

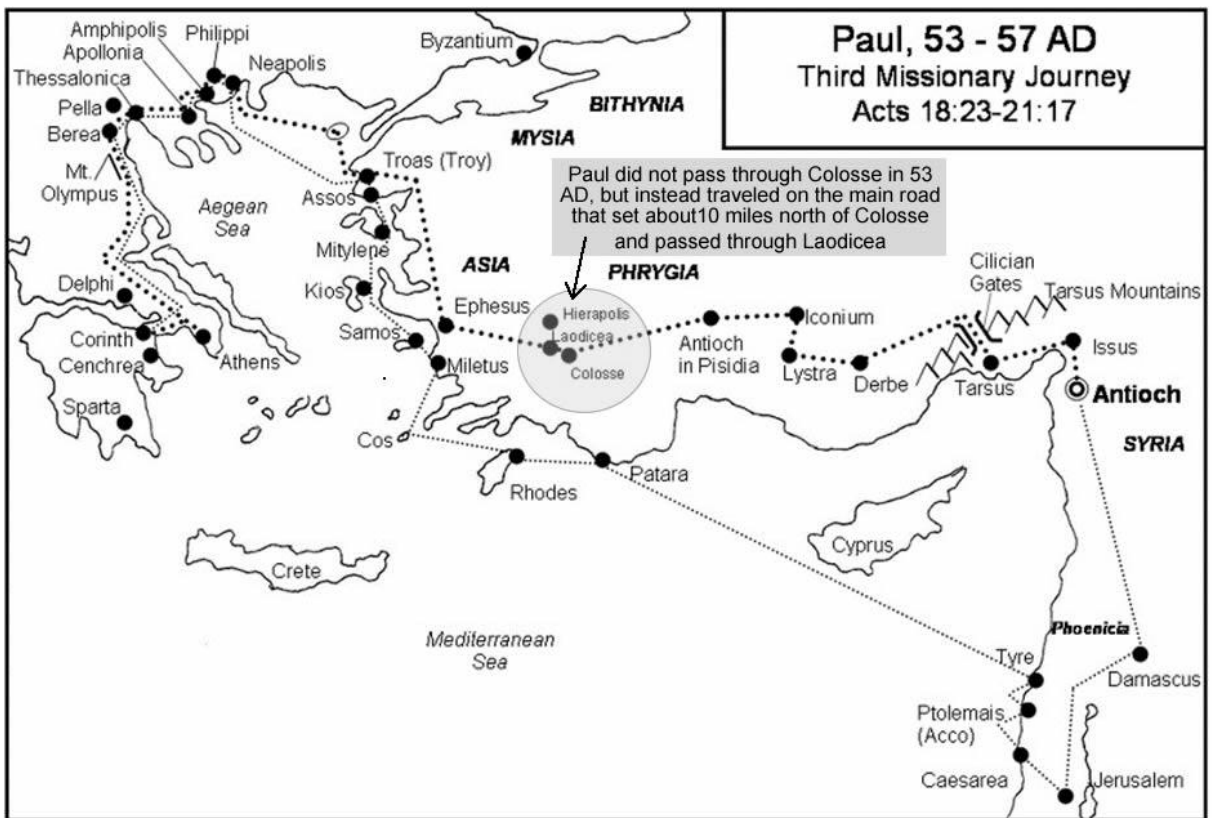
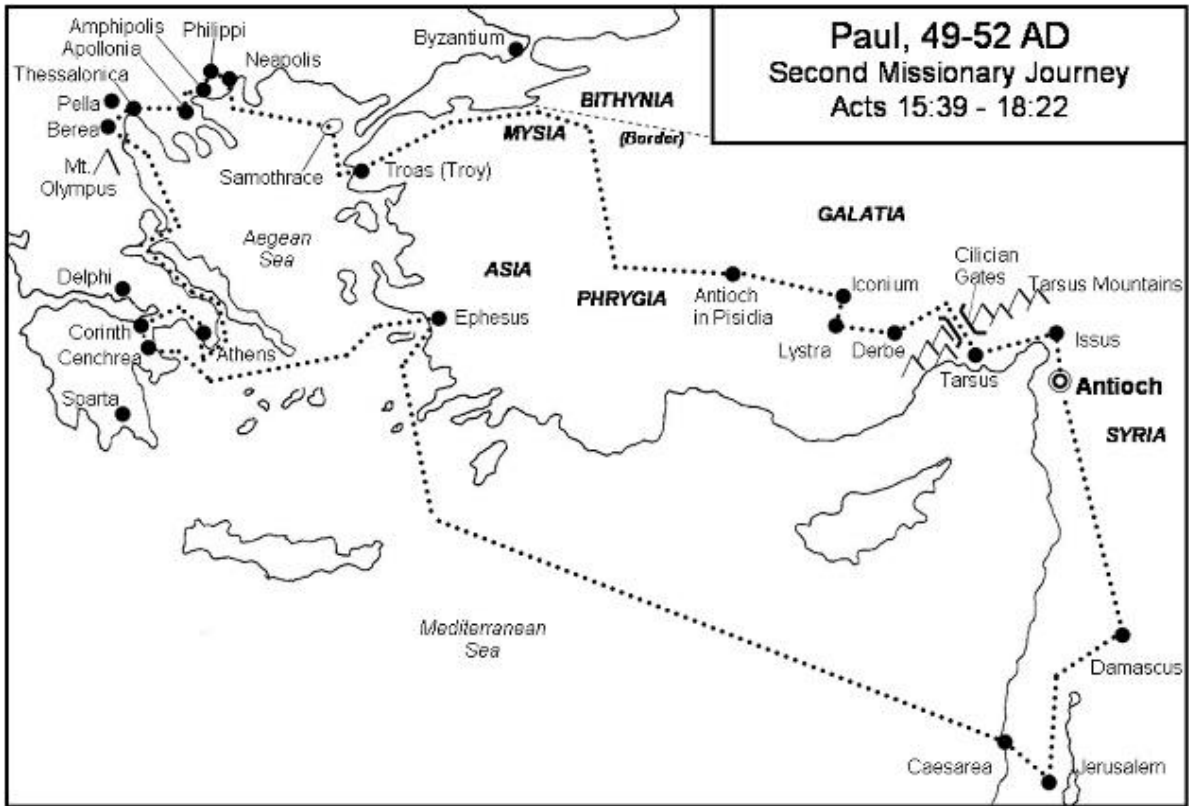
Colossians – Introduction

*“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy . . .
For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” 2:8, 9*

1. Focus of the book is on Christ.
 - a. Christ is the fullness of deity and the only adequate source and reason of life.
 - b. Christology is developed
 - c. The True Christ is distinguished from a “christ” that is deconstructed into the image of philosophy, culture, religion or the thoughts of man.
 - d. Religion, philosophy or world-view not centered on Christ is identified as *“philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits (or, “elementary principles) of the world, and not according to Christ.”*
 - e. Christ as presented in Colossians:
 - i. Christ is the **creator** (1:16-17)
 - ii. Christ **sustains** all things (1:16-17)
 - iii. Christ is the **fullness of Deity** (1:15, 19; 2:9)
 - iv. Christ is the **head of all principality and power** (2:10)
 - v. Christ is the **redeemer** (1:14)
 - vi. Christ has **reconciled** us to God (1:20-22; 2:11-15)
 - vii. Christ is the **resurrected** One (1:18; 3:1)
 - viii. Christ is the **head of the church** (1:18)
 - ix. Christ is our **life** (3:4)
 - x. Christ is the **source** of our strength to live the new life (1:11)
 - xi. Christ is our **returning Lord** (3:4)
2. Purpose of the book is to defeat worldly philosophies sweeping through Colosse that demeaned Jesus
3. Basic Outline:
 - a. 1:1-2:3, Doctrinal – the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - i. Paul thanks God for the Colossians’ faith
 - ii. Paul prays for the Colossians’ growth
 - iii. Paul describes the glorious person of Christ
 - iv. Paul describes the richness of Christ’s redemptive work
 - v. Paul identifies his personal ministry which is presenting the fullness of God’s word to believers
 - b. 2:4-23, The Colosse Heresy – emptiness of worldly philosophies and completeness of Christ
 - i. Paul goes on attack exposing competing philosophies and heresies undermining Christianity in Colosse.
 - ii. We do not know the specifics of this unique Greek culture under Roman rule with a heavy Jewish culture, but somethings that are mentioned are:
 1. **Traditionalism** which honors man made customs and rituals of the past with a less than satisfactory understanding of why things are done. (2:4, 8)
 2. **Ceremonialism** from a pagan religion much like the Jewish Judaism that dictated acceptable food and drink, honored holy days and religious festivals, and practiced circumcision. (2:11-17)

3. **Asceticism** is a system with a life style dominated by abstinence from natural activities, foods, or customs in the pursuit of gaining a spiritual or religious goal. (2:21)
 4. **Early Gnosticism** and other forms of religions based on secret knowledge (2:18)
 5. **Angel worship** (2:18)
 6. **Philosophy** and man's wisdom outside of God (2:8)
 7. **Merkabah Mysticism** - "Merkabah" means "heavenly chariot." This included a process of legal observances, ascetic practices, mystical experiences and the uses of "angels" (stoichea) to pass through the heavenlies and see vision of God as Ezekiel. See an example of a heavenly ascent, or a "Merkabah" experience recorded in 1 Enoch 14:8-23 below.
- c. 3:1-4:6, Practical Application – the lifestyle and character of a believer in Jesus
 - i. Paul establishes some expectations for believers in Christ. They have access to wisdom and power of Christ.
 - ii. The Christian's life should manifest this wisdom and power which is accessible from our position in Christ.
 - d. 4:7-18, Paul refers to nine people that are either with him or who are being greeted by him.
4. Authorship
- a. Paul has been accepted as the author since the earliest days of the church and until the 1800's.
 - b. In the 1800's the textual critics challenged the claim that Paul was the author. This challenge has grown into the 1900's and the 2000's. These challenges can be summed up as
 - i. The vocabulary and sentence structure are not what the critics in the modern age think they should be if written from Rome to a small city in the middle of Asia in 61-62 AD
 - ii. The highly developed theology in the area of Christology. This is assuming that the concept of Jesus being God and being the Messiah savior developed slowly over the first 2-3 centuries of Christianity, instead of being point-blank clear from Jesus teaching, the OT support and the revelation/teaching of the apostles in the first century
 - iii. The inability to precisely pinpoint the exact nature, philosophy or sect of the heresies Paul was combatting. Since we are not very clear in what Paul was talking about in a specific letter to this church in this small city 2,000 years ago then the modern critics assume the book is not written by Paul. (This, of course, reflects the arrogance of the modern scholars who are operating from a foundation of secular humanism deep with skepticism, naturalism, evolution, anti-spiritual, anti-god which assumes our generation and our "advanced" Western culture knows more than any other culture including the culture who produced, received and read this letter which was talking about something specific to their situation in 61-62 AD. Point in our arrogance we assume that our inability to understand is someone else's error.

- c. The good news is there is also many solid conservative academics, scholars, linguist, archaeologist, historians and theologians who totally reject the notion that the book of Colossians came from someone other than the Apostle Paul sometime around 55-62 AD.
 - d. The author does not explain the details of the false teaching in Colosse because the original readers already KNEW the false teaching and were familiar with the cults, sects and pagan religions that they lived in and around and may have been involved with. There is no need to explain a person's hometown to them when you are giving them advice about living in their hometown. The ONLY time someone would have to provide details about the obvious is if you are writing a false document in an attempt to convince other people in another circumstances in another time to be influence by what was written in the past.
 - e. Colosse was NOT an important city. It was 25 miles from the western coast.
 - i. Colosse was in the middle of Pagan land. Once a great city according to Herodotus, but now it was 11 miles from Laodicea, the major city of that region
 - ii. Colosse had just suffered an earthquake that would alter its value in 60-61 AD according to Tacitus where he writes of this in *Annals 14.27*. Colosse suffered significant damage and was never rebuilt to the same level. (Laodicea on the other hand rebuilt itself.)
 - iii. Colosse is the least important place any of the canonized books were ever sent.
5. Setting for the book:
- a. Paul wrote a letter to the believers (church) in the city of Colossae in 62 AD during his first Roman imprisonment (60-62 AD).
 - b. Paul had never been to Colossae, but this area called the Lycus Valley was evangelized while Paul was in Ephesus 52-55 AD. **Acts 19:10**
 - c. According to **Colossians 1:4 and 2:1** Paul had not been in Colossae, did not start the church in Colossae, and only knew a few of the people personally.
 - d. Paul did know these individuals from Colossae:
 - i. Epaphras, **Col. 1:7** and **Philemon 23**. Epaphras had started the church **4:12-13**
 - ii. Philemon, who received the letter and was converted by Paul **Philemon 19**
 - iii. And, eventually, Onesimus, the run-away slave Philemon 10
 - e. Paul and Luke appear to have passed by Colossae to the north on the Third Missionary trip which would make this second map wrong. **Acts 19:1** calls it the "road through the interior" to arrive at Ephesus. This would not be the lower direct route down the Meander River through the Lycus valley, but the instead they would have approached Colossae from a northern direction. It is important, possibly, to note that there were some disciples of John the Baptist, who himself may have been associated with the Essenes, there in Ephesus (**Acts 19:1-3**)





- f. Our only contact or information about the Colossian church is in the book of Colossians and Philemon. John wrote to the church in Laodicea in the Lycus Valley in Rev. 3:14-22. Hierapolis had the hot springs, Colossae had the refreshing cold springs, but Laodicea had to pipe in their water.
- g. Paul states to Timothy that Timothy was aware that Asia had turned away from Paul and his teaching 5-6 years later in 67 AD. Paul saw this coming and warned the Ephesus leaders in Acts 20:29-30 in the year 57 AD.
 - i. 2 Timothy 1:15 – “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.”
- h. After the beginning of the Roman wars in 66 AD and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 believers from Judea, including John (and, traditionally Jesus’ mother, Mary) and Philip fled to the Lycus Valley and this area. John went to Ephesus and Philip went to Hierapolis where he was martyred and buried (a church dedicated to Philip was known

of from an inscription and then the recent discovery

(<http://ferrelljenkins.wordpress.com/2011/07/28/tomb-of-philip-found-at-hierapolis/>)

- i. John's disciple Papias was the bishop of Hierapolis around 110-150 AD while John's disciple Polycarp was bishop at Smyrna
- j. In 172 AD the Hierapolis bishop Claudius Apolinaris presented a written apologetic document to Emperor Marcus Aurelius defending the Christian faith.
- k. The charismatic/Pentecostal group of 155 AD who followed Montanus (the Montanists) prophesied that the New Jerusalem would soon come from heaven to the city of Pepouza, thirty miles north of Lycus valley.
- l. In 363 AD the church council held at Laodicea wrote 60 rules called the "Canons of Laodicea" which have been accepted by later church councils as orthodox.

6. Archaeology

- a. Excavations at Laodicea between 1961-1963 revealed a nymphaeum with public fountains. This building had been destroyed by an earthquake in the 400's and was then converted into a church.
- b. Laodicea and Hierapolis have been excavated, but Colossae has not been excavated.

7. Population

- a. Mainly Greek colonists mixed with native Phrygians.
- b. There were hundreds of Jewish families relocated here from Mesopotamia by Antochus the Great around 200 BC. These Jews seem to have a more liberal approach to their Judaism (having come out of Babylonian area 200 years after Ezra, etc.)

8. Reason for the letter

- a. Epaphras seems to have traveled to Rome to see Paul and get council concerning the influence of the false philosophy, false religion and false Christian teaching that was overrunning his church.
- b. Archippus seems to have stood in as the leader in Epaphras' absence (Col. 4:17 and Philem 2)
- c. False teachings circulating through the church - Colossians 2:8; 2:20; 2:18; 2:23



Looking north at the Lycus Valley from the acropolis of Colossae.
This valley has several strong streams of fresh water and is fertile and irrigated.



A view of the tel of the remains of the acropolis of Colossae.
Note the mountains to the south of Colossae and Colossae's position in the Lycus Valley



Remains of an unexcavated small theater or an Odeon.

This view is looking south while standing on the tel.
(Photos from Carl Rasmussen, holylandphotos.org)

Merkabah Mysticism

- “Merkabah” means “heavenly chariot”
- This included a process of legal observances, ascetic practices, mystical experiences and the uses of “angels” (stoichea) to pass through the heavenlies and see vision of God as Ezekiel.
- This heavenly ascent is found in 1 Enoch 14:8-23 –
“¹ The book of the words of righteousness, and of the reprimand of the eternal Watchers in accordance ² with the command of the Holy Great One in that vision. I saw in my sleep what I will now say with a tongue of flesh and with the breath of my mouth: which the Great One has given to men to ³ converse therewith and understand with the heart. As He has created and given to man the power of understanding the word of wisdom, so hath He created me also and given me the power of reprimanding ⁴ the Watchers, the children of heaven. I wrote out your petition, and in my vision it appeared thus, that your petition will not be granted unto you throughout all the days of eternity, and that judgement ⁵ has been finally passed upon you: yea (your petition) will not be granted unto you. And from henceforth you shall not ascend into heaven unto all eternity, and in bonds of the earth the decree ⁶ has gone forth to bind you for all the days of the world. And (that) previously you shall have seen the destruction of your beloved sons and ye shall have no pleasure in them, but they shall fall before⁷ you by the sword. And your petition on their behalf shall not be granted, nor yet on your own: even though you weep and pray and speak all the words contained in the writing which I have ⁸ written. And the vision was shown to me thus: Behold, in the vision clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in ⁹ the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward, and bore me into heaven. And I went in till I drew nigh to a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire: and it began to affright ¹⁰ me. And I went into the tongues of fire and drew nigh to a large house which was built of crystals: and the walls of the house were like a tessellated floor (made) of crystals, and its groundwork was ¹¹ of crystal. Its ceiling was like the path of the stars and the lightnings, and between them were ¹² fiery cherubim, and their heaven was (clear as) water. A flaming fire surrounded the walls, and its ¹³ portals blazed with fire. And I entered into that house, and it was hot as fire and cold as ice: there ¹⁴ were no delights of life therein: **fear covered me, and trembling got hold upon me.** And as I quaked ¹⁵ and trembled, **I fell upon my face.** And **I beheld a vision.** And lo! there was a second house, greater ¹⁶ than the former, and the entire portal stood open before me, and it was built of flames of fire. And in every respect it so excelled in splendour and magnificence and extent that **I cannot describe** to ¹⁷ you its splendour and its extent. And its floor was of fire, and above it were lightnings and the path ¹⁸ of the stars, and its ceiling also was flaming fire. And **I looked and saw** therein a lofty throne: its appearance was as crystal, and the wheels thereof as the shining sun, and there was the vision of ¹⁹ cherubim. And from underneath the throne came streams of flaming fire so that **I could not look** ²⁰ thereon. **And the Great Glory sat thereon**, and His raiment shone more brightly than the sun and ²¹ was whiter than any snow. **None of the angels could enter** and could behold His face by reason ²² of the magnificence and glory and no flesh could behold Him. The flaming fire was round about Him, and a great fire stood before Him, and none around could draw nigh Him: ten thousand times ²³ ten thousand (stood) before Him, yet He needed no counselor. And the most holy ones who were ²⁴ nigh to Him did not leave by night nor depart from Him. And until then I had been prostrate on my face, trembling: **and the Lord called me with His own mouth, and said to me: 'Come hither,** ²⁵ Enoch, and hear my word.' And one of the holy ones came to me and waked me, and He made me rise up and approach the door: and **I bowed my face downwards.**”

– 1 Enoch 14:8-23