AD – Paul third missionary journey

~58 AD – Paul keeps Feast Day in Troas

~58 AD – Romans arrest Paul in Jerusalem

~61 AD – Paul writes Colossians from Roman prison

World Events that occur simultaneously

~50 AD – Rome adopts a working week of seven days based on 7 known planets (whose names provide the days)

~54 AD – Roman surgeon, Cornelius Celsus, describes how to cut stones from bladder

~56 AD – Nero expels actors from Rome and reforms circuses

~60 AD – Mayans build great civilization in Central America

~64 AD – Rome burns, Christians blamed and persecuted

Key text(s)

1:18 – Christ is the head of the Body, the Church

2:8 – Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy

3:16 – Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly

3:17 – Whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus

Memory Verse: Colossians 2:8

Genre/Literary style

An epistle (letter) written in (Koine) Greek

Features and Structure:

Just like Ephesians, Colossians can be divided easily into two sections. The first two chapters are doctrinal and describe Christ as the Head of the Church. The last two chapters are practical and describe holy, Christian living.

Norm Geisler's outline of Colossians:

1:1-2:7 – Doctrinal: Deeper life in Christ

2:8-23 – Polemical: Higher life in Christ

3:1-17 – Spiritual: Inner life in Christ

3:18-4:18 – Practical: Outer life in Christ

What to look for

- Although the specific heresies that Paul addresses are not given a name, they can be inferred from Paul's responses.

Note the emphasis on certain Jewish elements:

1) legal restrictions concerning circumcision, diet and holy days

2) veneration of angels

Note also some of the Greek elements:

1) self-denial

2) adherence to philosophy and human wisdom

3) emphasis on secret knowledge

Interesting facts

- To refute the heresy in Colosse, Paul draws upon what may have been a well-known song about Jesus. At least part of the hymn appears in **1:15-20**.
- Colosse was a relatively unimportant city. It was located in the Lycus River Valley about 100 miles inland (east) from Ephesus. Its better known sister cities were Hierapolis and Laodicea.
- With Ephesians and Colossians side by side you can see obvious parallels and that nearly 3/5 of Colossians is reflected in Ephesians.