

Outline of
Colossians



Introduction

Authorship

Not all scholars agree that Paul wrote Colossians. Some think that a disciple of Paul wrote the letter in Paul's name (probably with his approval, or posthumously in faithfulness to his teachings). Others think that Paul simply dictated this letter to a scribe, as he did most of his previous letters (e.g., Rom 16:22); in any case the probable date of the letter was in Paul's lifetime (see "Situation," below).

By the time Paul wrote Philippians (the likely period also for Colossians), he was increasingly borrowing popular philosophic language (cf. Acts 19:9). But although Paul may borrow language from some of the false teachers to make his case against them, most of the language that is used in Colossians has parallels in his undisputed writings (which also differ from one another). Given the brevity of the letter, the probable use of a scribe, similarities with undisputed Pauline letters and the lapse of several years since his earlier letters, the differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters need not require different authors. Pseudonymous letters existed but were normally written long after the death of the person in whose name they were written. Because an earthquake devastated or destroyed Colossae around A.D. 60–64 and it was never completely restored, it is unlikely that a letter would be written even purportedly addressing the church there after that date; nor could a forgery have gone undetected during Paul's lifetime (which probably lasted till at least A.D. 64).

Colossae

Colossae was in Phrygia, where religion was practiced with intensity. There is evidence for a Jewish presence in Phrygia as early as the sixth century B.C.; this Phrygian Judaism seems to have mirrored its culture to a significant extent. Christianity likewise exhibited unorthodox tendencies in this region in subsequent centuries. Colossae was a small and socially unimportant city by this period; it is probably only one of many cities in which Paul's students had founded churches (Acts 19:10); perhaps some received similar letters. As noted above, the city was severely damaged or destroyed by an earthquake around A.D. 60–64 and never completely restored, hence many scholars think that Paul wrote before that date.

Situation

Colossians 2 may indicate that Christians were attracted to mystical or apocalyptic elements in a Judaism thoroughly influenced by Phrygian culture. A great number of backgrounds have been proposed for the error at Colossae: mystery cults, broader Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Qumran-type Judaism and so on. The merit of considering these sources is that they all reflect some broader cultural ideas that played into the problems Paul confronted in Colossae; even Qumran parallels, while strictly limited geographically to Judea, provide evidence for some more widespread Jewish beliefs in this period. The one suggestion with little merit to sustain it is Gnosticism, since full Gnostic systems cannot be dated this early. But that the Colossian error reflects one synthesis of different streams of thought that later developed toward Gnosticism is possible.

That some Jewish Sibylline oracles may issue from that region and the activity of later Christian Montanists there might suggest the possibility of ecstatic elements in local Judaism (2:18). Acts testifies that Paul was preaching Christ to philosophically minded audiences in this period (see comment on Acts 19:9), and letters like Ephesians and Colossians give us an indication of Paul's grasp of popular-level Greek philosophy and also some of the popular philosophical ideas that permeated both Gentile and Jewish thought in mid-first-century Asia Minor.

Source: Keener, Craig S. (2014). *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition. InterVarsity Press.

ANCIENT LETTERS

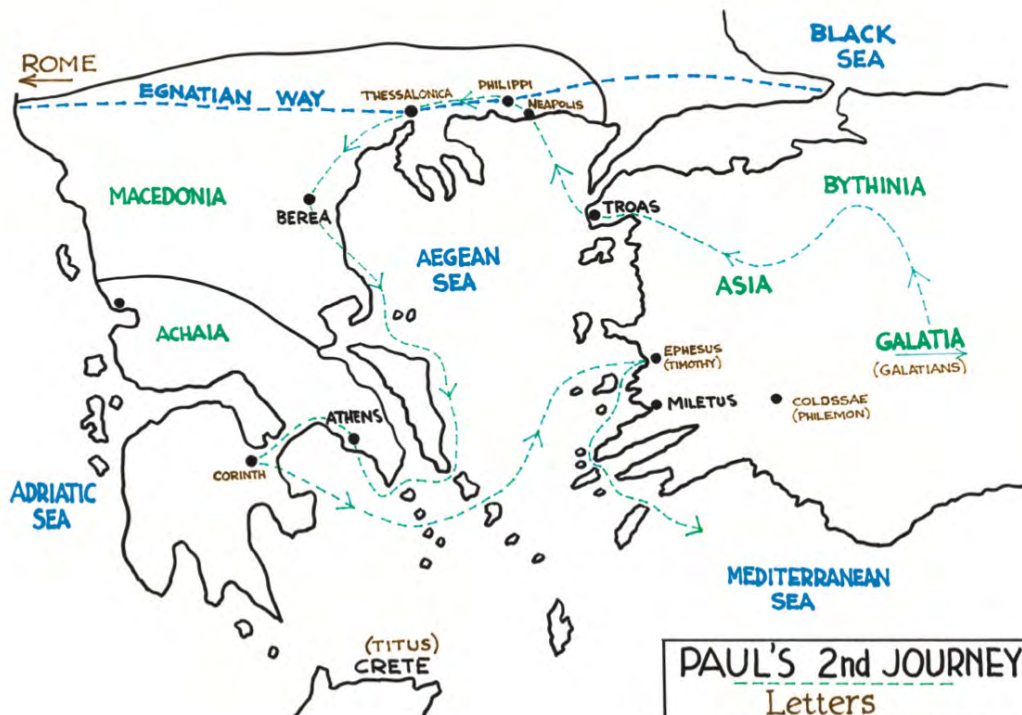
1. PERSONAL ~ individual (Philemon)
2. OCCASIONAL ~ local (Colossians)
3. GENERAL ~ encyclical (Ephesians)

Read between lines : circumstances
situation
crisis
need

WHAT does he correspond to?
WHO does he correspond with?
WHY does he correspond at all?

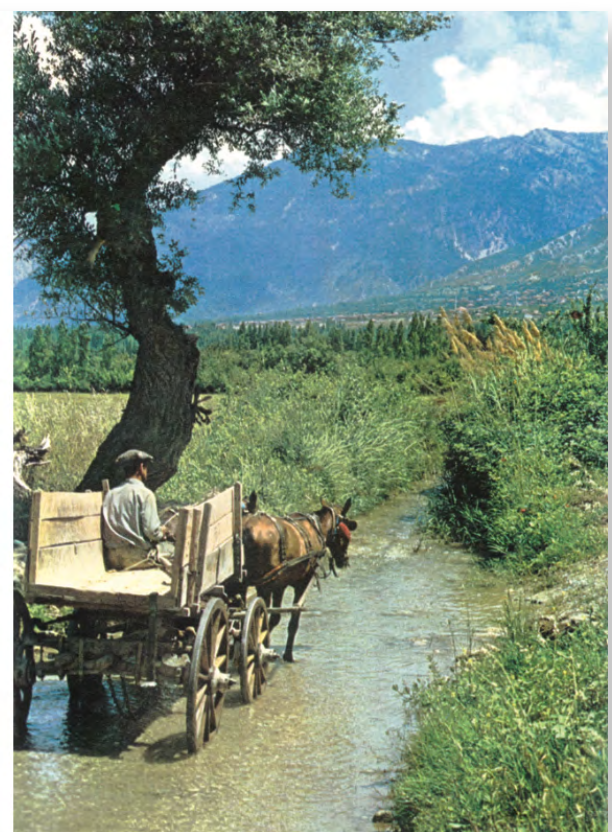
Pattern: **SENDER**
RECEIVER (address)
GREETING (prayers/wishes)
COMPLIMENT (or thanks)
SUBSTANCE (one or more topics)
SUMMARY
GREETING

Biblical 'epistles': **REALITY** (past): actual practice
RELEVANCE (present): applied principle





ROAD TO COLOSSAE (MEANDERING RIVER)



COLOSSIANS

A. SYNCRETISM: religion of Christianity

I. REDUCED BELIEF

- a. Immanence of God (too high)
- b. Pre-eminence of Christ (too low)

2. REGULATED BEHAVIOUR

- a. Observance of calendar
- b. Abstinence of body

B. SIMPLICITY:

I. ALL DIVINE FULNESS IN THE ETERNAL CHRIST

- a. CREATOR of the universe.
- b. CONQUEROR of the powers.
- c. CONTROLLER of the church.

relation to Christ

2. ALL HUMAN FOCUS ON THE EXALTED CHRIST

- a. PURITY in the passions.
- b. CHARITY in the church.
- c. HARMONY in the home.
 - i. Wives/husbands.
 - ii. Children/parents.
 - iii. Slaves/masters.

Chapter
1

- Col 1:1-6** After salutation Paul thanks God for their faith;
- Col 1:7-8** confirms the doctrine of Epaphras;
- Col 1:9-13** prays further for their increase in grace;
- Col 1:14-20** describes the true Christ;
- Col 1:21-29** encourages them to receive Jesus Christ, and commends his own ministry.

Chapter
2

- Col 2:1-7** Paul still exhorts them to be constant in Christ;
- Col 2:8-17** to beware of philosophy, and vain traditions;
- Col 2:18-19** worshipping of angels;
- Col 2:20-23** and legal ceremonies, which are ended in Christ.

Chapter
3

- Col 3:1-4** He shows where we should seek Christ.
- Col 3:5-9** He exhorts to mortification;
- Col 3:10-11** to put off the old man, and put on Christ;
- Col 3:12-25** exhorting to charity, humility, and other several duties.



Chapter
4

- Col 4:1-4** He exhorts them to be fervent in prayer;
- Col 4:5-9** to walk wisely toward them that are not yet come to the true knowledge of Christ.
- Col 4:10-18** He salutes them, and wishes them all prosperity.

Quiz on Colossians

1. Who was the physician/doctor named in Chapter 4?

2. According to Chapter 1, how did all things visible and invisible come into being?

3. In Chapter 3, on what should Christians set their affection?

4. Upon whom is the wrath of God coming?

5. According to Chapter 3, what could happen when fathers provoke their children to anger?

6. According to Chapter 2, what happened to the handwriting of ordinances that was against us?

7. When a Christian is baptized, it is symbolic of what?

8. In Chapter 4, what did Paul ask the Colossians to pray for him about?

9. Above all the other good qualities, what did Paul say to put on, in Chapter 3?

10. At the end of Colossians, what was Paul's message to Archippus?

GENEVA
BIBLE SCHOOL

