

Colossians: *Our Sufficient Savior*

Introduction

I. The Author—Colossians 1:1 attributes authorship of this epistle to the apostle Paul. Paul wrote this epistle in about A.D. 61-62 during his two-year period of house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30). During this time he also wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Together these four letters are often called “The Prison Epistles.” Paul sent Colossians and the epistle to Philemon in the hands of Tychicus and Onesimus (Col. 4:7-9). At the same time he also sent his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21-22). Ephesians is probably the encyclical letter that would soon come to Colossae from Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

II. The Audience—The word Colossae is taken from the word *Colossus* which means large or huge. This is ironic because Colossae is the least important city and church to which any of Paul’s epistles were addressed. The church at Colossae was not founded by Paul. Paul had never even personally visited the city at the time he wrote this epistle (Col. 1:4, 9; 2:1). The church was most likely founded by Epaphras during Paul’s three-year Ephesian ministry on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10; Col. 1:7; 4:12-13). Epaphras, who was from Colossae (Col. 4:12), traveled to Ephesus at some point, heard Paul preach, believed the gospel, and then became a missionary and pastor to his own hometown. As a result of his efforts a church was born there that met in the home of Philemon (Philemon. 1-2).

The occasion for this epistle can probably be traced to the arrival of Epaphras in Rome with news of a new teaching in the Lycus River valley that had infiltrated the churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea (2:1; 4:12-13, 16). The essence of the false teaching seems to be rooted in Judaism. All the features of this teaching that Paul addresses can be explained in the context of Judaism. Several factors support this notion: references to circumcision (2:11; 3:11), dietary regulations (2:16), Sabbath and Jewish festivals (2:16), and angel worship (2:18). As in many of Paul’s other epistles Judaism was the key opponent (see, Galatians). Judaizers dogged Paul’s footsteps throughout Asia Minor seeking to get pagan converts to Christianity to keep the Jewish law to become truly “mature.”

III. The Aim—To instruct God’s people that spiritual maturity comes through understanding and appropriating the all-sufficient person and work of Christ, not through keeping the Jewish law (1:28; 2:6-7).

IV. The Arrangement—

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Doctrinal: The Person and Work of Christ (1:3–2:3)
- III. Polemical: The Position of the Body in Christ (2:4–3:4)
- IV. Practical: The Practice of the Life of Christ (3:5–4:6)
- V. Personal: The Personal Affairs of Paul and Greetings from His Companions (4:7-18)

V. The Analysis

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Doctrinal: The Person and Work of Christ (1:3–2:3)
- III. Polemical: The Position of the Body in Christ (2:4–3:4)
- IV. Practical: The Practice of the Life of Christ (3:5–4:6)
- V. Personal: The Personal Affairs of Paul and Greetings from His Companions (4:7-18)

VI. The Application