

Colossians

Introduction to the Book

- Historical Background
 - The City and Its People
 - No one knows when Colossae was founded.
 - It was a booming metropolis as early as 480 B.C.
 - Colossae sat on the east-west route from Ephesus to the East at the entrance to a mountain pass.
 - This was a prime location since Colossae was the first city westbound travelers encountered when they entered the Lycus River valley.



- The location of Colossae was ideal to make the city prosper.
- The Lycus River valley was well suited for both ranching and industry.
 - The valley had lush pastures for grazing sheep.
 - One branch of the river left chalk deposits that were useful for dyeing cloth.
- In the Apostle Paul's time, Colossae had lost its prominence and was overshadowed by its neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.
 - The Romans had selected Laodicea as the capital of a district of 25 towns.
 - The Romans also changed the road system putting Laodicea on the East-West highway and at the junction of four other roads.
 - Hierapolis was well noted for its mineral baths and became a "vacation destination".
 - For commerce, one would go to Laodicea; for pleasure one would go to Hierapolis.

- Colossae was made up of a mixed population.
 - The natives were Phrygian.
 - Greeks settled in the area during the Greek period of dominance.
 - To this were added the Jews of the Diaspora, Romans involved in politics as well as other people groups drawn to the area for commercial purposes.
- The Founding of the Church
 - Col 2:1 indicates that the people of the Colossian church had never seen Paul.
 - Although Paul had evangelized Laodicea in the Lycus River valley during his third missionary journey, he did not visit Colossae during any of his journeys (see maps) [Acts 16:6; 19:1].



- It is most likely that Epaphras founded the Colossian church.
 - In Col 1:7 Paul states that the Colossian church had learned the gospel from Epaphras.
 - In Col 4:12-13 Paul speaks of Epaphras as a member of the Colossian church and an envoy for the other churches in the valley.
 - Epaphras would have established the church during Paul's third missionary journey.
 - Epaphras likely met Paul when he was teaching at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus.
 - Epaphras became a faithful student and took the gospel to the people of Colossae.
 - This would date the founding at 53-55 A.D.
- The Letter to the Colossians
 - Authorship
 - The letter itself attributes the authorship to the Apostle Paul [Col 1:1].
 - The reference to Timothy in this verse is because he provided scribal assistance for Paul in the writing of this letter.
 - No one questioned Paul's authorship until 19th century "higher criticism" came along.
 - These "higher critics" questioned Paul's authorship on the basis of the vocabulary and theology.
 - Neither challenge holds any water because they fail to take into account the problems Paul was addressing when he wrote the letter.
 - Conclusion: Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians with assistance from Timothy.
 - Date of Writing
 - Paul was imprisoned when he wrote this letter to the Colossians [Col 4:18].
 - Some would debate where he was imprisoned at the time, but this letter was written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome.
 - That puts the date of writing in the A.D. 60-62 time frame.
 - Occasion and Purpose
 - Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon were written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome.
 - Even though Paul had never been to Colossae, he saw himself as the apostle responsible for their spiritual wellbeing and growth.
 - False teaching had crept into the church at Colossae which needed to be addressed.
 - This teaching was a blend of Judaism along with the early ideas of what would become Gnosticism in the 2nd century.
 - The Judaism introduced legalism and asceticism into their congregation.
 - The pre-Gnostic belief was that anything material was inherently sinful.
 - The asceticism led to concerns about what they could eat or drink [Col 2:16-17].
 - The pre-Gnostic belief fostered a fascination with spirit beings – the angels [Col 2:18-19].

- Paul wanted to write to the Colossians about these issues and circumstances allowed the opportunity.
 - While in prison, Paul met a runaway slave named Onesimus [Phlm 8-11].
 - Paul led Onesimus to faith in Jesus Christ [v 10].
 - Paul knew that Onesimus must return to his former master Philemon in Colossae [Phlm 12-13].
 - Tychicus and Onesimus went to Colossae to deliver the letter to Philemon along with this letter.
 - Ephesus is right on the route to Colossae and Paul's letter to the Ephesians was delivered during this same trip.
- Outline
 - Greeting [1:1-2]
 - The Spiritual Walk of the Colossians [1:3-14]
 - Thanksgiving [1:3-8]
 - Prayer [1:9-12]
 - Rescue and Redemption [1:13-14]
 - The Preeminence of Christ [1:15-2:7]
 - The Supremacy of Christ [1:15-20]
 - Reconciliation through Christ [1:21-23]
 - The Mystery of Christ [1:24-27]
 - Wisdom and Maturity in Christ [1:28-2:5]
 - Our Walk in Christ [2:6-7]
 - Polemic Against Error [2:8-23]
 - Pre-Gnostic Error: Deity of Christ [2:8-10]
 - Legalism Error: Reality in Christ [2:11-17]
 - Mysticism Error: Headship of Christ [2:18-19]
 - Asceticism Error: Freedom in Christ [2:20-23]
 - The Spiritual Walk: Inner Life [3:1-17]
 - Focus on Things Above [3:1-4]
 - Put On the New Self [3:5-11]
 - Allow the Heart to be Changed [3:12-17]
 - The Spiritual Walk: Outer Life [3:18-4:6]
 - Family Life [3:18-21]
 - Work Life [3:22-4:1]
 - Prayer Life [4:2-4]
 - Public Life [4:5-6]
 - Personal Messages [4:7-17]
 - The Couriers [4:7-8]
 - The Others [4:9-14]
 - Reading in Laodicea [4:15-16]
 - Message to Archippus [4:17]
 - Salutation [4:18]