

Introduction to Colossians

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the believers at Colossae from prison in about A.D. 60. The Colossian church was probably started by Epaphras after he became a believer under Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).

Paul wrote the letter because Epaphras sent news that false teachers were telling the church in Colossae that their beliefs were incomplete. These false teachers had mixed together parts of Judaism, Greek philosophy and Christianity to form a new religion. Following are some of the features of their teachings:

1. They included forms of ascetic practices (extreme physical self-denial), angel worship, and pride in superior wisdom and knowledge.
2. They taught that there were spirit-powers that controlled the natural world and were to be revered as mediators between God and His creation. The separation between God and His creation could only be bridged by recognition of and reverence paid to these "elemental spirits."
3. One could show reverence to these spirit-powers by being delivered from the evil influences of material things. There were two routes a person could take: a) asceticism or b) the observation of the Jewish holy days (Sabbaths, feast days and new moon celebrations), circumcision and the Jewish dietary laws.

In this letter to the Colossians Paul seeks to address this heresy by using the ideas and language of the false teachers and showing that Christ is the fulfillment they are seeking. There is no other mediator between God and man other than Christ, and the way these false teachers propose is wrong and ineffective.

Interpreting Colossians

In order to correctly interpret this book it is especially important to understand the historical and cultural background of Colossians. Otherwise, many of the words, phrases and allusions Paul uses will be meaningless.

QUESTIONS FOR COLOSSIANS PASSAGES

OBSERVATION (Facts)

For chapters 1 and 2 only:

- What are Paul's actions and attitudes toward the Colossians?
- What does Paul say about his relationship to God?

For all chapters:

- Who is Jesus?
- What has Jesus done for the Colossians?
- What are Paul's instructions (and reason for instructions) to the Colossians?

INTERPRETATION (Meaning)

- What is the main idea(s) the author is trying to communicate?

APPLICATION (How this applies to my life)

- What does the main idea in the passage mean to me?
- What kind of response do I need to make?

REMEMBER: Not all questions are applicable to every passage. Just answer the questions that "fit" the passage, and ignore the rest.

READINGS IN COLOSSIANS

Week 1

- 1 1:1-8
- 2 1:9-14
- 3 1:15-20¹
- 4 1:21-23
- 5 1:24-29²
- 6 Psalm 23

Week 2

- 1 2:1-7
- 2 2:8-15³
- 3 2:16-23⁴
- 4 3:1-4
- 5 3:5-11
- 6 Psalm 25:1-11

Week 3

- 1 3:12-14
- 2 3:15-17
- 3 3:18-25
- 4 4:1-6
- 5 4:7-18
- 6 Psalm 25:12-22

¹ **“thrones, powers, rulers and authorities”** (vs16): angelic powers both good and bad. The names stand for different ranks.

² **“mystery”** (vs26): refers to that which God has revealed openly (an open secret) (unlike the popular religious view which means something that is hidden from all but a few.)

³ **“circumcision/uncircumcision”** (vs 11-13): Circumcision is a covenant sign given to Israel signifying their special relationship with God. Uncircumcision refers to the Gentiles (all who are not Jews).

“written code” (vs 14): God’s righteous standard reflected in moral law.

⁴ **religious festival, new moon celebration, Sabbath Day”** (vs 16): Jewish holy days which suggested some aspect of the coming Messiah and celebrated some aspect of their culture.

“shadow” (vs17): Before Christ appeared there were rituals that foreshadowed the true reality found in Christ