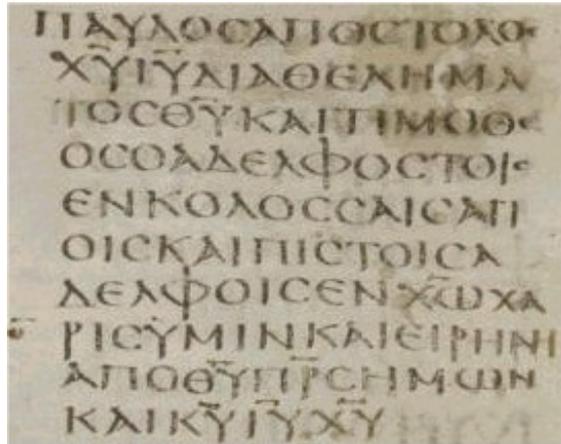


Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

Introduction



Colossians 1:1,2 from the Codex Sinaiticus which adds 'and Lord of us'.

Historical Evidence

The historical evidence from the late 1st century is not as abundant as with other Epistles, however, Polycarp (95 – 155) appears to quote from 3:5,6 and 3:12 – there is evidence that this author was aware of all the books of the NT. It is from Irenaeus (c 120 – 200) that we have the most secure testimony of the authenticity of the Epistle for he quotes from every chapter in our Epistle. Irenaeus quotes from all the Epistles except Philemon¹:-

	Rom	1 Cr	2 Cr	Gal	Eph	Phil	Col	1 Th	2 Th	1 Tm	2 Tm	Tit	Phm
Quotes	84	102	18	27	37	13	18	2	9	5	5	4	0

There are also quote in the works of Justin Martyr (100 – 165), Tertullian (c 160 -220) and Clement of Alexandria (c 215). Now, surely, these Greek speaking 'Doctors of the Church' were well aware of the peculiarities of the various Pauline Epistles, but they considered them of no consequence at the time, neither did any NT scholars over the centuries until German scholarship, from the 1830s onwards, questioned the authenticity of the Epistles on the grounds of Paul's quaint manners of writing. The ancients of the Church lived between 1 and 3 generations of the writing of these works and had no doubts concerning their authorship, and neither should we doubt. What evidence carries the greatest weight? The physical, absolute, objective evidence, which still exists in this world, or the hypotheses which exist only in the minds of certain theologians? Presenting the hypotheses in print does not give them an existence! These hypotheses have been given the status of 'Theories', but theories are capable of being proved, hypotheses are not! It is a sad reality of these distracted times that commentaries are being produced without any reference to the historical evidence. These arguments based on 'Internal Evidence' were demolished within a few years of their having been formulated, but like the 'bad penny' they keep returning. The Epistle is included in both the Marcion catalogue (c 140) and the Muratorian Canon (late 2nd century).

Reasons for Writing

Paul had no personal knowledge of the church in Colossae, but one Epaphras, probably one of Paul's converts, had been instrumental in setting up the Christian community. The church members were probably Gentile converts, but close by were Jews displaced from Babylon and also adherents to various Eastern mystical cults. Epaphras seems to have heard of the sectarian pressures being

¹ Grant, R.M., (1965) The Formation of the New Testament, Harper & Rowe, New York.

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brought into the church and one can imagine him asking Paul to write a correcting letter. The church had developed tendencies to various forms of spurious worship – of angels, of Sabbaths and of moons and had lost the central meaning of 'being Christian'. Once again Paul issues command after command concerning right Christian living.

Place and Date of Writing

The letter was written by 'Paul in chains' and so during a period of imprisonment, which could have been in Ephesus, Caesarea or Rome, but this latter is regarded as most likely. It would have been written between 61 & 63.