

SC = 51, COLOSSIANS

Structure: General Notes

Author: God + Paul

51: 0: 1 – 1 = Author =

51: 0: 1 – 1.1 = Author = Q: Paul was in prison at the time Colossians was written (4: 3) – most likely in Rome but possibly in Caesarea. A date of writing of about A.D. 60 seems probable (1933, ASB).

51: 0: 1 – 1.2 = Author = Q: Epaphras was the one who told Paul at Rome about the Colossian church problem and thereby stimulated Paul to write this letter (ca: Key People, Epaphras – below) (1935, ASB).

51: 0: 1 – 1.3 = Author = Q: Colossians, along with Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon, is called a *Prison Letter* because Paul wrote it from prison in Rome. This prison was actually a house where Paul was kept under close guard at all times (probably chained to a soldier) but given certain freedoms not offered to most prisoners. He was allowed to write letters and to see any visitors he wanted to see (2158, LAB).

51: 0: 1 – 1.4 = Author = Q: Tradition has it that Paul wrote Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon during his imprisonment in Rome. This would mean these letters were written in the early A.D. 60s. However, others sites including Caesarea and Ephesus have been proposed as the place of Paul's confinement, so that neither date nor place is certain (1160, FCA).

Date:

51: 0: 1 – 1 = Date = About A.D. 60, at the time of Paul's 1st imprisonment in Rome.

51: 0: 2 – 1 = Timeline =

51: 0: 2 – 1.1 = Timeline of Colossians...

Jesus' life (6/5 B.C – A.D. 30)... Paul's Conversion (A.D. 35)... Paul's missionary journeys (A.D. 46 – 67)...

Council at Jerusalem (A.D. 50 – 51)... Nero's reign (A.D. 54 – 68)... Paul's 1st imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 59 – 62)...

Book of Colossians written (A.D. 60 – 62)... Paul's imprisonment and death in Rome (A.D. 67 – 68)...

Destruction of Jerusalem's Temple (A.D. 70) (1933, ASB).

51: 0: 2 – 1.2 = Timeline of Colossians = Q: This was written between the time of Acts 28 and the burning of Rome in A.D. 64 (491, Robertson – WPNT).

Purpose:

51: 0: 1 – 1 = PT, Overview...

51: 0: 1 – 1.1 = PT, Overview = Q: Main theme: Fullness and freedom in Christ (1160, FCA).

Q: *Theme:* The Dignity of Christ as the Head of the Church and the deity of Christ (491, Robertson – WPNT).

51: 0: 1 – 1.2 = PT, Overview = Q: As Paul does so often, he begins his letter with a strong doctrinal statement and concludes with behavioral implications. Here his doctrinal emphasis is on the cosmic nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the divine Lord of the universe who reconciles all things to Himself through his death, not by rules and regulations. Paul sets this strong statement of Christ's deity (1: 15-23) over against the mystical, ritualistic religion of the false teachers (2: 8-23). (Apparently, these teachings had something to do with astrology. The "star-deities" could only be pleased by a life of abstinence and self-denial). Once the truth about Christ is stated, Paul turns to the implications of Christ's lordship over all and describes how Christ's followers out to live (3: 1 – 4: 6).

The epistle to the Colossians begins, like most of Paul's letters, with a lengthy introduction (1: 1-14). In the first major division on doctrine, Paul establishes the preeminence of Christ (1: 15 – 2: 23). He follows this with an exhortation to the Colossians to live in union with Christ (3: 1 – 4: 6). He concludes with personal greetings (4: 7-18) (1161, FCA).

51: 0: 2 – 1 = PT, The Supremacy of Christ...

*51: 0: 2 – 1.1 = PT, The Supremacy of Christ = Q: Paul affirmed that:

(1) Christ is God (1: 15; 2: 9)...

(2) He is the Creator of all things (1: 16)...

(3) All the fullness of God dwells in Him (1: 19; 2: 9)...

(4) Christ is superior to the angels (2: 10, 15)...

(5) Christ is the head of the church (1: 18)...

(6) Through whom believers have "fullness" (2: 10)...

(7) in Christ all the requirements of the Mosaic Law have been met (2: 11, 16-17)...

(8) asceticism has no value (2: 23)... while a life "hidden in Christ" (3: 3) brings glory (3: 4)... and

(9) Christ himself is the "mystery of God" (2: 2; 1: 25-27; 4: 3) – no other secret knowledge is necessary (1934, ASB).

51: 0: 2 – 1.2 = PT, The Supremacy of Christ = Q: The key theme is the preeminence of Christ (1; 18) because the false teachers made Christ one of several emanations from God. They mixed Christian truth with their doctrines of Jewish legalism and Oriental mysticism. Colossians is the perfect answer to the so-called new Age movement today, for Paul affirms that in Jesus Christ believers are complete and have the fullness of God available to them (2: 9-10).

Chapters 1-2 are doctrinal and present Jesus Christ as the preeminent Creator, Savior, and Lord (782, Wiersbe – CCB).

51: 0: 3 – 1 = PT, A Warning Against Heresy (& Gnosticism)...

51: 0: 3 – 1.1 = PT, Warning Against Heresy = Q: Paul labeled the Colossian heresy a vain deceit based on human tradition and the “basic principles of this world” (2: 8, 20). It denied Christ’s sufficiency and belittled Christian hope in his finished work on the cross (1934, ASB).

51: 0: 3 – 1.2 = PT, Colossian Heresy... (2159, LAB).

The Heresy...	Reference	Paul’s Answer...
1: Spirit is good; matter is evil.	1: 15 – 20	God created heaven and earth for his glory.
2: One must follow ceremonies, rituals, and restrictions in order to be saved or perfected.	2: 11, 16-23; 3: 11	These were only shadows that ended when Christ came. He is all you need to be saved.
3: One must deny the body and live in strict <i>asceticism</i> (strict self-denial as a form of spiritual discipline).	2: 20 – 23	Asceticism is not help in conquering evil thoughts and desires; instead, it leads to pride.
4: Angels must be worshiped.	2: 18	Angels are not to be worshiped; Christ alone is worthy of worship.
5: Christ could not be both human & divine.	1: 15-20; 2: 2-3	Christ is God in the flesh; He is the eternal One, the head of the body, first in everything, supreme!
6: One must obtain “secret knowledge” in order to be saved or perfected – and this was not available to everyone.	2: 2, 18	God’s secret is Christ, and he has been revealed to all.
7: One must adhere to human wisdom, tradition, and philosophies.	2: 4, 8-10; 3: 15-17	By themselves, these can be misleading and shallow because they have human origin; instead, we should remember what Christ taught and follow his words as our ultimate authority.
8: It is even better to combine aspects of several religions.	2: 10	You have everything when you have Christ; He is all-sufficient.
9: There is nothing wrong with immorality.	3: 1-11	Get rid of sin and evil because you have been chosen by God to live a new life as a representative of the Lord Jesus.

51: 0: 3 – 1.3 = PT, Colossian Heresy – Gnosticism = Q: Throughout this letter Paul combats a heresy similar to *Gnosticism*. Gnostics believed that it took special knowledge to be accepted by God; for them, even for those who claimed to be Christians, Christ alone was not the way of salvation (1: 20). In his introductory comments in Colossians 1, therefore, Paul commended the Colossians for their faith, love, and hope – three main emphases of Christianity (1 Corin 13: 13). He deliberately omitted the word *knowledge* because of the “special knowledge” aspect of the heresy. It is not what we know that brings salvation, but whom we know. Knowing Christ is knowing God (2158, LAB).

51: 0: 3 – 1.4 = PT, Colossian Heresy – Gnosticism = Q: Gnosticism was a world-view that sought to explain everything on the assumption that matter was essentially evil... Paul had won his fight for freedom in Christ against the Judaizers, now he must fight philosophic speculation found in the cults of the Gnostics (Docetic and Cerinthian), Eleusinian mysteries, and Mithraism. ... In particular, there were false teachings about the person of Christ:

Docetics held that Jesus did not have a real human body, but only a phantom body and no real humanity;

Cerinthians admitted the humanity of the man Jesus, but claimed that the Christ was an *aeon* that came on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove and left him on the Cross so that only the man Jesus died (ca: Phil 2: 5-11).

... So then Colossians seems written expressly for our own day when so many are trying to rob Jesus Christ of his deity, as did the Gnostics then. Knowledge of Gnosticism is one of the keys to understanding Colossians (491, Robertson – WPNT).

51: 0: 4 – 1 = PT, Christian Living...

51: 0: 4 – 1.1 = PT, Christian Living = Q: Paul insisted that the believer’s union with Christ (3: 1-4) results in holy living. He outlined clear standards (3: 5-17) that prescribe attitudes that are to govern relationships within family and church. Leadership is to be exercised, but domination is unacceptable (1934, ASB).

51: 0: 4 – 1.2 = PT, Christian Living = Q: Chapters 3-4 are practical and show how the believer works out the preeminence of Christ in daily living. Because the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians were written about the same time, you will see parallels; but Ephesians emphasizes the body (the church), while Colossians emphasizes the Head of the body (Jesus Christ). The letters complement each other (782, Wiersbe – CCB).

51: 0: 5 – 1 = PT, Thanksgiving...

51: 0: 5 – 1.1 = Q: Note the emphasis on thanksgiving in Colossians (1: 3, 12; 2: 7; 3: 17; 4: 2). The more wonderful we see Jesus to be, the more we will be grateful to God for Him and His blessings (783, Wiersbe – CCB).

To whom....:

51: 0: 1 – 1 = To whom =

51: 0: 1 – 1.1 = To whom = Q: This letter was written to believers in Colosse. The church there had been planted by Paul's coworkers Epaphras (1: 7; 4: 12), who joined Paul while he was under house arrest in Rome (4: 12; Phm 23; ca Acts 28: 16-31), during which time the apostle likely wrote this letter (1933, ASB).

Where / Setting...

51: 0: 1 – 1 = Setting, General =

51: 0: 1 – 1.1 = Setting, General = Q: Similarities to Ephesians suggest that Paul wrote the two letters (Ephesians and Colossians) at nearly the same time. Colosse was in the Lycus valley, inland from Ephesus and not far from Laodicea, and Paul evidently sent out the letters to a number of churches in the area, with Ephesians perhaps being a circular letter... Paul was in prison at the time Colossians was written (4: 3) – most likely in Rome but possibly in Caesarea. A date of writing of about A.D. 60 seems probable (1933, ASB).

51: 0: 2 – 1 = Colosse, The Church...

51: 0: 2 – 1.1 = Colosse, The Church = Q: The church at Colosse was established on Paul's 3rd missionary journey, during his three years in Ephesus, not by Paul himself (2: 1) but by Epaphras (1: 7, 12-13), a native of Colosse and an evangelist in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis (c: 4: 13) (1935, ASB).

51: 0: 2 – 1.2* = Colosse, The Church = Q: Philemon was an active member of this church, as was Onesimus (Col 4: 9) (1935, ASB).

51: 0: 2 – 1.3* = Colosse, The Church = Q: Epaphras, one of Paul's converts, founded the church in Colosse (1: 7; 4: 12-13); Paul had never been there personally (2: 1). While imprisoned in Rome, Paul heard that false doctrines were being introduced in the church, so he wrote this letter to warn the believers and to establish them in the faith (782, Wiersbe – CCB).

51: 0: 2 – 1.4 = Colosse, The Church = Q: The church at Colosse was probably Gentile in composition. In 1: 21 Paul speaks of the Colossian Christians as having once been "alienated" from God and "hostile in the minds" – phrases he uses elsewhere to describe those who are not part of God's covenant with Israel. Then in 1: 27, he talks about making the mystery of God clear to the Gentiles; the reference is obviously to the Colossians. Finally in 3: 5-7, Paul lists their past sins, which are characteristic of Gentiles rather than Jews (1160, FCA).

51: 0: 3 – 1 = Colosse, The City...

51: 0: 3 – 1.1 = Colosse, The City = Q: About 100 miles west of Ephesus in the Lycus River Valley lay the city of Colosse. In Paul's time, it was located in the Roman province of Asia (in what today is Turkey). It was one of three major population centers that flourished in the region. Hierapolis and Laodicea (4: 13) stood on opposite sides of the Lycus River, about six miles apart, while Colosse straddled the river 12 miles upstream.

Since it was located on a major trade route from Ephesus, Colosse was considered a great city in the days of Xerxes, the Persian king (5th century B.C.). One hundred years later, it had developed into a prosperous commercial center on account of its weaving industry. In fact, "Colossian" came to mean a specific color of dyed wool.

By the time of Paul, however, Colosse's prominence had diminished; though its sister cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, were still prospering. Laodicea had become the seat of Roman government in the region, and Hierapolis was famous for its healing waters. But Colosse, when Paul wrote, was no longer even a city. In fact, Colosse was the least important town to which Paul ever wrote (1161, FCA).

51: 0: 4 – 1 = Colosse, The Religious Atmosphere/Setting...

51: 0: 4 – 1.1 = Colosse, The Religious Atmosphere/Setting = Q: A large number of Jews had lived in the region of Colosse, ever since the 2nd century B.C. when Antiochus III brought 2,000 Jews from Mesopotamia and Babylon to settle there. By Paul's time there may have been as many as 50,000 Jews living in the region and practicing their religion. However, their synagogue had a "reputation for laxity and openness to speculation drifting in from the Hellenistic world" (Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon: New Century Bible Commentary*, p. 18 – 1160, FCA).

51: 0: 4 – 1.2* = Colosse, The Religious Atmosphere/Setting = Q: 50,000 Jews living in the region and practicing their religion... But freethinking Judaism was not the major religious force in the Lycus Valley. The Greek religions also flourished there. The fertility cult of Cybele was highly popular; it was characterized by ecstasy and excessive enthusiasm throughout the Roman Empire, the worship of Isis, Apollo, Dionysus, Asclepius and other gods was widespread. The cult of Mithras, a mystery religion based on astrology and sacrifice, abounded in Colosse. *The church at Colosse, therefore, grew up in an atmosphere that blended a variety of religious traditions that may have been sources of heresy within the church* (1160, FCA).

Key Verse(s):

... Colossians 1: 15-20

15: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16: For in him all things were created:

things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17: He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18: And he is the head of the body, the church;

he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,

so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19: For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20: and through him to reconcile to himself all things,

whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

... **Colossians 2: 9-10**

9: For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

10: and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

Key People:

51: 0 – 1 = People = Q: Paul, Timothy, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras (2156, LAB).

51: 0 – 1 = People, Paul = Q:

51: 0 – 2.1 = People, Epaphras = Q: The church at Colosse was established on Paul's 3rd missionary journey, during his three years in Ephesus, not by Paul himself (2: 1) but by Epaphras (1: 7, 12-13), a native of Colosse and an evangelist in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis (c: 4: 13). Paul loved and admired him, calling him "our dear fellow servant," "a faithful minister of Christ" and a "fellow prisoner" (Phm 23). Epaphras was the one who told Paul at Rome about the Colossian church problem and thereby stimulated Paul to write this letter (1935, ASB).

51: 0 – 2.2 = People, Epaphras = Q: The name Epaphras is a shortened form of Epaphroditus (from "Aphrodite," the Greek goddess of love), suggesting that he was a convert from paganism. He is not the Epaphroditus of Philippians 2:24 and 4: 18. Archippus also exercised a fruitful ministry in Colosse (Col 4: 17; Phm 2). Philemon was an active member of this church, as was Onesimus (Col 4: 9) (1935, ASB).

Key Places:

51: 0 – 0 = Places = Q: Colosse, Laodicea (4: 15, 16) (2156, LAB).

51: 0 – 1 = Places, Colosse, The City...

51: 0 – 1.1 = Setting, Colosse = Q: Colosse was known for its soft wool and dyed cloth. The site housing the city's ruins is located near the modern-day Turkish village of Honaz (1935, ASB).

51: 0 – 1.2 = Colosse = Q: Colosse (or Colossae) was located in the Roman province of Asia Minor in the Lycus valley about 120 miles (194 km) east of Ephesus in today's southern Turkey... Colosse, standing on the most important trade route from Ephesus to the Euphrates, was a place of great importance from early times.

The Persian king Xerxes visited in 481 B.C., as did Cyrus the Younger in 401. By the time of Paul the city may have diminished somewhat in significance. Its economy depended upon trade and textiles, and particularly on a distinctive purple wool called colossinus (1935, ASB).

51: 0 – 1.3 = Colosse = Q: Colosse lost its importance due to a change of the road system, after which Laodicea became the greater city.... During the 7th & 8th centuries its open position exposed it to the terrible raids... During the 12th century A.D. the Turks destroyed the city. Archaeologists have unearthed ruins of an ancient church (1935, ASB).

51: 0 – 1.4 = Colosse = Q: The city of Colosse was 100 miles east of Ephesus on the Lycus River. It was not as influential as the nearby city of Laodicea, but as a trading center it was a crossroads for ideas and religions. Colosse had a large Jewish population – many Jews had fled there when they were forced out of Jerusalem under the persecutions of Antiochus III and IV, almost 200 years before Christ. The church in Colosse had been founded by Epaphras (1: 7), one of Paul's converts. Paul had not yet visited this church. His purpose in writing was to refute heretical teachings about Christ that had been causing confusion among the Christians there (2158, LAB).

Unique / Special Features:

51: 0: 1 – 1 = Unique Features...

Structure: Chapters

51: 0 – 0.1 = Structure / Outlines...

51: 0 – 1 = Structure / Outline – (1335, NIV-CS)

51: 0 – 1.1* = Structure / Outline = Q: Chapters 1-2 are doctrinal and present Jesus Christ as the preeminent Creator, Savior and Lord. Chapters 3-4 are practical and show how the believer works out the preeminence of Christ in daily living. Because the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians were written about the same time, you will see parallels; but Ephesians emphasizes the body (the church), while Colossians emphasizes the Head of the body (Jesus Christ). The letters complement each other (782, Wiersbe – CCB).

