

New Testament Survey

SECTION: PAUL'S PRISON LETTERS

BOOKS INCLUDED: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

AUTHOR: Paul, aka Saul of Tarsus

DATE: Appx. 62-63 A.D.

PURPOSE: In general, these letters were written to teach, correct and support the new churches and specific Christians. Specifically:

Ephesians and Colossians: to combat false teaching developing in the Greek churches.

Philippians: a friendly letter of gratitude and encouragement.

Philemon: a personal letter of support and intervention in a domestic/legal matter.

BACKGROUND:

Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians: written by Paul from prison in Rome to churches in Asia Minor and Macedonia (both areas dominated by Greek culture). Gnosticism was becoming a problem. Paul planted the churches in Ephesus and Philippi, but may have never been to Colossae.

Philemon: written by Paul from prison to a wealthy slaveholding convert.

CONTENT SUMMARY:

Ephesians and Colossians: Half doctrinal response, half practical application.

Philippians: Joy and encouragement.

Philemon: Gentleman to gentleman—"You owe me, so...".

SPECIFIC PASSAGES FOR DISCUSSION:

Ephesians:
Paul's prayer that they "know" Jesus—1:17
Salvation by grace—2:8-9
Unity in the body of Christ—4:1-16
Mutual submission—5:21-6:9
The Armor of God—6:10-18

Philippians:
Paul's assurance to the Philippians—1:4-6
The humility of Jesus—2:1-11
Positive choice of outlook—4:4-9

Colossians:
Arguments against Gnosticism—Chapters 1 and 2
"In all that you do"—3:17

Philemon:
Paul's "plea" for Onesimus—8-21