

Introduction to Colossians

Where is it in the Bible?

Colossians is the twelfth book in the New Testament and is found between Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.

Who wrote it?

This letter includes a salutation (1:1) that indicates that Paul (and Timothy) wrote the letter and a closing (4:18) that clearly states that Paul is the author. However, many scholars dispute Paul's authorship. As with Ephesians, there are many differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters in the areas of vocabulary, style, and theology. In addition, Colossians and Ephesians share a number of commonalities.

When was it written?

As with other disputed Pauline epistles, Colossians is difficult to date. To further complicate matters, Paul says he is in prison, but does not say where. Most scholars who accept Paul as the letter's author feel that it was written in the early 60s during his imprisonment in Rome, although some have suggested it was written during an earlier imprisonment. If the letter was not written by Paul, its author could have been an associate of Paul (perhaps Timothy?) or a later follower. That would mean the letter could have been written any time from the late 60's to the 80s.

What is it about?

"The Christ hymn or confession in Colossians 1:15-20 announces the twin themes of the letter, proclaiming Christ's lordship over all the powers of the universe and Christ's lordship of our lives. Christ is the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead."¹

How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Prayer for the Colossians (1:3-14)
- III. Supremacy of Christ (1:15-23)
 - a. Christ Hymn (1:15-20)
 - b. Significance for Believers (1:21-23)
- IV. Paul's Work for the Gospel in Colossae (1:24-2:3)
- V. Dangerous Teachings (2:4-23)
- VI. Ethical Implications (3:1-4:6)
 - a. New Life in Christ (3:1-17)
 - b. Rules for Christian Households (3:18-4:1)
 - c. Additional Instructions (4:2-6)
- VII. Final Greetings and Closing (4:7-18)

¹ Paul S. Berge at <http://www.enterthebible.org/newtestament.aspx?rid=18>

What are some things to look for?

- **Christology:** Colossians presents an exalted view of Christ in the hymn in 1:15-20. He is God's agent of creation as well as God's agent of salvation. He is the ruler of the universe; all rulers and powers are subject to him. Believers can be confident of their salvation and need not fear any earthly powers or spirits.
- **Knowledge:** In Christ, the Colossians already have all the knowledge they need for salvation and for leading "lives worthy of the Lord" (1:10). They should not be deceived by false teachers or by new ideas which come up. In particular, they are warned against the observance of Jewish law, self-abasement, worshiping angels and dwelling on visions (2:16-18).
- **Realized Eschatology:** Colossians is one of a few New Testament books (others include the Gospel according to John and Ephesians) which highlight realized eschatology. "Realized eschatology" is "the belief that blessings and benefits associated with the end times are available already in this present life."² For the Colossians, this means that no one on this earth can affect their salvation because they have already been raised to new life in Christ.

² Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 365.