

Overview of Colossians

Why study this book: To learn how Jesus is all we really need in this life. For believers, it is critical to understand who this Christ really was. Paul breaks up Colossians into two sections: The first two chapters explain how Jesus is the image of the invisible God. The last two chapters offer some practical ways of living that are directly tied to Jesus Himself.

Author: Paul: the apostle and church planter. Written while under house arrest in Rome as he waited for his hearing before Caesar. He begins with personal greetings (1:1), refers to himself again later (1:23), and closes the letter in his own handwriting (4:18).

Date: Between AD 60-62. Late in Paul's ministry as the book of Acts comes to a close. Written after he has already been in prison (4:3, 10, 18).

Setting: The name Colossians was given because this was a letter sent to the church in the city of Colosse. The city was made up of mainly Gentiles. However, there was a large Jewish settlement dating from the days of Antiochus the Great (223-187 BC). Colosse seems to have become a center for an early form of Gnosticism, a hybrid religion and philosophy that mixed Christian, Jewish and possibly pagan mysticism.

Background: The church at Colosse began during Paul's three year ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19). However, Epaphras, who was saved during a visit to Ephesus (1:7), likely started the church in Colosse after returning home. He did so under Paul's guidance.

Main Point: To present Jesus as the final and full revelation of God. Paul wrote about this to counter the false teachings that were attacking the church at Colosse. The new teaching claimed a profound knowledge apart from Christ (2:8), an emphasis on following prescribed rituals (2:16), the worship of angels (2:18), and ascetic self-abasement (2:18 & 20-23). The new teaching which included the worship of angels indicates that it invoked spiritual powers rather than calling on Christ in whom the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form (2:9). The new false teaching in effect denied the total sufficiency of Christ for salvation and the completeness of Christ's atonement.

Outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - a. Greetings (1:1-2)
 - b. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
 - c. Prayer (1:9-14)
- II. The Supremacy of Christ (1:15-23)
- III. Paul's Labor for the Church (1:24-2:7)
 - a. His Ministry for the Sake of the Church (1:24-29)
 - b. His Concern for the Spiritual Welfare of His Readers (2:1-7)
- IV. Freedom from Human Regulations through Life with Christ (2:8-23)
 - a. Warning to Guard against the False Teachers (2:8-15)
 - b. Pleas to Reject the False Teachers (2:16-19)
 - c. An Analysis of the Heresy (2:20-23)
- V. Rules for Holy Living (3:1-4:6)
 - a. The Old Self and the New Self (3:1-17)
 - b. Rules for Christian Households (3:18-4:1)
 - c. Further Instructions (4:2-6)
- VI. Final Greetings and Benediction (4:7-18)

Sources:

1. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/colossians/>
2. <http://www.christianinconnect.com/colossians.htm>
3. <http://executableoutlines.com/col.htm>
4. The Interpreter's Bible: Colossians
5. The NLT Study Bible
6. The Quest Study Bible
7. Colossians & Philemon – John MacArthur