

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

(NO QUESTIONS – JUST READ)

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul, joined in his salutation by Timothy (**Col 1:1**), and signed by Paul himself at the end of the letter (**Col 4:18**).

THE CITY OF COLOSSE: The city was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Together with Hierapolis (**Col 4:13**) and Laodicea (**Col 2:1; 4:13-16; Rev 3:14-22**), Colosse made up a tri-city area. Each city had its own distinction:

- Hierapolis, a place for health, pleasure, and relaxation
- Laodicea, known for its commercial trade and politics
- Colosse, known simply as a small town

Colosse was mostly a pagan city, with a strong intermingling of Jews (in 62 B.C., there were 11,000 Jewish freemen in the tri-city area). This may explain the nature of some of the problems that arose among the church in Colosse (problems with both pagan and Jewish origin).

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE: The establishment of the church is uncertain. At issue is whether Paul himself had ever been there. Some suggest that Paul may have done some work there during his third journey, on the way to Ephesus. Others point out that Paul's comments imply that he had not personally been in Colosse (**Col 2:1**). One possibility is that the church was established during Paul's extended stay at Ephesus, where the effect of his work spread throughout Asia Minor (**Acts 19:8-10**). It may not have been Paul himself, but one of his co-workers who went out to Colosse. Paul's remarks in the epistle indicate that Epaphras was the one who preached the gospel there (**Col 1:5-8**) and in Hierapolis and Laodicea (**Col 4:12-13**). Though he was with Paul at the time the epistle was written, Epaphras is identified as "one of you" (**Col 4:12**), suggesting that he may have originally been from Colosse.

Other members of the church at Colosse included Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, who may have been father, mother, and son.

By comparing the epistle to the Colossians with that written to Philemon, it is reasonable to suppose that the church at Colosse met in their home (**Col 4:17** with **Philemon 1-2**, and the references to Archippus). If Philemon and his family were hosts of the church at Colosse, then Onesimus (Philemon's slave) would have also been a member there upon his return (cf. **Col 4:7-9** with **Philemon 8-16**).

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING: Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (Col 4:18; cf. Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome. If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Colossians around 61-63 A.D. from Rome. The indication is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. Col 4:7-9; **Philemon 10-12; Ephesians 6:21-22**).

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE: Paul had received a report of the situation at Colosse by way of Epaphras (Col 1:7-8). This report was for the most part favorable (Col 2:5). But the subject matter in the epistle strongly suggests that the church was facing a two-fold danger:

- The danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality.
- The danger of accepting what has been come to known as **"The Colossian heresy"**. This heresy was a syncretism involving four elements of both pagan and Jewish origin:
- **Philosophies of men** - which denied the all sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ (Col 2:8)
- **Judaistic ceremonialism** - which attached special significance to the rite of circumcision, food regulations, and observance of special days (Col 2;11,**16-17**)
- **Angel worship** - which detracted from the uniqueness of Christ (Col 2:18)
- **Asceticism** - which called for harsh treatment of the body as the means to control its lusts (Col 2:20-23)

To guard against these dangers, Paul writes to:

- Warn the Colossians against relapse (Col 1:21-23)
- Warn them against the "solution" being urged upon them by those denying the all-sufficiency of Christ (Col 2:8-23)
- Direct their attention to the "Beloved Son", the "All-Sufficient and Pre-Eminent Savior" (Col 1:13-18; **2:8-10**)

THEME OF THE EPISTLE: With the focus on Jesus Christ as the answer to the "Colossian heresy", the theme of this letter is clearly:

CHRIST – THE FULNESS OF GOD, AND THE PRE-EMINENT, ALL- SUFFICIENT SAVIOR

KEY VERSES: Colossians 2:9-10

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."