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VOLUME 15

Colossians

1:1-2

EXEGESIS

English Edition



Pericope 01



"Summary Conclusion"

Introduction:

Exegesis, as used in the BIC project, seeks to develop an historical understanding of the meaning of the scripture text.¹ The guiding question is What did the

¹For a listing of recommended publications of secondary sources on Colossians see New Testament Exegesis Bibliography - 2021 published in the *Denver Journal*, vol. 24 - 2021, of the Denver Seminary, edited by members of the New Testament Department, Craig L. Blomberg, William W. Klein and David L Mathewson. These sources represent an evangelical perspective.

COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON

Barth, Markus and Blanke, Helmut. *Colossians* (AB). New York: Doubleday, 1994.

Barth, Markus and Blanke, Helmut. *The Letter to Philemon* (ECC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Beale, Greg K. *Colossian and Philemon* (BECNT). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.

*Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

*Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Letter to Philemon* (AB). New York: Doubleday, 2000.

*Pao, David W. *Colossians and Philemon* (ZECNT). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Wilson, Robert McL. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians* (ICC). London: T & T Clark, 2005.

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Foster, Paul. *Colossians* (BNTC). London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016.

*McKnight, Scot. *The Letter to the Colossians* (NICNT). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

*McKnight, Scot. *The Letter to Philemon* (NICNT). Grand

text mean to those who first heard it read in a gathered assembly of believers? Of course, absolute certainty of recovering this meaning fully is not possible. But by utilization of several interpretive approaches, relative certainty of most of the likely meaning can be achieved. The variety of angles revolve around careful analysis of both the historical and the literary dimensions embedded into the scripture text. The conclusions drawn from such analysis establish the boundaries for making modern applications of the text's meaning for our day. Thus the thought flow must always move forward from exegesis to exposition. To reverse it means eisogesis, i.e., a false reading of modern assumptions back into an ancient text.

Now let's dig into the text in its ancient setting. Here is the original reading of the text of Col. 1:1-2,

1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ* Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς 2 τοῖς ἐν * Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ* , * χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν* .

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

*Moo, Douglas J. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (PNTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

—
Bird, Michael F. *Colossians and Philemon* (NCCS). Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009.

*Garland, David E. *Colossians/Philemon* (NIVAC). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Gupta, Nijay K. *Colossians* (SHBC). Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2013.



This is taken from the Nestle-Aland *Greek New Testament*, 28th edition. The footnoting marks symbolized by *etc. reference the notes that are contained in the companion volume containing the more technical analysis of the wording of the scripture text, *Novum Testamentum Graece Apparatus*.² More about that later in the discussion below. The scripture text forms the prewriting of the letter from Paul to the church at Colossae. A literal translation of the original Greek Text reads as follows:

1 Paul apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God and Timothy the brother, 2 to the among the Colossians holy and faithful brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God Father of us.

Now we are ready to put on our analytical glasses and take a close look at the text from the perspectives embedded in the following outline of exegesis.

1.0 Historical

With this piece of scripture text, we come face to face with some important historical questions. Where did this writing come from? Who is responsible for its composition? Can we be sure that it correctly represents what was written in the original composition stage? Such questions raise historical issues connected to a writing going all the way back to the beginning century of Christianity. Given the historical

1,2 *Κολασσαϊς Ι Κ Ρ Ψ 075. 6. 33. 81. 104. 326. 614. 629. 630. 1241^s. 1505. 1739. 1881 pm sy (bo)

†txt X B D F G L 365. 1175. 2464 pm sa

†Ιησου Α Δ* F G 33. 104. 629 lat (sy^p) sa^{ms} bo^{pt}

† και κυριου Ιησου Χριστου Χ Α C F G Ι 075. 104. 365. 630. 1241^s. 2464 m it v^{gcl} (sy^{h**}) bo; Hier

† και Ιησου Χριστου του κυριου ημων Ρ

†txt B D K L Ψ 33. 81. 1175. 1505. 1739. 1881 ar m v^{gstww} sy^p sa; Ambst

nature of the Christian religion, answering such questions becomes very important to the credibility of what the text says.

1.1 External

When looking at an ancient text such as this one, the historical aspects have to do with how was the text originally written, and then has the subsequent centuries of copying these words correctly preserved the original writing? Thus the compositional and transcriptional angles need to be analyzed first. In the larger concern of biblical interpretation, the external historical angle centers on establishing the specific wording of the text written in antiquity. Without confidence in the specific wording, interpretive conclusions drawn from the text can never achieve a satisfactory level of certainty and confidence that our religious beliefs do have a solid foundation.

1.1.1 Compositional

In order to grasp these words correctly, we must understand them against the larger background of similar writings found in the first century world. Somewhat anticipating the Literary Analysis below, the form of the passage is the Praiscriptio of an ancient letter. This identifies the scripture text as part of an ancient letter.³ The let-

³For a very helpful bibliographical listings of publications in the field of NT epistolary research, see *Bibliography: New Testament Letters, Supplement to Introducing the New Testament*, 2nd ed., 2018, by Mark Allan Powell.

11.1 Bibliography: New Testament Letters
On the Production of Letters in the Ancient World
Aune, David E. *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. LEC. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987.



ter in the first century world was a major vehicle of

Klauck, Hans-Josef. *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006.

Malherbe, Abraham J. *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*. SBLSPS 19. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1973.

Especially helpful on the different types of letters and their distinctive functions.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995.

Covers the technical aspects of how letters were written and delivered.

Richards, E. Randolph. *Paul and First-Century Letter-Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

———. *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*. WUNT 2/42. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991.

A study on the role of the amanuensis.

Stowers, Stanley K. *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. LEC. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.

On Different Parts of a Letter

Supplement to Introducing the New Testament, 2nd ed. © 2018 by Mark Allan Powell. All rights reserved.

Overview of Ancient and Early Christian Letters

Aune, David E. "Letters in the Ancient World" and "Early Christian Letters and Homilies." In *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, 158–225. LEC. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987.

The Thanksgiving

O'Brien, Peter T. *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*. NovTSup 49. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Schubert, Paul. *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings*. BZNW 20. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939.

communication between virtually all segments of

The Body

White, John Lee. *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter*. SBLDS 2. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972.

The Closing

Weima, Jeffrey A. D. *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*. JSNTSup 101. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994.

Prayers

Wiles, Gordon P. *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul*. SNTSMS 24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

On the Question of Pseudepigraphy

Carson, Don. "Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy." In *The Dictionary of New Testament Background*, edited by Craig A. Bloomberg

Supplement to Introducing the New Testament, 2nd ed. © 2018 by Mark Allan Powell. All rights reserved. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, 856–64. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Charlesworth, James C. "Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy." In *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 5:540–41. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

deSilva, David A. "Pseudepigraphy and the New Testament Canon." In *Introduction to the New Testament*, 685–89. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Donelson, Lewis R. *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*. HUT 22. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986.

Dunn, James D. G. "Pseudonymity." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, 977–84. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Meade, David G. *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority*



daily life. The setting could be family communication between parents and children. It could be among businessmen. It could be a military communique to troops in the field. The average length of such letters was considerably shorter than what we find in Paul's letters. But forms were rather well established at the point of basic elements. Stock phrases show up with frequency in particular segments of the ancient letter. The similarity of form with different scenarios does make possible the classification of these letters by the different situations prompting them. A business letter is clearly distinguishable from a personal letter to a family member, even though in basic form the two are very similar.

The broad genre of letter divided itself into four basic elements of each letter: the Praescriptio, the Proem, the body, and the Conclusio. As long as the scroll form was used, the Praescriptio served as the ID of the letter by being written on the outside of the letter. But with the emergence of the codex format for these documents, the Praescriptio became the initial unit of the letter that was but one document among several that could be contained in a single document. The ID function of the letter Praescriptio centered in the three basic elements of identifying the letter (1) sender, and the letter (2) recipient(s), along with a (3) greeting that affirmed a close connection between sender and recipients. The nature of the connection was indicated in the first two elements by personal names (basic) and descriptive references (secondary). The ancient Greek and Roman letters went from **sender to recipients with a greeting. But the Semitic in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition.** WUNT 39. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986.

Wilder, Terry L. *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception: An Inquiry into Intention and Reception*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004

letters of the Middle East began with designation of recipients followed by specification of the sender. Yet the Semitic pattern expands the greeting beyond the simple Hellenistic health wish.⁴ When written on the outside of the scroll at the point of the seal, the identificational function of the Praescriptio was especially prominent. The recipients of Paul's letters are mostly identified by geographical references rather than by personal names (only Timothy, Titus and Philemon). Also the letters are addressed to groups, rather than single individuals as with Timothy, Titus and Philemon. The church at Colossae is addressed to the **among the Colossians...brothers**, using the plural. But First Corinthians has to the church of God which is in Corinth, the singular. In both instances, the physical reality was multiple groups of house churches scattered across the city. There were no single churches which gathered in one place from across the city. The closest thing to this would have been a gathering of the individual house church leaders in one place. This diversity of reference must be kept in mind when seeking to make applications of the ideas found in the text. The unitary implication of the singular number underscores the keen sense of oneness felt in early Christianity.

It is in the secondary qualifications of recipients

²An example of this oriental model with its twofold structure, including a greeting in the form of a direct address, is the edict of Nebuchadnezzar which opens with the words "King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth: peace be multiplied to you! ([εἰρήνη ὑμῖν πληθυνθείη]" Dan 3:18 [4:1]; cf. Apoc Bar 78:2). [Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 1.]



and senders that one gains the fuller picture of those involved in the composition and reading of the letters. From an application perspective, it will be primarily here that timeless spiritual truths will emerge from the text. These expansion elements of the text will fill out the picture with historical references. And often spiritual qualities will be the thrust of the secondary elements.

The importance of letters in religious circles is affirmed by the Jewish leaders in Rome who indicated they had not received any hostile letters about Paul from Jewish leaders in Judea (Acts 28:21), nor any oral report about the apostle. Clearly implicit in their statement is the acceptance of such letters as carrying substantial weight. Similarly, Paul the Pharisee sought letters from the High Priest and elders in Jerusalem that would have given him authority to arrest any Christians that he might find in Damascus (Acts 9:2; 22:5). The letter could assume the voice of its sender with all the authority the sender possessed. It is this attitude toward the letter which prompted the early recipients to begin making copies of the letter sent from Paul a leader in the Christian movement who claimed apostolic authority for his words. One distinctive is the stance of Paul for his authoritative words. His words possessed significant authority not because they were his words, but because they came from God and reflected the will of God for the letter recipients.

1.1.2 Transcriptional

Over the subsequent centuries these words were copied by countless individuals initially 'laymen' and later on professional scribes. The technical field of study, labeled Textual Criticism, centers in New Testament studies on tracing the process of making copies

of the original text until the invention of the printing press in the late 1400s. Until then the copies were hand written copies. Large numbers of these copies were made during the first several centuries. The pace of copying slowed down considerably in Western Christianity around eight hundred AD by which time the Latin Vulgate had become the dominant version of New Testament scriptures. Study of the Greek New Testament increasingly became the work of the monks and other specialists. This would be the case until the 1800s when renewed interest in the Greek text exploded in parallel to the emergence of both the modern missions movement and the biblical archaeology movement.

The copying of Col. 1:1-2 reflects a very stable text form with little variations of wording. The only place of variation which would impact the translation of the passage is the addition of *καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* after *ἡμῶν* so that the text here matches the readings in Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; and Phlm 3.⁵ The text then reads from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Some additional witnesses add a second *ἡμῶν* to balance out the reading to our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. These all show up as late witnesses and seem to be obvious additions well beyond the time of the original composition of the letter. Because these later readings show up in the Textus Receptus Greek text, they will also be found in modern English translations such as the KJV

⁵Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 410.



which heavily depend on the Textus Receptus.⁶

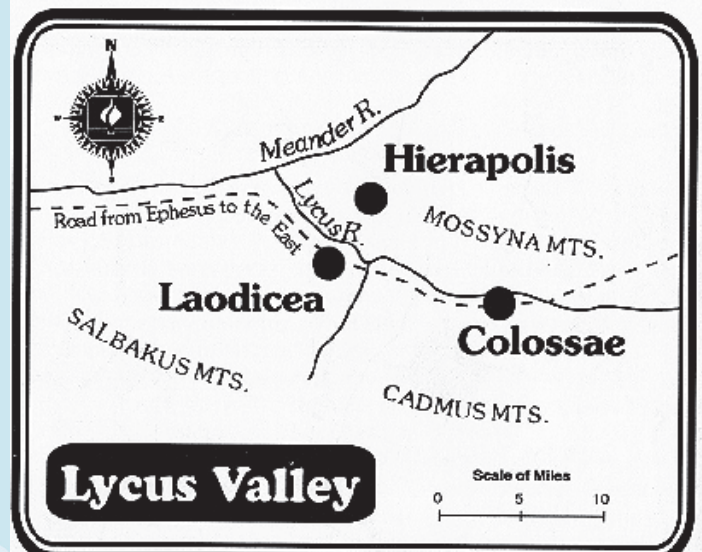
1.2 Internal

What is labeled as Internal History has to do with stories told or implied inside the text itself about events happening at the time of the writing of the document. In this passage the people have to do with the believers living in and around the ancient city of Colossae. The 'when' question, following the 'who' and 'where' ones, is more difficult to determine. Yet more difficult still is the 'what' question relating to events taking place which prompted the writing of the letter. Here the secondary modifications provide the bulk of internal insight for understanding the recipients of the letter. The use of personal names Paul and Timothy provide most of the understanding of the senders of the letter. Clues from the larger context of the letter itself stand as sources for the when and where questions. Particularly helpful are the final greetings from the Conclusio in 4:7-18.

1.2.1 People

Textus Receptus (Latin: "received text") refers to all printed editions of the Greek New Testament from Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum omne* (1516) to the 1633 Elzevir edition.^[1] It was the most commonly used text type for Protestant denominations.

The biblical *Textus Receptus* constituted the translation-base for the original German Luther Bible, the translation of the New Testament into English by William Tyndale, the King James Version, the Spanish Reina-Valera translation, the Czech Bible of Kralice, and most Reformation-era New Testament translations throughout Western and Central Europe. The text originated with the first printed Greek New Testament, published in 1516, a work undertaken in Basel by the Dutch Catholic scholar, priest and monk Desiderius Erasmus. ["Textus Receptus," Wikipedia, accessed July 20, 2022]



Two individuals are specified as senders of the letter, Παῦλος, Paul, and Τιμόθεος, Timothy. Christian tradition has uniformly understood Paul as Saul of Tarsus who came to know Christ in his conversion experience on the Damascus road. The adherence to the form in the traditional letters of Paul further cements the identity of this sender as Paul the apostle. At minimal, it is written in his name. At best, he is the actual author of the letter.



265 BC - 225 BC
Seleucus II Callinicus

In the modern era of interpretive history, questions have been raised about the authenticity of the letter. But the defense of the Pauline authorship of the letter is very persuasive.⁷ The position

⁵"In modern times an increasing number of scholars have attributed it to an early follower, but Pauline authorship has been equally strongly defended, noting the similarities of the personal details with those in *Philemon (which virtually all critics regard as authentic)." [F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*



taken in BIC is of Pauline authorship. The name Παῦλος shows up only twice more in the letter. In 1:23, “I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.” And at the very end of the letter in 4:18, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.” These provide further insight into this Paul. He is a servant of the Gospel which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. At the end of the letter the apostle signals the personal writing of only the “greeting” of the letter, which is found in 4:7-18. This reveals the following of a typical pattern of oral dictation of the contents of the letter to a writing secretary. Additionally some first person singular sections add more light on the sender of the letter. For example, 1:24-29 stress the intense suffering of Paul for the cause of the Gospel.

The second ‘sender’ of the letter is Timothy. The personal name, with the literal meaning of “honoring God,” Τιμόθεος identifies the young man who became a part of Paul’s traveling group at Lystra on the second missionary journey (cf. Acts 16:1) and remained at Paul’s side the rest of Paul’s life. Acts 20:4 mentions seven different men who traveled with Paul at times. But Timothy is mentioned most often among these men. He is mentioned as a co-sender in 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; and 1-2 Thess. 1:1. He is named as letter recipient in 1 Tim. 1:2 and 2 Tim. 1:2 while serving in Ephesus. As a co-sender of five letters of Paul, he most likely served as the writing secretary who was so named by the apostle. As such he also most likely carried the letters to their destinations and then read them to the various gathered house church groups. He would have been the ideal person for the assembled groups to ask questions of in order to understand everything contained in the

(Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 381.]

letters. Eventually questions came, as 2 Pet. 3:16 indicates, “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand...”

While Paul is further identified as Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God’s will,⁸ Timothy is identified as καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός, and Timothy, our brother. The use of the Greek article ὁ could be translated either by ‘our brother’ or as ‘my brother.’ The close proximity of the plural ἡμῶν, our, in 1:2 argues for the plural understanding implied here as well. Whether Timothy is alluded to in the first person plural sections of the letter, “we” depends entirely on the context in which “we” is used. The first person plural pronoun can denote the (a) speaker and his listeners, or, as here, (b) just Paul and Timothy as the named senders, or (c) merely Paul himself in the so-called editorial we usage. The view that the article is functioning as a first person plural possessive pronoun here would strongly favor ‘we’ as including both Paul and his targeted readers / listeners to this letter. Very similar is Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός, Timothy our brother, in 2 Cor. 1:1. When Τιμόθεος is rarely modified in direct connection to Paul, 1 Thess. 3:2 would be typical, Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Timothy, our brother and God’s co-worker in the Gospel of Christ.

⁸Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, Fifth Revised Edition. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Col 1:1.



1.2.2 Places

The geographical term in vv. 1-2 is the personal reference τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς,⁹ the among the Colossians.... The people in the town are the focal point of the reference. Among the residents of this small town there resided some saints and believers. And the letter is addressed to these folks. The town of Colossae was located in the Lycus Riv-er Valley. Two other cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea, were located not far from Colossae. The history of the three cities is closely tied together. Colossae was in a growth pattern until either 61 or 64 AD when an earthquake destroyed much of the town. Very little archaeological work has been done beyond identifying the location of the town. The subsequent rebuilding of the city was very slow and was never completely rebuilt. Laodicea gradually became the primary town in the valley. The valley was a little over a hundred miles east of the coastal city of Ephe-sus. The valley achieved importance largely because of the conjunction of major north/south and east/west trade routes intersecting one another in the valley. The Jewish population of the valley was fair-ly substantial coming out of the extensive migration into the province of Asia during the earlier reign of the Greek general Seleucus II in the third century BCE over the Seleucid Empire.¹⁰ Given the eastern fertile

⁹Two separate plural spellings are used in the NT to refer to the town of Colossae: Κολοσσαεύς, -έως, Colossian, and Κολοσσαί, ὧν, αἱ, Colossae.

Some mss use Κολασσ- instead. In the larger body of Greek literature, a wide variation of spellings surface. This is not overly surprising since references to towns, cities etc. tended to focus on the personal aspect rather the locational aspect.

¹⁰A significant feature of the Lycus valley cities, including presumably Colossae, was the presence of a

substantial Jewish minority.³ According to Philo, Jews were very numerous in every city in Asia Minor (*Legum Allegoriae* 245: Ἰουδαῖοι καθ' ἐκάστην πόλιν εἰσὶ παμπληθεῖς Ἀσίας). In the late third century BCE Antiochus the Great had settled two thousand Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia to help stabilize the region (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.147–53), and in the middle of the second century a sequence of letters sent by the Roman Senate to Asia Minor in support of Jews living there indicates a sizable Jewish population (*Antiquities* 14.185–267; 16.160–78). Certainly we know that Hierapolis had a Jewish community (a κατοικία, a “colony,” CIJ 2.775) from its earliest days as a city (the early second century BCE; see further Hemer 183 and n. 23). The same conclusion can be drawn from the attempt of Flaccus in 62 BCE to confiscate the gold collected by Jews in Asia Minor as their part of the temple tax: we learn from Cicero’s defense of Flaccus (in 59) that “a little more than twenty pounds” of gold had been seized in Laodicea (*Pro Flacco* 28.68, in GLAJJ §68). That could represent as many as fourteen thousand adult males (*Exod.* 30:13–16; *Neh.* 10:32–33) paying the half-shekel (= 2 drachmae).⁴ Evidently Laodicea was the central point for retaining the collection, presumably for the Lycus valley at least, so that would include the Jewish population of Colossae and Hierapolis.⁵ And it is possible that more than one year’s collection was involved (*Trebilco* 14). But when families are included we may have to allow a total Jewish population of Colossae during this period of as many as two or three thou-sand. Depending on how large Colossae still was by this time, that would make the Colossian Jews a substantial and possibly influential ethnic minority (as they certainly were later in other cities of the region—see n. 33 below).

It should be noted that the collection of the temple tax implies a fairly regular communication between the cities of the Lycus valley and the land of Israel. These would no doubt be facilitated by the good system of



crescent heritage of these Jewish immigrants, the dominant Jewish orientation in this part of the Roman empire was Hellenistic Judaism. One would occasionally find Hebraistic Jews living outside Palestine, but most Jews had assimilated themselves pretty heavily into the surrounding Greek culture.¹¹

An indirect place implication surfacing here has to do with where the author was residing at the time of the composition of the letter. Clearly the letter was destined for the city of Colossae. But from where?

Church tradition, heavily influenced by Roman Catholics (see n. 2 above), which would probably bring a steady stream of Jewish travelers through a region where there were so many Jews resident.⁶ In the same connection we should note that residents of Asia and Phrygia are reported among the crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:9–10. A further interesting confirmation is given by the tradition reported in Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.31.2–5) that Philip the apostle (he must mean evangelist, unless the two were the same) settled in Hierapolis with his virgin daughters (see, e.g., Bruce, *Colossians*, Philemon, and Ephesians 16). The importance of this will become evident as we proceed.

[James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 21–22.]

⁸Hellenistic Judaism over against Hebraistic Judaism asserts the adoption of many local customs, dress styles, dietary patterns etc. of the surrounding non-Jewish culture. Hebraistic Judaism in the Diaspora sought to live strictly by the Deuteronomistic Code with tendencies toward isolation from the surrounding non-Jewish cultures. But both approaches to Judaism maintained deep religious commitments and devotion to the temple in Jerusalem. The fundamental difference was in their approach to the surrounding non-Jewish cultures where they lived.

olic scholarship down through the centuries, has answered this question with the claim that the letter was written while Paul was a prisoner in the imperial capital city of Rome. It's linkage to Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon has assumed a common Roman imprisonment for the apostle at the time of the composition of all four so-called Prison Epistles. But modern scholars have insisted on more than tradition as a basis for answering the question of where? As well as the when? question.

What signals emerge from inside the letter in answer to this question? In 1:4, the letter was written after Paul indicates that “we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people.” In 1:6, the letter was written after the Gospel had taken root among the Colossians: “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace.” In 1:9, the letter was written sometime after Paul had heard about the commitment of the Colossians. In 1:24, the letter was written while the apostle was suffering for the Colossians. In 2:1, the letter was written while Paul was ‘contending hard’ for both the Colossians and the Laodiceans.¹² In 2:16–23, the letter was written while some false teachers were active in the life of the community spreading their heresy. In 4:3, the letter was written while Paul was “in chains,” δι’ ὃ καὶ δεδεμαι. Note also his request in 4:18, “Remember my chains,”

¹² ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ, how hard I contend for you and for those in Laodicea.



μνημονεύετέ μου τῶν δεσμῶν.

In 4:7-9, both Tychicus and Onesimus are being sent to explain Paul's situation to the Colossians. Most likely also carrying this letter with them. Aristarchus, a fellow prisoner with Paul, sends greetings (4:10), along with Jesus Justus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. Special greetings are sent to Nympha in Laodicea who has a house church meeting in her home (4:15).

With this very limited referencing as to Paul's situation at the time of the writing, the answer to where was this letter sent from must remain tentative at best. Rather clearly, Paul had not personally visited Colossae prior to the writing of the letter. But others, especially Epaphras (4:12-13; 1:7-9), have informed the apostle about the Colossian believers. The writing did occur while Paul was a prisoner. This is about as close to the where and when questions as we can get from inside the letter itself.

External signals tend to revolve around the two periods of imprisonment described in Acts. First, in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-27:1), and then in Rome (Acts 28:11-31). In Caesarea (appx AD 57-60), Paul was kept in the prison located in the governor's palace (Acts 23:35), but had relative freedom with visitors able to see him. Apart from appearances before the Roman governors of Felix and Festus, as well as before King Agrippa, the apostle had lots of free time during the two plus year long stay in Caesarea. Yet, in Rome (appx. AD 61-62) the level of freedom was greater with the apostle renting a residence and a single Roman guard watching over him (Acts 28:30). He was able to invite people to come listen to him preach the Gospel. Either depiction could fit the limited description found inside the letter. One conclusion coming from a comparison of the four prison

letters is that Philippians most likely was written from Rome toward the end of the two plus years there. But Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were carried together, and very possibly from Caesarea. Ephesians was the 'cover' letter with Colossians and Philemon belonging with it. And possibly a lost letter written to the Laodiceans as well (Col. 4:15-17). Personally, I tend to favor this scenario for the composition of not just Colossians but also Ephesians, Philemon, and Philippians. A small minority of contemporary scholars posit a short imprisonment of Paul during the lengthy stay there in Ephesus on the third missionary journey.¹³ But Luke in his rather detailed depiction of this period (AD 52-55) makes no mention of such happening in either Ephesus or in Asia (the province). The basis for this postulation stems primarily from an analysis of Philemon, and the projected trajectories of developing Pauline theology and where Colossians fits into this pattern. Both of these sources come from outside the letter itself and thus carry less weight. In Philemon 22, Paul expresses hope of being released from imprisonment soon so that he can make a trip to Colossae. But such optimism would fit both Caesarea and Rome equally well. No indication surfaces in early church tradition to suggest that this hope was ever realized.

¹³For a detailed assessment of this view, see James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 39-40.



1.2.3 Times

No overtly temporal references are found in 1:1-2. The implicit temporal marker is the assumed time of the composition of the letter. Thus a projection of when the letter was written depends on how the secondary markers elsewhere inside the letter are understood, and also how Colossians is linked to the other prison letters. As noted in the above survey of time markers, the indicators are rather broad and thus impossible to tag onto identifiable events taking place in Christianity at large during the middle of the first Christian century. Opposition to Christianity is coming increasingly from the Roman government, rather than from Jewish sources mainly out of Judea. When Paul reaches Rome in Roman custody, Jewish persecution fades from the narrative. The identity of the false teachers alluded to in the letter is not specific and not associated with named individuals. The outlines of this teaching reflect Greek intellectualism, rather than of an uniquely Jewish origin.¹⁴ But it must be acknowledged that such rea-

¹⁴Although the community's life and conduct offer no cause for reprimand, the author of the letter is deeply worried that the community, unsuspecting and innocent as it is, may be led astray by false teaching and become the victim of deceivers. For this reason the community is urgently warned and admonished concerning the distinction between correct and false preaching: "Be on your guard that no one snares you by philosophy and empty deceit" (βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης, 2:8*). This warning points out the danger which threatens the community. Some persons have appeared who call their teaching "philosophy" (φιλοσοφία) which apparently refers to the secret information of the divine ground of being, the proper perception of the "elements of the universe" (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, 2:8*, 20*), and the way which must be taken in order to be in the proper relation to them. These elements

soning could be appealing to those clearly Hellenistic Jews who may have been in the congregation. A clear non-Jewish background of at least the majority of members is set forth with some specificity.¹⁵ Both with the temporal references

of the universe, represented as strong angelic powers, determine not only the cosmic order but the destiny of the individual. Thus man must serve them in cultic adoration and follow the regulations which they impose upon him (2:16–23*): careful observance of the particular holy times—festivals, new moon, Sabbath (2:16*)—as well as imposed abstinence from certain food and drink.

[Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 2–3.]

¹⁵There are many allusions to the heathen past of the letter's recipients. They are reminded that they were once estranged, with a hostile mind involved in evil deeds (1:21*); it is said that they were dead in sins and in uncircumcision of the flesh (2:13*). Thus they were heathen who heard the good news through Epaphras (1:7f* and 4:12f*) and accepted it. In baptism they experienced the creative power of God who raised them to new life (2:12*), who forgave their sin (1:14*; 2:13*), and who raised them with Christ (3:1*) in order that they might henceforth conduct their lives under the dominion of Christ (1:13f*). The proclamation, which was discerned to be the truth (1:5f*), had been presented as teaching (1:17*) which had been shaped into a distinct form in the tradition (2:6f*). Of this tradition, particular elements, fixed in their wording, were cited in this letter: there is the hymn which sings of the universal dominion of the exalted Christ (1:15–20*); the sentences which deal with baptism and God's act in the cross of Christ (2:12–15*); lists of deeds which the Christians should put away and avoid (3:5*, 8*) as



of the Colossians and of Paul's own situation, the answer to the when? question can easily range from the Caesarean to the Roman imprisonments of the apostle. I tend to gravitate toward the earlier era of the late 50s when Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea.

1.2.4 Events

Again, given the formula nature of 1:1-2 rather than a narrative pattern, no identifiable historical events are noted. Implicit markers are present most notably in the depiction of the developing danger of false teaching finding a lodging in the community. This material lies primarily in chapter two of the letter.¹⁶

well as a definition of the attitude to be practiced in conduct (3:12*); and, finally, the series of exhortations directed to Christians in various stations of life (3:18–4:1*). The community is reminded of this familiar teaching and made aware of the consequences which necessarily follow from it: to confess Christ as the Lord who holds in his hands the rule over the whole world, and to be obedient to him in all phases of life.

[Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 2.]

¹⁶A Variety of Proposals. Despite, and probably because of, the somewhat meager evidence provided by the letter, the academic industry of publishing books and articles on the teaching that provoked the writer's response shows no signs of abating. This commentary is not the place for interaction with the mass of secondary literature that also shows little sign of reaching a consensus. All that can be done here is to mention some of the more recent proposals, to caution the reader about the difficulties involved in any reconstruction, and then to provide a brief and tentative sketch of what appears to be the most plausible view.

No mention is made of any outside false teach-

In the past, scholars looked to a Jewish form of Gnosticism or to Jewish mysticism or to Hellenistic mystery cults or to neo-Pythagoreanism or to a syncretistic mix of some of these as the background that provides the identity of the philosophy. Recent monographs and commentaries have offered further variations. Sappington develops the view that some form of Jewish mysticism is the distinctive ingredient of the teaching, providing a full examination of the similar pattern of ascetic and mystical piety to be found in a number of Jewish apocalypses.¹³ The distinctive contribution of DeMaris is to introduce Middle Platonism into the discussion as the context in which the letter's debate about achieving knowledge was conducted. He sees the teaching being opposed, therefore, as a mix of "popular Middle Platonic, Jewish and Christian elements that cohere around the pursuit of wisdom."¹⁴ As the title of his monograph suggests, Arnold also finds a mix.¹⁵ He provides the fullest investigation of local inscriptional and literary evidence, particularly that which deals with the practice of magic. For him the syncretistic teaching contained Jewish (cultic observances) and pagan (mystery cult initiation) elements that cohered within the general framework of magic and folk religion. Two further contributors to the debate refrain from a syncretistic solution. Dunn, in his commentary and in an article that preceded it, holds that the teaching was purely Jewish, a diaspora "synagogue apologetic promoting itself as a credible philosophy more than capable of dealing with whatever heavenly powers might be thought to control or threaten human existence."¹⁶ Martin, on the other hand, views it as purely Hellenistic, claiming that Cynic teachers entered the Christian assembly to observe and then delivered a critical invective against Christian practices, to which the author of Colossians responds.¹⁷

The very number and variety of proposed solutions to the identity of the philosophy should caution against any overly confident claims to reconstruct it. Although the writer's prescription for curing the ailment he be-



ers traveling to Colossae. Thus no 'Judaizers' from the

lieved to be a threat to the well-being of his readers comes across reasonably clearly, the ailment itself defies any really accurate diagnosis. The writer had no reason for defining more exactly the teaching involved. He expects his readers to know perfectly well what he was talking about, and so he merely touches on some of its features, using some of its catchwords and slogans. Since the evidence the letter provides is piecemeal, it pushes the interpreter beyond the text to find an explanatory framework for the fragmented reflection of the teaching and its practices, found in the writer's response. Determining which does greatest justice to all the elements in the letter's polemic remains the criterion for evaluating the various proposals. Some of them fail to explain parts of the letter adequately, but in itself this criterion still allows for a number of competing hypotheses.

There are at least two further difficulties in any attempt to employ the letter to reconstruct the alternative teaching. How many of the writer's direct references to the philosophy in this polemical letter can be taken as straightforward description rather than negatively slanted caricature? And if reconstruction is based on the part of the letter that is in direct interaction with the opposing teaching, is it legitimate to see other parts of the letter as having the teaching more indirectly in view and to use their discussion to complete the reconstruction?

Despite the difficulties, and provided that one remains both self-conscious about how to proceed and tentative about one's conclusions, it is still worth the effort to take up the letter's clues, to point to similar concepts in the thought of that time, and thereby to endeavor to sketch the best picture available of the teaching in view. After all, this teaching caused the writer enough concern to provoke a response to it, and some historical reconstruction is necessary if we are to appreciate that response as fully as possible. This sketch will proceed in three stages. It will begin with the explicit terminology mentioned in 2:18, move to a more disputed issue involving 2:8, 20, and then suggest a general characterization of the teaching. Other aspects will be discussed in the course of the commentary.

outside like at Galatia. Evidently, the false teaching was 'home grown' being generated by trying to combine the apostolic Gospel with non-Jewish reasoning about origins and the universe. That most likely was 'home grown' from the pagan background of some of its members.

Thus *in summary of the historical aspects of 1:1-2*, we can conclude that the writing was in the form of an ancient persuasive letter. Paul and Timothy are the designated senders of the letter. It is addressed to the holy and pious brothers in Christ who live in the Roman city of Colossae. Paul has not yet made a trip to the city in order to get acquainted personally with the members. But the glowing depictions of the church brought to Paul by Epaphrus in particular, who evidently founded the Christian community in Colossae originally, have so inspired the apostle that he wants to write to them to give further instruction in the Gospel. No appeal beyond prayers is made of the Colossians in order to get them to undergird Paul's ministry. He is not writing a letter of introduction as in Romans in anticipation of a coming visit to raise support. Nor is he defending his claim to apostolic authority like in Galatians. Rather he merely seeks to instruct them deeper into the Gospel message, as well as to affirm their faithfulness to Christ being reported to him. The presence of false teaching -- cf. chapter two -- played some role in the writing of the letter.

2.0 Literary

In addition to examining the history connected to an ancient written document, the literary [Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Letter to the Colossians," in New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994-2004), 560-562.]





qualities of the writing must be checked as a part of the foundation for interpretation of the writing. The focus is on identifying repetitive patterns of thought expression as an important vehicle of communicating ideas. Such patterns -- ranging from individual words to entire documents -- are essential elements of communication. The labels External and Internal are rather arbitrary and used mostly to preserve continuity through out the outline. External is associated with identification of forms at a broad genre level and at a smaller unit level. Internal is associated mainly with analysis of individual words and phrases and their position inside sentence expression.

2.1 External: Literary Forms:

The range of possible forms in ancient writings is rather extensive, with some of them not corresponding very closely with related modern forms. Fortunately, for the Bible student the range of broad forms of the New Testament writings is limited to Gospel, History, Letter, and Apocalypse. To be sure, this is but a small percentage of the available forms in ancient writings generally. And some limited mixing of forms does take place inside the NT. The more challenging analysis surfaces with smaller units of writings inside the four broad forms. Additionally, the NT writers are writing in Koine Greek as their second language while thinking in and sometimes reproducing forms out of their mother tongue, Aramaic. Additionally, the influence of Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire, will surface in the NT documents.

2.1.1 Identify the literary structure or form.

During the past half century, NT scholarship, espe-

cially in the US, has shifted a lot of focus to literary form analysis. The discipline of Pauline studies has given massive attention to the letter form, especially contrasting modern and ancient letter formats. Of course, the discipline of Form Criticism has been around for well over a century, but the New Literary Criticism that somewhat covers this more recent scholarly activity is a post-WWII trend in biblical studies. Currently the label in vogue is Narrative Criticism, but also Reader-Response Criticism, Structuralism, and Rhetorical Criticism will touch on differing aspects of the literary nature of a written text. The approach taken in BIC is more basic and centers on form and structure present in a written text. From an analysis of these things, what can we hear the text saying to us? Although sometimes viewed as opposing perspectives, the historical and the literary aspects ought to be taken as complementary and not as contradictory angles.

2.1.2 Analyze the role of the text as a form

As already noted, Col. 1:1-2 forms a unitary sub-form of the ancient letter. The Latin label is Praescriptio, i.e., pre-writing. This was the id marker for the letter. When the letter was written on a papyrus sheet and then rolled into a scroll once completed, the Praescriptio formula "S to R: greetings" was written at the seal on the outer surface of the scroll for identifying the letter. Later when the book style of a codex became the material for copies of the NT, the Praescriptio content would be placed at the beginning of the letter for ID purposes on inside pages containing multiple documents. That has remained the position of the Praescriptio down to the present time.



Three elements comprise the contents of a Praescriptio: 1) designation of the sender(s) of the letter; 2) specification of the intended recipient(s) of the letter; 3) a greeting asserting a friendly connection between the two. Usually the sender was identified by a personal name, as well as the recipients. Mostly, the greeting was a health wish of some sort. To these three core elements could be added modifying terms and phrases. This fleshed out the rather dry formula structure, along with a signaling of potential topics of discussion to be found in the body of the letter. The letters in the Pauline corpus of the NT display both uniform adherence to the core structure of the ancient letter and also to the creativity of the apostle for expanding these core units. Ironically, the Praescriptio inside the NT that comes closest to the letters generally in that world is James 1:1, Ἰάκωβος θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ χαίρειν, James, God's and Lord Jesus Christ's servant, to the twelve tribes of the Diaspora, greetings. The sender is the only expanded element. The recipient is specified by symbolic description rather than by personal name. The greeting χαίρειν is taken from the ordinary oral greeting of hello in ancient Greek (cf. 2 John 10). This basic adherence to standardized form and yet individualized creativity with the details is rather typical to the epistolary Praescriptia in the first century Greek letter writing world.

All of the thirteen letters traditionally assigned to Paul as the sender adhere to the three fold structure. And also they illustrate deep creativity in the adding of expansion elements to the core.¹⁷ One should also

note that these expansion elements are the primary source of application of the text to our contemporary world. This will especially be the case when these elements have a spiritual or ethical orientation. The expositional relevancy of the letter Praescriptio will come primarily at this point. Beyond this, the interpretative value of the letter Praescriptio is mainly historical in nature.

2.2 Internal: Literary Structure:

The internal literary focus basically builds off the premise of the key role of a sentence in both oral and written communication. As an unitary expression, it fits into groups of sentences, usually labeled in modern literary terms, as a paragraph. Then groups of paragraphs come together to complete the document in written expression. The arrangements, connecting links, content themes etc. for documents is limitless and dependent largely on the creativity of the composer. But a sentence must contain certain elements in order to comprise a sentence. Usually this means a complete thought. Nouns and verbs are brought together in order to achieve complete thoughts. Verbs either express actions or affirm states of being. Nouns and their substitutes define the producer and/or recipient of the verbal action. With states of being expressed by the verb, the role of nouns shifts to defining who or what exists in the state of being. Thus the noun subject moves from specifying the producer of verbal action to stating what exists in the state of being. That is, from the active to the passive roles. Since this affirms static existence rather than active movement, the producer of this state of being in English is expressed in a prepositional phrase by

¹⁷For a listing of the divisions of the letters in the New Testament, see "Letters in the New Testament," <https://cranfordville.com/NT-Lec31-3229.html#3.1.2.2.1.3>.





'from,' 'by,' 'with,' etc. Because of linguistic 'parent-hood' with ancient Greek, the Greek sentence functions pretty much the same way as does its English counter part.

When we come to the ancient letter Praescriptio, another linguistic phenomenon emerges. It, by nature, is formulaic rather than sentence expression. To be sure, in some ancient Praescriptia, the Greeting, i.e., Salutatio, could be structured in sentence expression. In early Christian writings the prayer wish nature of the Greeting did sometimes use a stated verb. But basically uniformly in these instances, the Greek Optative Mood form of the verb will be found as a request. This couching of an idea into a polite request was deemed the only proper way to approach Almighty God. That is, we ask God; we do not tell God to do this or that. Thus the Greeting was couching as a prayer wish.

None of Paul's letters contains a stated verb in the Greeting section. But in 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2, and Jude 2, we find πληθυνθείη, may they be multiplied; and in 2 John 3, ἔσται, they will be. But 2 John 3 is an expression of confidence, rather than a prayer wish.

2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording.

The most detailed analysis of the wording of any text entails the parsing of each word in the sentence. Not only does this activity give us the meaning of each word, it also defines the role of each word in the sentence. Known technically as morphology and syntax, these two aspects are essential to correctly translating the Greek text over into a receptor language such as English. Further, they are essential for determining the precise meaning contained in the sentence. In some ways, such analysis is the most tedious aspect of analysis, but one of its more im-

portant things to do.¹⁸

Παῦλος: 2nd - Nom (Indep) - M - S - Παῦλος, ὁ - Paul

ἀπόστολος: 2nd - Nom (App) - M - S - ἀπόστολος, ὁ - apostle

Χριστοῦ: 2nd - Gen (Poss) - M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - of Christ

Ἰησοῦ: 2nd - Gen (Poss) - M - S - Ἰησοῦς, ὁ - Jesus

διὰ: preposition with Ablative case noun denoting agency - through

θελήματος: 3rd - Ablative (Means) - N - S - θέλημα, -ατος, τό - the will

θεοῦ: 2nd - Gen (Poss) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - God's, of God

καὶ: coordinate conjunction linking the two send-

¹⁸For a detailed listing of both morphology and syntax brought together in Parsing, see [Appendix 2: Guides to Parsing](#) in Lorin L. Cranford, *Learning Biblical Koine Greek*, volume 35 of the *Biblical Insights Commentary* at [cranfordville.com](#). Morphology, which centers on alternative spellings, is easier to determine. Syntax, which centers on the role of the Greek word in a sentence, is more challenging to determine. But exegetical insight overwhelmingly comes from syntax rather than from morphology. In this model of parsing used here, both aspects are combined in order to lay a fuller foundation of understanding.



ers - and

Τιμόθεος = Pers Name - Nom (Indep) M - S - Τιμόθεος,
ὁ - Timothy

ὁ ἀδελφός: Nom (Appos)- M - S - ἀδελφός, ὁ - our
brother

2

τοῖς , , , ἀδελφοῖς: 2nd - Dat (Ref)- M - P - ἀδελφός,
-οῦ, ὁ - to the...brothers

ἐν: preposition denoting location - in

Κολοσσαῖς: Geog Name - Loc (Place)- M - P -
Κολοσσαεὺς (Κολοσσαεὺς, Κολοσαεὺς, Κολασαεὺς),
-έως, ὁ - among the Colossians

ἁγίοις: Adj (Attrib) Loc - M - P - ἅγιος, -ία, -ον - to the
holy

καὶ: coordinate conjunction linking the two adjectives
- and

πιστοῖς: Adj (Attrib) Loc - M - P - πιστός, -ή, -όν - to
the faithful

ἐν: preposition denoting location - in

Χριστῷ: 2nd - Loc (sphere)- M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - in
Christ

χάρις: 3rd - Nom (Indep) - F - S - χάρις, -ιτος, ἡ - grace

ὕμῖν: Pers Pron - Dat (Ref) - P - σύ - to you

καὶ: coordinate conjunction linking two nouns
together - and

εἰρήνη: 1st - Nom (Indep) - F - S - εἰρήνη, ἡ - peace

ἀπό: preposition with ablative noun denote sep-
aration and source - from

θεοῦ: 2nd - Abl (Source) - M - S - θεός, -οῦ, ὁ -
from God

πατρός: 3rd - Nom (App) - M - S - πατήρ, -τρός,
ὁ - Father

ἡμῶν: Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - P - ἐγώ - our

Observations from this parsing:

(1) The key terms in this passage are clear: Paul;
Timothy; brothers; grace and peace.

(2) The expansion expressions add richness to
the core structure:

Το Παῦλος is added ἀπόστολος
Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, apos-
tle of Christ Jesus through God's will

Το Τιμόθεος is added ὁ ἀδελφός, our
brother.

Το τοῖς... ἀδελφοῖς is added ἐν
Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς, among the
Colossians holy and faithful. Also added is ἐν
Χριστῷ, in Christ. In regard to brothers, the
symmetrical balance between the pre positions
of holy and faithful and the post position of in
Christ is noticeable. The human / divine aspects
are highlighted by this. Or, viewed another way,
the human actions and divine position are set in
focus by this. This establishes a framework for
understanding salvation in Christ as touching on
human obligations and the divine positioning of
the Christian brother.





To χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη is added ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, from God our Father. Grace taken from the same root stem as hello (χάρις / χαίρειν) signals Paul's religious oriented hello Greeting.¹⁹ With the Greek hello comes the Jewish hello in the Greek word εἰρήνη, peace. The Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint reflects this in the LXX use chiefly for דִּשְׁלָם, shalom. Thus Paul issues a combined Greek and Hebrew greeting with a distinctly Christian religious tone.

(3) The standard Praescriptio formula is followed: From sender to recipient: hello. This immediately identifies the document as an ancient Greek letter. This means that some occasion prompted the composition of the letter. While it may or may not be alluded to in the Praescriptio, usually it will be identified directly either in the Proem that follows or else in the early materials in the letter body.

¹⁹In the formula of greeting εἰ. ὑμῖν=שְׁלֹמֶךָ (cp. aJdg 6:23; 19:20; Da 10:19 Theod.; Tob 12:17 Lk 24:36; J 20:19, 21, 26. εἰρήνην τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ peace to this house Lk 10:5; cp. vs. 6 (Wklassen, NTS 27, '81, 488–506); Mt 10:12 v.l., 13 (on εἰ. ἐπὶ w. acc. cp. Is 9:7; Ps 84:9). In epistolary closure καὶ ἔστω μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰρήνη peace be w. you AcPICor 2:40.—A new and characteristic development is the combination of the Greek epistolary greeting χαίρειν with a Hebrew expression in the Pauline and post-Pauline letters χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη (s. χάρις 2c)Ro 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phlm 3; Rv 1:4. (χάρις, ἔλεος, εἰρήνη)1 Ti 1:2; 2 Ti 1:2; 2J 3. (χάρις καὶ εἰ.—or w. ἔλεος—πληθυνθεῖν, cp. Da 4:1; 4:37c LXX; 6:26 Theod. 1 Pt 1:2; 2 Pt 1:2; Jd 2; 1 Cl ins; Pol ins; MPol ins; cp. Gal 6:16; Eph 6:23; 2 Th 3:16; 1 Pt 5:14; 3J 15; ISm 12:2; B 1:1 (χαίρετε ἐν εἰ.)to a degree, mng. 2b also is implied in this expr. [A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., sv. εἰρήνη, ης, ἡ]

The two adjectives qualifying brothers, ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς provide at least a hint at the motivation behind the writing of this letter. The quality of Christian commitment exhibited by the Colossian believers inspired Paul to compose this letter of dominantly praise and adoration for the 'brothers' at Colossae. This theme will be developed at several places beginning in the Proem (1:3-8) and in the body of the letter itself.

2.2.2 Assess the structural arrangement of the passage.

One pictorial presentation of this grammatical arrangement of the formula structure is with a procedure called Block Diagramming.²⁰ Here is the diagram of Col. 1:1-2,

Superscriptio:

1 1 Παῦλος
ἀπόστολος
Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ
καὶ
Τιμόθεος
ὁ ἀδελφός

Adscriptio:

3 2 τοῖς...ἀδελφοῖς
ἐν Κολοσσαῖς
ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἐν Χριστῷ·

Salutatio:

²⁰For an explanation and guidelines for this procedure see "Appendix 5: Steps to a Literary Structural Analysis of the Greek Text" in Lorin L Cranford, *Learning Biblical Koine Greek*, vol. 35 of the *Biblical Insights Commentary* at cranfordville.com.



3 χάρις
 ὑμῖν
 καὶ
 εἰρήνη
 ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Just a quick glance at this diagram reveals a deep sense of balance and symmatry through the expansion elements of the core structure. Given the almost musical way in which first century Koine Greek was spoken, the rhythmic balance of the major / minor segments would have come through very well in the auditory sounds of these words being spoken. Each major element has a least one expansion added. Note also the heavy use of pairs of expressions linked to one another. Paul/Timothy; apostle/brother; Christ Jesus/will of God; among Colossians/in Christ; holy/faithful; to you/from God; God/Father. One cannot help but being impressed with this clear literary beauty which is embedded into these words. In the chaotic world of the first century, to hear these beautifully expressed words of encouragement and assurance from the apostle Paul as they were read to the assembled group of believers must have been reassuring itself.

2.2.3 Assess the contextual role of the passage. The final issue of exegesis needing to be probed has to do with how this passage fits into the other units of thought in the entire document. Literary context plays a role in determining meaning for the words inside a passage.

As the first element in an ancient letter, the Praescriptio functioned primarily in the scroll format as the letter ID. Later, beginning in the fourth century, the Praescriptio was listed at the beginning of

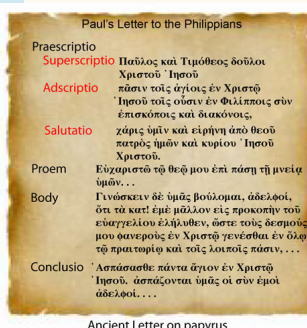
the letter, still fulfilling the identification role. But now, the role of the expansion elements to anticipate more detailed discussion in the letter body took on greater importance. From a modern interpretive perspective, this introductory function of the letter Praescriptio has important significance. Careful examination of the details can signal major themes to be discussed in the letter body. Thus these early signals establish boundaries and points of special focus for the later discussions.

Summary Conclusion

What can we conclude from this backward glance into the composition and early copying of this Pauline letter? More particularly, what kind of possible foundation for contemporary modern application of these verses can be gleaned? 1) A letter was composed under Paul's authorization as an apostle to be sent to Chrisan communites in Colossae.

(2) Timothy most likely did the actual wring of the document from Paul's dictation.

(3) The letter was sent to the Chrisans among the residents of the city. The personal address affirms the ex-



Ancient Letter on papyrus

istence of a believing community as a part of a larger group of residents in the town.

(4) Without using the direct reference to σωτηρία, "salvation," the Praescriptio affirms several aspects connected to this central idea.



a) ἀπόστολος, apostle, here in apposition to Παῦλος, Paul, assumes, in the Praescriptio literary, the role of official title providing authorization for the composition of the letter. Paul writes this letter in his divinely chosen role as one commissioned through the will of God. He has been sent out (cf. verb ἀποστέλλω) by God to deliver the message of salvation. The writing of this letter is a part of that commissioning. This commissioning also belongs to Christ Jesus, Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. He is at the center of the commissioning. The message of salvation is focused on Christ Jesus as its centerpiece.

b) A primary mission of σωτηρία is to bring humanity together as ἀδελφοί, brothers. Timothy and Paul are brothers despite their ethnic differences. Timothy, and Paul, are brothers to the believers at Colossae despite dramatically different backgrounds. And in spite of not having formally met one another. The centrality of family in early Christianity comes to the foreground here. In spite of their differences, Paul saw the commonality of 'brothers' as superseding all the differences. All stand together with the God of this universe as their Father, πατὴρ ἡμῶν.

c) How is such possible? Grace and peace that come from God is how: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ Θεοῦ. Divine favor, χάρις, and divine blessing, εἰρήνη, are the sources, ἀπὸ Θεοῦ, of this salvation. This continuous stream of divine favor and blessing are the life-changing dynamics underneath such salvation. What they produce in human life are ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς, holy and faithful lives. That is, lives lived dedicated to God and lived faithful to His ways. The image of God as Father adds richness to this picture. (5) These expansion signals of later discussions create excitement and interest in the words of Paul. They set up anticipation of how he will flesh them

out into fuller explanation. The reading of the letter to each of the assembled house church groups made that worship experience unforgettable to the listeners. One can easily imagine the excitement of the group on that worship occasion.

Now the bottom line question: How do we preach and teach these sacred words to our modern day audiences? Part Two: the Exposition of Col. 1:1-2 will seek to answer this question. With the exegesis completed we have a solid foundation for building sermons and teachings within the established boundaries of the text meaning.

