

## Books Not Book

### Introduction

Scripture "is God's house and God wants his children to play there"

We are learning how to study the Bible by studying Colossians. We learned last week about a general approach to study....4 C's that help us approach Scripture.

Content...What do I see? Not interpreting...just noticing for later.

Context- What did this verse mean to the original audience

The infant church was itself developing in the midst of conflict and confusion. Paul's writing reflects this; his letters are full of life, each prompted by the problems of a specific people and by Paul's desire to send practical advice to them in difficult times. We make a mistake in supposing Paul intended to write his letters as "books of the New Testament," addressing an amorphous congregation of future believers rather than real people in his own day.

In preaching or teaching from Paul's letters, we must keep in mind that he did not write letters as academic briefs, devoid of passion and composed of unchanging ideas and universal truths for a fixed, permanent biblical canon. His letters always comprise a practical theology, for the apostle adapts the unchanging convictions of his gospel to the actual problems facing a particular congregation in practical and concrete ways. Paul is an itinerant missionary, not a professor of biblical studies!

Connection- What does the truth of this verse mean today? How do I bring this forward?

Conduct- Now that I understand this truth how does the Holy Spirit want to change me?

### Date Written

This is one of Paul's Prison Letters. He is at the end of his life. If you remember he was arrested in Judea and demanded to make his case to Caesar. Since he was a Roman Citizen, he had that option.

Paul has spent his entire ministry life trying to get to Rome. Rome was the epicenter of the Gentile World. All roads led to Rome and the sun it was said never set on the Roman Empire.

Like an aspiring actress trying to get to Hollywood, or a country singer trying to get to Nashville.....A first century evangelist of the Gospel of Jesus had to go to Rome. PHOTO 1

All trade routes went through Rome. Ideas from all over the world were explored and discussed there. It was the place of the great thinkers. If you wanted to change the World....change the world's thoughts...the world's religions...you came to Rome.

Paul had written a letter to Rome and to the believers there. That letter reads like a defense of the faith. The Book of Romans is Paul's explanation of the essentials of what it means to follow Jesus. If you want to understand the Christian faith, the reasons behind the things Jesus did and the future eternal impact of your beliefs read Romans. Or listen to the series that we did several years ago.

So let's think about the dates here.

Paul took three missionary journeys that we have studied in our series on Acts.

Journey Number One was in 45 AD. It was a short loop. PHOTO 2

Journey Number Two was in 49-51 AD. Longer and much broader loop. PHOTO 2

Journey Number Three 52-57 Almost a repeat of Journey 2. PHOTO 3

Notice for our purposes that none of these journeys included a trip to Rome. Paul had planned to go there but he was prevented because he had to bring funds back to Jerusalem 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus, His followers were being persecuted in Jerusalem by the Jews. They were ostracized. They could not work. They were not allowed in the synagogue. Pastors often idealize the early church in Acts because they shared everything...they make it sound like a wonderful commune. But in reality, it was more like an isolated Covid lockdown of the followers of Jesus. No one would hire them, no one would feed them, they were not allowed in any Jewish festivals, events, or social gatherings.

Most followers of Jesus in Jerusalem fled the persecution and took the gospel to the world. Paul felt like it was part of his mission to collect money from the Gentile believers and bring it back to Jerusalem

His missionary journeys were primarily focused on spreading the gospel to the gentiles, but it was also a fund raising tour.

Romans 15:22–24 (ESV) 22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Toward the end of his letter to the Romans in 57 AD....Paul is only 500 miles from Rome. He has dreamed his whole ministry life about preaching in Rome. He says his mission plants essentially no longer need him. Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica, Corinth...all doing well.

Paul tells them that he hopes to see them on his way to Spain. Sounds like his third journey is going to Europe. He is probably only two weeks or so away from Rome.

No doubt the Romans were beginning to prepare for the arrival of Paul in Rome. He would have been famous by now. He would also have been infamous by now. And Rome loved controversy...particularly intellectual controversy.

But then Paul drops the bomb on them.

Romans 15:25–29 (ESV) 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. 28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. 29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Paul is telling them...I will take this money back to Jerusalem and then come to you on my 4th Mission Trip on my way to Spain.

So when the seas allowed the return to Judea Paul leaves in the year 57AD.

Now we know that there was never an official 4th Missionary Journey to Spain. Instead, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem...no big surprise there....Jews were being persecuted and Paul would have been a prime target for the Jews. Paul knew that...everyone knew that.

On the way back Paul stops to see the Elders from the Church in Ephesus. They met him on the beach and prayed with him.

Acts 20:22–25 (ESV) 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

Acts 20:36–38 (ESV) 36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Paul's goal is to get to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost that year. Spring of 57. He goes to the Temple on that day and is immediately arrested.

Verse 30 sounds a lot like what these very same leaders did to Jesus just 25 years earlier... Acts 21:30–36 (ESV) 30 Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

From this point on, Paul is under arrest until his death. At his trial his argument was so convincing, that they probably would have let him go....but He appealed to Caesar...He demanded as a Roman citizen to plead his case in Rome. Paul would finally get to go to Rome and preach the Gospel. Do you remember when Pilate turned to the crowd and said that Jesus had done nothing wrong?

Acts 26:30–32 (ESV) 30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. 31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

The year is now AD60. Paul is taken in chains, by boat to Rome...Shipwreck at Malta...interesting story but we must leave it...and he arrives in Rome.

Acts 28:14–16 (ESV) 14 There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. 15 And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. 16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

We call Paul's time in Rome as his prison time...It preaches well...but he was a Roman Citizen...under house arrest and could go almost anywhere he wanted if the guard stayed with him. He could have visitors, he could receive gifts, and we know he could write letters.

Acts 28:23 (ESV) 23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Not exactly Alcatraz.

Acts 28:30–31 (ESV) 30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

It is during this time of house arrest that Paul writes his "Prison Letters" It was Paul's Roman Citizen ship that allowed him the freedom to preach in Rome. Otherwise he probably would have been fed to the lions at the Colosseum. But make no mistake about it. He was and he knew that his time was to end. Paul was facing a death sentence. He would die at the hand of Nero most likely in 64 AD when Nero torched Rome and blamed the Christians for it.

Do you remember what book we are studying? It is the book of Colossians. Did you hear me talk about Colossians at all in the last 15 minutes? Nope...except to say that Paul wrote the book from Rome in about 62 AD.

The Bible Study Lesson for today is this....**No book stands alone.** They are all interconnected. This letter to those at Colossae has to be understood in the context of the Historical Record of Paul's Journeys (Acts) and The letter Paul wrote to the place he now is (Romans). Let me share with you is revealed by studying Acts for instance along with Colossians. You may have noticed on the Mission Trip Maps....something odd....I never showed you where Colossae was.....**MAP**

Paul did not go to Colossae on his first missionary journey....didn't stop by on his second...and never made it there on his third. Paul had never been to Colossae...Never planted a church there...Never converted a single gentile there...Yet here we have him writing a letter to people he doesn't know....have never met...and Yet Paul says that he constantly prays for them.

That could be an important thing to observe before we dive in to this letter. This letter is different than Ephesians, Corinthians, and Galatians...Paul had spent time in those places. They knew him and he knew them. There was a level of trust and understanding already established before the letter was written.

In Galatians, for instance, Paul knows them well and they know him well. He is upset with them....skips the pleasantries at the beginning of the letter and jumps right in after them...

Galatians 1:6–7 (ESV) 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Can you imagine if Paul had written that rebuke to people he had never met before?

When read a book of the Bible we need to learn everything that we can about the context from the other books in the Bible first. Then we need to read the book and see what we can learn from within that book itself.

Colossians 1:6–9 (ESV) 6 As indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Colossians 2 (ESV) 1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

So..Paul doesn't know them.....But he knows their pastor...Epaphras...and he has told Paul about the church at Colossae. That is a name that we need to study and pay attention to.

Colossians 4:10–13 (ESV) 10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

Ok we learn that Epaphras is not Jewish....he is a Gentile...He is one of them....and He has worked hard for them...in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

So we dive a bit deeper...Where are these places?

#### Map

Colossae doesn't even make the map. Philadelphia does....

Ephesus, Laodicea and Philadelphia we know from the 7 letters to 7 churches in Revelation.

So who is Epaphras and how does he know Paul? Why is he with Paul in Rome and not in Colossae with his church? When was Paul near Colossae?

Let's go back to our missionary journey maps. Colossae is near Ephesus. If they were going to meet it was probably during time when Paul was near there.

Didn't go that far on the first journey....Didn't go near it on the second journey...came to Ephesus by sea on that trip....Most likely Epaphras connected with Paul on the Third Journey **MAP** ...and then came back home and established his church. But why is Epaphras in Rome and how did he know Paul was there?

Ephesus....the leaders there...we just spoke of them...Remember? Paul stopped by there on his third...yes third journey...and told them that he was going to Jerusalem. They knew he would be persecuted. Epaphras was not an elder at Ephesus....but he knew every one of them. How do we know he was not one of their elders?

**Acts 20:25 (ESV) 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.**

So maybe Epaphras had learned that Paul was imprisoned and went to see him. Remember Paul was imprisoned there for two years....

Acts 28:30–31 (ESV) 30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Ok so...Here is what we have learned thus far.

The year is 60-64 AD Paul is under house arrest in Rome...He is preaching the Gospel, receiving guests and writing letters.

A man Paul knows named Epaphras has come and told Paul about the church that he planted in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.

What did Epaphras tell Paul that would move Paul to make the effort to write a letter? Paul almost always wrote to encourage and challenge people in his letters. What was wrong in Colossae?

One of the things we will need to look for as we approach this book is to try to learn what concerned Paul about this church.

In addition, we will learn that this letter is delivered to them by a man named Tychicus and Onesimus....not Epaphras

So what do we know about Colossae, the city itself?

The ancient city of Colosse was located in the fertile valley forged by the river Lycus in the Asian province of Phrygia. MAP Centuries earlier, Colosse had served as a center for the valley's prosperous wool and textile industries; its place on a major trade route only enhanced its economic advantage. But by the time of Paul its influence had waned. Neighboring Laodicea had replaced Colosse in economic and political importance, while Hierapolis, some fifteen miles away, had grown in prominence as a tourist town, famed for its mineral baths and as a sanctuary for members of the prominent Phrygian mystery cult. Hierapolis is Holy City in Greek.

In all likelihood, then, this letter first addressed a small congregation in a rather unimpressive town.

What prompted Paul to write a letter to these people? What concerned him?

Although the Lycus valley was a well-known haven for Diaspora Jews, apparently Epaphras's ministry was exclusively to Gentiles and was viewed by Paul as an extension of his own Gentile mission. So the specific spiritual crisis addressed in this letter must be understood against the general background of Paul's controversial Gentile mission.

Both from Paul's writings and from Luke's Acts, we know that Paul's evangelistic ministry provoked the wrath of "official" Judaism and made untenable the already fragile relationship between Judaism and the first followers of Christ. Even within the earliest church, some Jewish Christians were offended that Paul's evangelistic mission did not require Gentile converts to jump through the same hoops that Judaism required of its Gentile converts.

Jewish believers had another concern...Without Torah (Law) and tradition (i.e., interpretations of Torah) to provide social and spiritual boundaries, Jewish believers were worried that Christianity as a whole would fail to remain a distinctive community, covenanted with God for salvation, and would be absorbed into the pagan world.

According to Paul, all believers, whether Jew or not, are now reunited with God in Christ Jesus. Moreover, Paul considers obedience to the dietary and religious traditions of Judaism unnecessary for converted Gentiles: God calls Gentiles out of the world for salvation by the preaching of Christ. To depend on Jewish tradition rather than Christ's dependable work is to deny the singular significance of his cross and invalidate the empty tomb.

The more specific crisis facing the first readers of Colossians is the relationship between Judaism and Pauline Christianity in the town of Colossae, if not also throughout the Lycus valley.

During Paul's 3rd Journey....He spent a lot of time in this area. He was mainly at Ephesus. We read about this time in Acts 19.

Acts 19:1–7 (ESV) 1 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." 4 And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

Acts 19:8–10 (ESV) 8 And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul was in this area for over two years. He was kicked out of the Synagogue in Ephesus but he stayed there teaching in the Hall of Tyrannus for two years. How insignificant is Colossae? Paul wasn't just passing through and missed them...He was there for two years and never heard about them! But we are told, they knew of him....."10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

So as we approach this text for the first time, we have a number of questions to consider. Things to look for as we focus on the Content. PHOTO

Why did someone as important as Paul write to this seemingly insignificant group of believers?

What was Paul so concerned about that he wrote one of his prison letters to Colossae?

Why is Epaphras not in Colossae dealing with the problems and why is does Paul seem to go over the top validating him to his own congregation? Is there tension there?

What about this growing Holy City nearby? PHOTO What is this Phrygian mystery cult? How is that influencing these relatively isolated believers?

Why doesn't Paul send this letter back to them with Epaphrus? Why is Epaphrus remaining in Rome if his church is in peril? Why does he stay in Rome praying for them instead of coming home and ministering to them?

The church at Ephesus is relatively solid...why not send someone from there to intervene?

What questions do you have?

Read Colossians

Now remember we are learning how to study the Bible....Note that thus far the only source we have used is the Bible itself. Key Point for us. **Scripture interprets Scripture.** Most of what we need to know to understand God's word is already in His Word. We may just have to look for it.

**PHOTO** Next week we continue our study of this Letter written to the people in Colossae. This small insignificant town in the foothills near Ephesus and Philadelphia. You have the background now to begin interrogating the text. Happy Hunting. Let' Pray.