

Colossians

The Preeminence of Christ

Colosse was about one hundred miles from Ephesus. It was probably in the missionary expansion of the Ephesian Church that the Colossian Church was founded. We do not know who its founder was; but it may well have been Epaphras who is connected with the Churches at Colosse, Hierapolis and Laodicea (1:7; 4:12, 13). Paul did not found the church at Colosse. In fact, he had never visited there (2:1). It is a good speculation that the church was started during his three year stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) by Epaphras.

The church at Colossae was mainly a Gentile church (1:21). The sins described are mostly Gentile in character.

AUTHOR: The author claims to be Paul the apostle (1:1). There is no real doubt to this conclusion. It has every mark of Paul's style and "there is no evidence that anyone else took Paul's name to palm off this striking and vigorous polemic."

DATE: This letter was sent at the same time with the Epistle to Philemon and the one to the Ephesians since Tychicus the bearer of the letter to Ephesus (Eph. 6:21f), and the one to Colossae (Col. 4:7f) was a companion of Onesimus (Col. 4:9) the bearer of that to Philemon (10-12). If Paul is a prisoner (Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:20; Philemon 9) in Rome, as most scholars hold, and not in Ephesus, the probable date would be A. D. 63. I believe that Paul is in prison in Rome when he sends out these epistles. If so, the time would be after the arrival in Rome from Jerusalem as told in Acts 28 and before the burning of Rome by Nero in A. D. 64. If Philippians was already sent, A. D. 63 marks the last probable year for the writing of this group of letters.

OCCASION: The letter was written upon the arrival of Epaphras in Rome from Colossae with news of the state of the church there (1:7-9; 4:12f). One very disquieting feature of the new teaching there "was a strong inclination on the part of the Christians to accept an attractive line of teaching which (although they did not suspect it) was calculated to subvert the pure gospel which they had believed and bring them into spiritual bondage."

"Grievous wolves" have descended upon the churches in the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Hierapolis, Laodicea) and are leading many of the believers astray. These false teachers and deceivers were later called Gnostics. The culture of Paul's day was full of the teachings of the mystery cults which professed new thought with a world view that "sought to explain everything on the assumption that matter was essentially evil and that the good God could only touch evil matter by means of a series of aeons or emanations so far removed from him as to prevent contamination by God and yet with enough power to create evil matter." These Gnostics (*hoi gnostikoi*, the knowing ones) with their philosophic speculations applied their theory of the universe to the Person of Christ. Many today are content to deny sin, disease, death and evil in spite of the evidence to the contrary. The issue was so grave that Epaphras journeyed all the way to Rome to seek Paul's wisdom and help.

PURPOSE OF WRITING: Paul wrote to counter the Gnostic attack on the Person of Christ. The Docetic (*dokeo*, to seem) held that Jesus did not have a real human body, but only a phantom body. He was an aeon

(*dokeo*, to seem) held that Jesus did not have a real human body, but only a phantom body. He was an aeon and had no real humanity. The Cerinthian Gnostics (followers of Cerinthus) "admitted the humanity of the man Jesus, but claimed that the Christ was an aeon that came on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove and left him on the Cross so that only the man Jesus died."

Paul confronted both false teachings with "his full-length portrait of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man (both deity and humanity) in opposition to both types of Gnostics." Cf. Phil. 2:5-11.

Colossians is just as relevant today when men try to rob Jesus Christ of his death as when Paul wrote it. It speaks to the New Age Movements, the legalists, as well as the "licentious element that let down all the bars for the flesh while the spirit communed with God."

THE LYCUS VALLEY: Three important cities in the Lycus Valley, Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colosse, were located about 100 miles from Ephesus along the River Lycus. They were a part of the Roman province of Asia in Paul's day. Colosse straddled the river about twelve miles up river from the other two cities. The rich volcanic ground produced magnificent pasture land. The great center for the woolen industry was located there. Laodicea was specially famous for the production of garments of the finest quality. Dying was also associated to the wool industry. A certain dye was named after Colosse. These cities have "considerable geographical interest and of great commercial prosperity."

The importance of these cities is seen in the fact that "Laodicea became the political center of the district and the financial headquarters of the whole area, a city of splendid prosperity. Hierapolis became a great trade-center and a notable spa."

The heresy to which Paul is addressing in its incipient form rose from the town of Colosse. If it had been left unchecked it would have resulted in the fall of Christianity.

Many prosperous Jews lived in the Lycus Valley. Barclay estimates as many as 50,000 Jews lived in the area.

[Gnosticism: The Colossian Heresy](#)

Title: Introduction to Colossians

Series: A Look at the Book

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