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Literary Siblings: Relationship of Ephesians to Colossians

Ephesians is remarkably similar to the letter of Paul to the Colossians:

- Somewhere between one-half and one-third of the 155 verses in Ephesians have close parallels to the material found in Colossians.
- In many cases, these parallels occur in the same order of presentation.
- A few passages are very close in wording (cf. Eph. 1:4 with Col. 1:22; Eph. 1:15 with Col. 1:4; Eph. 6:21–22 with Col. 4:7–8).

Most scholars believe that Colossians was written first and that whoever wrote Ephesians was familiar with the contents of that letter. This seems to make sense, because Ephesians has the more generic tone, presenting general reflection on points that, in Colossians, are made with reference to a specific situation.

This allows for a number of possibilities:

- Paul wrote Colossians as a specific letter to a particular church, and then he wrote Ephesians as a more general letter dealing with the same subject matter.

- Paul wrote Colossians, and later someone else used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians as a pseudepigraphical letter written in Paul's name.
- Paul wrote neither Colossians nor Ephesians; some pseudonymous author wrote both letters.
- One pseudonymous author wrote Colossians, and later a different pseudonymous author used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians.