

## Colossians – Overview

**Author:** The apostle Paul. Paul had been a Pharisee who persecuted the church before God saved him on the road to Damascus. His life is documented, to a limited extent, in Acts chapters 7 through 9 and chapters 11 through 28. Some of his early years as a Christian are also recalled by Paul in Galatians 1:11-2:14. He received his ministry to the Gentiles from God and he received the message of the gospel directly from God.

**When and Where:** The book was written while Paul was in prison. The question is, which prison? The answer to this question dictates the date of the book. The two main views are that the prison was either in Ephesus or Rome. If the prison was in Ephesus, while Paul was in Ephesus for two years (Acts 19:8-10), then the book was written in the early 50s. The most commonly held view by conservatives is that the prison was in Rome (Acts 27, 28). If Paul wrote from prison in Rome then the date of writing is 60-61 AD. Some date it as early as 58 AD in Rome.

**Recipients:** The primary recipients of the book were the believers in Colossae. The letter was also to be read in the church at Laodicea. Paul had not planted the church in Colossae. He learned of the church through fellow workers, especially through Epaphras who planted the church. Colossae was in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, about 120 miles east of Ephesus. It was land locked. The church was a mix of Gentile and Jewish believers.

**Purpose:** Paul wrote to the Colossians because of false teaching which had surfaced in the church. At the heart of the problem was that Jesus Christ's person and work were not fully understood and appreciated. There was a Jewish influence because Paul spoke of all believer's spiritual circumcision. By implication, there was therefore no need for physical circumcision. Paul also told them not to adhere to the ceremonial law of keeping new moons and observing the feasts. The Jewish influence did not rise to the level of abuse that Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians. The fiery rhetoric of Galatians is not found in the letter to the Colossians.

The false teaching also had a Gentile influence. There appeared to be some who claimed to have special knowledge which others did not have. They claimed to experience God in a much deeper way through visions, self denial (do not handle, do not taste, do not touch), and possibly worship of angels. Paul corrected this erroneous view by telling the Colossians that Christ is all sufficient for knowing God. Paul clearly declared that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Christ alone can reconcile sinful man to God who is holy. Christ is the way to the Father. Any attempt to come to the Father apart from Christ misses the mark.