

A Survey of the Book of Colossians

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Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Colossians 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. He uses Timothy to aid him with the writing (**Colossians 1:1**). The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul. However, there are critics of his authorship because of the likeness to Ephesians, but we should consider the similarities between Romans and Galatians. It wasn't unlike Paul to do this. In fact, both Ephesians and Colossians share similar outlines, outlook, and theme. Both letters were delivered by Tychicus along with the book of Philemon (**Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-8**). Paul also puts some emphasis on Onesimus in this book (**Colossians 4:9**).

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Colossians 4:4, 18**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles. Paul wrote it around the same time that he wrote Philemon (see Philemon notes) but prior to Ephesians (see Ephesians notes). He also wrote another letter to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:16**). In fact, Paul asks this congregation to read the letter to Laodicea publically. This gives the most accurate picture of how the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were collected. Unfortunately, Paul's letter to the Laodiceans has been lost (**I Corinthians 5:9**).

Theme:

This letter is about the supremacy of Christ. The people in Colossae were very affluent and familiar with popular culture. Colossae was an ancient city of about 500 years when Paul wrote this letter. It was known for a peculiar purple wool (colossinus). The city stood on a trade route from Ephesus to the Euphrates. However, the trade route changed and the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis became the greater cities. Colossae was the last prominent city to get Paul's attention through letters.

Paul was worried about some erroneous doctrines that were beginning there. The exact origin of this false teaching is unknown. Some say it was Essenism or Gnosticism. It may have been a contemporary Judaism with a syncretism of local Phrygian ideas. Nevertheless, Paul met these errors by presenting the all-sufficient Christ. He reveals that Jesus was not superhuman, but God in the flesh. He created all things. He provides the hope of salvation (the gospel) and the means of salvation (His precious blood).

In Colossians, Paul wants to present Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God, in whom are the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, and divine perfection (**Colossians 1:15-23**). On the cross, Jesus Christ revealed His importance and freedom from corruption and newness of life is found in His death and resurrection (**Colossians 2:8-15**). Paul does not critique, condemn, or judge the Colossian heresy, but delivers a positive case for Christian truth.

Audience:

The church of Colossae was the intended audience. This congregation was probably established on Paul's third missionary journey during his ministry in Ephesus. However, it is possible that the congregation was not started by Paul. We have no record of Paul ever traveling to this city (**Colossians 1:9, 2:1**), but Epaphras had a wonderful relationship with this congregation (**Colossians 1:5-7**). The church may have been established by Timothy (**Colossians 1:1**), Epaphras (**Colossians 1:7, 4:12-13**), or even those who were returned from Pentecost (**Acts 2:10**). Luke records that Phrygians were present that day.

The church was lead by a Gentile preacher named Archippus (**Colossians 4:17**). The fact that the evangelist was a Gentile must have affected its outreach. The congregation would have struggled with the Jew vs. Gentile scenario as a church. This would be something the Gnostics and Judiazing teachers would have exploited. However, Paul encourages fellowship with the church at Laodicea. They needed to fellowship with other strong congregations to give them strength. Also this Colossian heresy could have influenced other churches nearby, so communication is a key.

The letter from Paul is very intriguing and challenging to all who read it. The letter deals with a lot of heretical teaching that influenced the church there, but we are blessed to take away something positive when we read it. Even the casual reader can see that the Colossian heresy was threatening the work of the church and Paul is writing to keep the church on the same page.

Paul's work in the school of Tyrannus, while in Ephesus, would have given him the opportunity to share these thoughts with many others (**Acts 19:10**). Early writings tell us he lectured daily from 11 AM to 4 PM (for two years). Paul supervised missionaries, works, and ministries like the one in Colosse, Ephesus, and Laodicea. He mentored people like Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphras who would also carry this message of hope to their home congregations and to the world.

Other significant members of this church included Philemon and Onesimus (**Philemon 1, Colossians 4:9**). Because the congregation was affluent, and well connected to others within the Christian fellowship, it may have stood for quite some time after the first century. Recently archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of an ancient church there.

Key Verses:

Colossians 1:9-14, 1:18, 2:8, 2:13-15, 2:18-19, 3:1-7, 3:12-17, 3:20, 4:2-6, 4:16-17

Outline:

- I. THE SUPREME CHRIST (1:1-29)
- II. THE SUPREME GOSPEL (2:1-23)
- III. THE SUPREME LIFE (3:1-4:1)
- IV. THE SUPREME FELLOWSHIP (4:2-18)

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