



COLOSSIANS – a few bits of background

One method which might be helpful to get you into the message of the book

- 1 Read the letter a couple of times.
- 2 Using a handbook or a study Bible to find out
 - * Who wrote the letter?
 - * To whom was it written?
 - * When was it written?
 - * What is the historical setting?(you'll also find background material on the internet)
- 3 Think about
 - What is the major emphasis of the writer?
 - What ideas keep cropping up?
 - What subjects does the author deal with?
 - Do any words or phrases keep popping up?
 - Why do you think the letter was written?
 - What problems was the author dealing with?
 - Can you give the book your own title?
- 4 Can you see any modern problems which parallel the letter?
- 5 Is there any truth which God is asking you to put into practice?

COLOSSAE - Where is it?

- * In the Lycus valley - 100 miles inland from Ephesus. Three cities together.
- * Hierapolis and Laodicea either side of the Lycus (still there today)
- * Six miles apart but within sight of each other
- * Colossae - 12 miles upstream
- * Earthquakes frequent

What sort of area?

- * Volcanic ground, fertile ground, good pasture land, flocks of sheep are common
- * Laodicea especially famous for garments of finest quality.
- * The allied trade was dyeing (Rev 3:18)
- * Wealthy area (Rev 3:17)
- * Also, springs were everywhere of different temperatures (Rev 3:15) - volcanic action
- * Laodicea was a political centre, financial HQ
- * Hierapolis was a trading centre, spa (where most of the hot springs started).
- * Colossae originally as important as Laodicea and Hierapolis - even when Paul wrote, Colossae was not as big as the other two.

- * Today Laodicea and Hierapolis survive; you can only guess where Colossae was.
- * But in the town of Colossae problems had arisen in the church, and for Paul that was important

An important fact

- * Colossae was in the province of Phrygia
- * About 200 BC many Jews emigrated to the area.
- * In 62 BC the local Roman governor had to stop Jews sending the temple tax to Jerusalem.
- * About 11,000 male Jews resided in the Lycus valley (James 1:1) 50,000 in total.

The church at Colossae

- * Paul had never visited the church (2:1)
- * Probably grew from Paul's stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10)
- * Founder was probably Epaphrus (1:7, 4:12 & 13) - if he wasn't he was certainly the minister
- * It was mainly a gentile church
- * 1:21 the phrase 'aliens.... and enemies.' Paul often used this phrase about those who knew nothing of the old covenant.
- * 1:27 ref. Gentiles
- * 3:5-7 A list which is characteristically Gentile

The threat to the Church

- * Epaphrus brought news to Paul in Rome - some news was good.
- * He commends them for:
 - 1:4 love of the saints
 - 1:6 bearing fruit
 - 1:8 love in the spirit
 - 2:5 their order, their firm faith
- * There were problems but they weren't all consuming - so Paul is trying to deal with a threat not an immoral church (Corinth)
- * He was trying to grasp the evil before it had time to spread

The heresy at Colossae - No one can be exactly sure

What do we find Paul dealing with?

- 1 Heresy attacked the supremacy and total adequacy of Christ.
No Pauline letter has such a lofty view of Jesus.
1:15 Image of the invisible God
1:19 All of God's fullness
2:2 He knows the treasures of wisdom and knowledge
- 2 Paul stresses the part Jesus Christ played in creation (1 v 16), in maintenance (1 v 17)
The Son was the Father's instrument of creation.
- 3 In contrast he speaks of the humanity of the Lord
1:22 Physical body
2:9 Bodily form
- 4 There is an astrological element in the heresy
2:8 'basic principles of this world'
- 5 Also demonic spirits were involved
1:16, 2:10, 2:15 refer to 'powers and authorities'
Natural forces like the wind, thunder, rain etc

- 6 Philosophers who led people away from Christ
2:8 suggests these were around
- 7 Ritual days were observed
2:16 both Jewish and Pagan
- 8 A whole series of man-made restraints
2:16 laws about food and drink
2:21 don't do....
3:5-8 But lax morality was also about

The best guess

- 1 Gnosticism - The spirit alone is good
Matter is essentially flawed and evil
Matter was eternal - never created (hence creation reference)
God is Spirit therefore cannot be involved in creation therefore, He is not creator
- 2 If Jesus is Son of God, he cannot have a body (matter is evil)
He was a kind of phantom
Gnostic writing says things like 'Jesus left no footprints'
So, Jesus was never human (ref. humanity of Jesus 3. above)
- 3 It affects the way you live
Either a) Bodies are evil - hate them! deny yourself, starve, and inflict pain itself
(8. above)
b) It doesn't matter, because it's evil, what you do with it. Therefore your
body has nothing to do with your relationship to God

Gnosticism is a highly intellectual way of life.

You raise your mind to higher and higher heights and in doing so reach God - You understand Him more.

You need to gain all kinds of secret knowledge; hidden passwords were common. Higher things of God were only open to the chosen few - you had to belong to an intellectual aristocracy to make it to God.

Remember those Jews who moved to Colossae - Gnosticism grew from Jewish thinking.

- Obey the law
- Make sacrifices
- Deny yourself
- Special knowledge (cf Pharisees etc and Jesus)

A strange alliance grew between the Gnostic and the Jew.

A BRIEF SUMMARY TO HELP YOU READ THE BOOK

- * 1:1, 2 Greeting
- * 1:3-8 Thanksgiving
- * 1:9-12 Prayer

God's Work In Christ 1:1-23

- * 1:13, 14 Redemption What He did - HISTORY
- * 1:15-19 Excellence of Christ What He is - CHARACTERISTICS
- * 1:20-23 Reconciliation What He does– RECONCILIATION

Paul' Ministry 1:24 to 2:3**False Teaching Denounced** 2:4-23

- * 2:4-7 Walking in Christ
- * 2:8-15 Completeness of Christ's work
- * 2:16-23 Dangers of mere ritual

The Christian Life 3:1 – 4:6

- * 3:1-11 The Old and the New
- * 3:12-17 Exercise and Christian Virtues
- * 3:18 – 4:1 Family and Social Relationships
- * 4:2-6 Prayer and walking wisely

Conclusion 4:7-18

- * 4:7-9 Message to Tychichus (who was he?)
- * 4:10-17 Greetings
- * 4:18 Signature