

---

# Contents

Introduction	4
COLOSSIANS	
1. Background of Colossians	8
2. Survey of Colossians	16
3. Thanksgiving and Intercession	20
4. The Person and Work of Christ	26
5. Heresies Exposed	36
6. Christianity in Action	44
7. Personal Greetings and Salutations	50
PHILEMON	
8. Paul's Letter to Philemon	54
Bibliography	60

## COLOSSIANS

# Lesson 1

---

# Background of Colossians

**I**n this study, we are considering one of the inspiring letters that Paul wrote in prison—the epistle to the Colossians. The church addressed by this letter was small and inconspicuous, but the letter itself had all the credentials of a message from God. Its readers could not help but notice that it magnifies the Person and work of Jesus Christ. As we study the epistle’s four chapters, let us seek new insights into the riches of intimate fellowship with Christ, who “is all, and in all” (3: 11).

The purpose of this lesson is to acquaint you with the background and setting of Colossians before beginning the analytical studies in Lesson 3. If you have just finished studying Philipians, you will need to shift your attention to a different setting and situation.

(Note: be sure to read every Bible verse cited.)

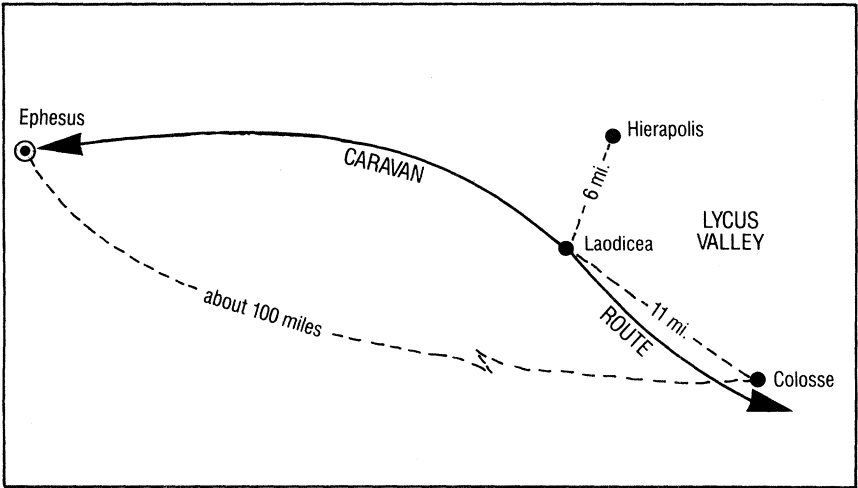
### **I. THE CITY OF COLOSSE**

See the map of the area surrounding Colosse, and note that Colosse was one of the “tri-cities” of the Lycus Valley. This area was about one hundred miles inland from Ephesus. (Check the map on p. 6.) Five centuries before Christ, Colosse was hailed as “the great city of Phrygia.” By Paul’s time, it was just a small town. A main reason for the change was the rise of the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis, when the trade route between Ephesus and the Euphrates Valley was diverted away from Colosse.<sup>1</sup>

When Paul wrote Colossians, there was a Christian congregation meeting in each of these three cities (4:13).

1. Laodicea was known as “the metropolis of the valley,” and Hierapolis, “the sacred city.”

## ENVIRONS OF COLOSSE



The inhabitants of Colosse were mainly Greeks and Phrygians, along with an unusually large Jewish population. The area was famous for its soft wool.

## II. THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

Paul's evangelistic and teaching ministry at Ephesus on his third missionary journey may have had much to do with the founding of the church at Colosse.<sup>2</sup> From Colossians 1:3-4 (cf. 2:1) some conclude that the congregation for the most part were strangers to Paul. Epaphras, who may have been one of Paul's Ephesian converts, could have been the founder of this church (1:7) as well as of the churches of Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. 4:13). At any rate he was a key member of the Colossian congregation (4:12).

Colossians 4:17 suggests that Archippus may have been the church's pastor when Paul wrote the epistle. (Cf. Philem. 2.) The church assembled in the home of Philemon, who was one of its active members (4:9; Philem. 1, 5-7). How large the group was, we do not know. Most of the members were of Greek background. The others were converted Jews.

2. The journey (A.D. 52-55) is recorded in Acts 18:23-21:17. Read especially 19:10, 26.

**III. AUTHOR AND DESTINATION OF THE EPISTLE**

Colossians 1:1 identifies the author as Paul and recognizes Paul’s co-worker Timothy in its greeting. Verse 2 identifies the readers as “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” Paul also directed the Colossian church to share the letter with the church at Laodicea (4:16; cf. 2:1).

**IV. PLACE OF WRITING AND DATE**

Paul wrote wrote this epistle from prison at Rome, around A.D.61. His letters to Philemon and the Ephesians were written and delivered at the same time. (See Chart A.) Tychicus and Onesimus were the bearers of the letters. (See Eph. 6:21-22; Col 4:7-9; Philem. 12, 23-24.)

**CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE PAULINE EPISTLES**

**Chart A**

MISSIONARY TOURS	FIRST IMPRISONMENT	RELEASE	FINAL IMPRISONMENT
A.D. 48-56	61-62	62-67	67
GALATIANS— between tours 1 and 2	COLOSSIANS  PHILEMON  EPHESIANS	1 TIMOTHY	2 TIMOTHY
1 THESSALONIANS } 2 THESSALONIANS } 2 tour	-----	TITUS	
1 CORINTHIANS } 2 CORINTHIANS } 3 ROMANS } tour	PHILIPPIANS		
6 EPISTLES	4 EPISTLES	2 EPISTLES	1 EPISTLE

**V. OCCASION FOR WRITING**

The immediate occasion for writing this letter was heresy in the church at Colosse. (The pronunciation of the two words together, Colosse-Heresy is a help in recalling the setting of this epistle.) Epaphras reported to Paul the false views and evil practices in the

church at that time. (Cf. 1: 7-8.) The section 2:8-23 describes these rather explicitly, though Paul does not name or identify the heresy itself. It would probably be more accurate to use the plural word *heresies*, for a variety of false views were being fostered by the false teachers. Among these were: (1) a Judaistic legalism—circumcision (2:11; 3:11), ordinances (2:14), foods, holidays, et cetera (2:16); (2) a severe asceticism (2:16, 20-23); (3) worship of angels (2:18); and (4) glorification and worship of human knowledge (2:8).

These false views will be discussed in more detail in a later lesson. The important observation we make here is that Paul ably challenged and exploded these heresies on a positive note, by a pure presentation of counter-truths about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. (Read Philem. 23 to learn what may have befallen Epaphras after delivering his report to Paul.)

## **VI. THEME AND TONE**

The main theme of Colossians is well represented by the text “Christ is all, and in all” (3:11). As someone has said, “Paul does not preach a system nor a philosophy but a person—Jesus Christ.” The deity of Christ, the efficacy of His death on the cross, His sovereignty and supreme lordship, and His continuing mediatorship are all part of Paul’s doctrinal message, because these were the doctrines being denied by the false teachers. Other important subjects appearing in the epistle will be observed in our survey study.

The tone throughout the epistle is forthright, positive, bold. Paul takes the offensive, not defensive, position. He has his sword at his side as he writes to the Christians at Colosse. He would agree wholeheartedly with the comment that “the only safeguard against a false intellectual system is a strong and positive Christian theology.” But there is a tone of compassion in the epistle as well. As one writer has remarked, “it breathes the spirit of tenderest love and joy in all sorrows and afflictions.”

## **VII. RELATION TO OTHER NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS**

Colossians is one of the four prison epistles, the other three being Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. All four were written about the same time (A.D. 61-62), which would account for at least some of the similarities in the books.

Colossians and Ephesians have been called twin epistles because of their many likenesses. Both were written with the same general purpose—to show the relationship between Christ and

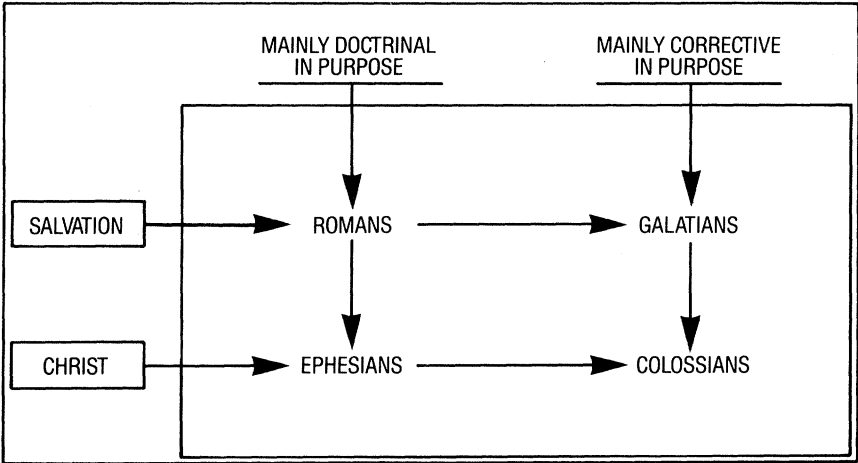
His church, as assurance and correction to young Christians maturing in the Lord. But the two epistles are far from being identical twins. Study Chart B to learn some of the differences.

The place of Colossians in the foursome of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians may also be noted.

**COLOSSIANS AND EPHESIANS COMPARED**

**Chart B**

COLOSSIANS	EPHESIANS
Christ and the cosmos	Christ and the church
emphasis on Christ, Head of the church	emphasis on the church, Body of Christ
more personal; local	less personal; lofty
combats error directly	combats error indirectly
tone: intensity and tumult of a battlefield	tone: calmness of surveying the field after victory



**Review Questions**

1. How large a city was Colosse in the days of Paul?

\_\_\_\_\_

How far was it from Ephesus?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did Paul have anything to do with the founding of the church at Colosse? If so, what?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name some active members of the congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_

Who may have been the pastor when Paul wrote Colossians?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Was Paul acquainted with most of the congregation by sight?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Where were the two nearest churches located?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Where was Paul when he wrote Colossians, and when did he write?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What was the immediate occasion for writing this letter?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What serious problems threatened the Colossian church?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What approach did Paul use in writing to the church?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





**THE PLACE OF THE CHRISTOLOGICAL EPISTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

NEW TESTAMENT					
HISTORY	EPISTLES				APOCALYPSE
	Pauline		General		
MATTHEW	EARLY	LATER	REVELATION		
MARK	during missionary journeys	after arrest at Jerusalem			
LUKE	GALATIANS	FIRST IMPRISONMENT ('prison epistles')	RELEASE	SECOND IMPRISONMENT	JAMES
JOHN		CHRISTOLOGICAL	PASTORAL		HEBREWS
ACTS	1 THESSALONIANS	COLOSSIANS	1 TIMOTHY		JUDE
	2 THESSALONIANS		TITUS		1 PETER
	1 CORINTHIANS	EPHESIANS	2 TIMOTHY		2 PETER
	2 CORINTHIANS	PHILEMON			1 JOHN
	ROMANS	PHILIPPIANS			2 JOHN
					3 JOHN