

COLOSSIANS

While Paul was in legal limbo under house arrest in Rome around AD 60 to 62, he was forced into a two-year hiatus from the mission field. But during those two years he didn't just sit around staring at the walls. He took the opportunity to build up the church through a ministry of writing which included what we call his four "_____ [a] Epistles": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

THE CITY OF COLOSSAE

If you travel to the site of _____ [b] today, all you'll see is an elevated green mound (called a "tell" or "tel" in archaeology) in the countryside. If you didn't know what you were looking at, you'd have no idea that the unexcavated remains of an ancient town were under the soil. Of course, if you travel about 120 west of this unexcavated site of Colossae, you'd come to one of the great tourist sites in modern-day Turkey, the well-excavated site of _____ [c], and you'd see hordes of tourists and tour buses swarming the site. It's not an exaggeration to say that if Paul had not written his letter to the Colossians, nobody but a few historians and maybe a few nearby residents would know that the remains of the once-bustling city of Colossae was buried there.

In its heyday, before the _____ [d] era and several centuries before Christ, Colossae was a bustling, rich, important city. It was situated at the junction of the main trade routes running east from Ephesus and north to Pergamos. It was also situated at the head of a gorge in the Lycus River valley where two streams united. The water there contained an unusual amount of carbonate of lime deposits which was ideal for dying cloth. As a result, Colossae in its heyday was well known for its _____ [e] industry, especially its _____ [f]-dyed wool. By the time Paul wrote Colossians, the city had become largely _____ [g]. In Roman times, the road to Pergamos was rerouted through the nearby city of Laodicea, bypassing Colossae. That, coupled with the rise of Laodicea and Hierapolis (another nearby city), led to the _____ [h] in importance of Colossae. The ancient geographer Strabo, writing around the time of Christ, called Colossae "a small town."

The area that Colossae was in was a very _____ [i]-prone area. Near the time that Paul was under house arrest (around AD 60 or 61), Colossae and its larger, neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis were shaken to their core and devastated by a massive earthquake. Even though by this time Colossae's significance had waned and it was

overshadowed by its more prosperous neighbors Laodicea and Hierapolis, it was nevertheless rebuilt because of its favorable location in the Lycus River valley and its proximity to Laodicea and Hierapolis (which, obviously, were rebuilt as well).

The population of Colossae was predominantly _____ [j] (Col 2:13), but there was a sizable _____ [k] community there as well. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions that Antiochus III (223-187 BC) resettled two thousand Jewish families from Babylon to the region of Phrygia (the province where Colossae was located). By Paul's day, some two centuries later, this Jewish presence would have had ample time to establish roots in Colossae. Worship of a pagan goddess was widely practiced in the Lycus Valley, and so it's fair to assume that it would have been popular in Colossae. Also, coins from Colossae show that people during the Roman Empire (27 BC—AD 180) worshiped a number of pagan gods including Artemis of Ephesus. This swirl of cultural and religious ideas seems to have had a significant impact on the church in Colossae. They would have faced the threat of corrupting the purity of the _____ [l] by combining it with _____ [m] and _____ [n] ideas.

THE CHURCH IN COLOSSAE

Paul had a very close, personal relationship with the church in both Philippi and Ephesus. In the book of Acts, Luke records Paul's involvement with planting and nurturing the church in both of those locations (Philippi, Acts 16) and (Ephesus, Acts 19-20). The city of _____ [o], however, isn't even mentioned in Acts. Does that necessarily mean that Paul had never visited Colossae? No, not necessarily. But there are a couple of things he says in Colossians which lead us to believe that he had never personally visited the church there. In Colossians 1:4 he says he has "_____ [p] of your faith in Christ Jesus . . ." and in 2:1 he says, "I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you . . . and for all who have _____ [q] seen me face to face."

When then, was the church planted in Colossae, and who planted it? Paul said the brethren in Colossae heard about the "grace of God in truth" and "learned it from Epaphras our fellow servant" (Col 1:6-7). He goes on to say about Epaphras, "He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit" (Col 1:7-8). So, it appears that _____ [r] planted the church there, possibly with the help of another friend of Paul's, _____ [s], who was serving as a leader in that new church (Phlm 1:1-2). Paul also writes that Epaphras—who is with Paul in _____ [t] when Paul writes Colossians—works very hard for the church not only in Colossae, but also in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:12-13). Epaphras, it seems, was an

evangelist making a _____ [u] among the _____ [v] churches in those cities of close geographical proximity.

Assuming that Epaphras was the primary church planter in these three cities, when would he have done so? It's impossible to say with certainty, but in Acts Luke tells us that during Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus (on his third missionary journey), "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). It was probably at this time that the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis got their start. Epaphras was probably _____ [w] while visiting _____ [x] during Paul's stay there, and then he returned to his hometown (Colossae, Col 4:12) and planted the church.

Evidently, these three geographically close cities worked closely in spreading the _____ [y]. After all, not only does Paul say that Epaphras works hard for the churches in all three cities, but he admonishes the Colossians to have their letter read to the church in _____ [z], and to have the Laodicean letter read in Colossae (Col 4:15).

CONTENT OF COLOSSIANS

Despite the hard work of Epaphras, the church at Colossae was facing some real _____ [aa]. False teaching was beginning to sprout, and Epaphras thought it was serious enough that he decided to make the 1000+ mile round trip to _____ [bb] to visit Paul in prison. Fortunately, it doesn't seem the church had yet been deeply infected by the false teaching, but it had definitely started to make its way into the congregation. Paul must write to warn the Colossian brethren against its dangers. So, Colossians is really a "_____ [cc] letter." Paul was determined to nip these false ideas in the bud before they grew deep roots. So, through both positive _____ [dd] and clear _____ [ee], Paul set out to _____ [ff] the church in Colossae and her sister congregations in the nearby sister cities.

What exactly was the particular _____ [gg] that the Colossians were facing? It's impossible to say with certainty, but we can say that it included a mixture of _____ [hh] philosophy (Col 2:8) and _____ [ii] legalism (Col 2:11-14, 16; 3:11). Here are some of the false elements:

- *Christ alone is not* _____ [jj]. Salvation involved Jesus plus superior knowledge. They probably claimed _____ [kk] as a basis for their superior knowledge (Col 2:18). Paul said such mystics were "puffed up without reason" (Col 2:18).
- *God is good, but matter is* _____ [ll]. In their minds, God could not have created evil matter. Paul, however, emphasized that Jesus is fully God and He created all things (Col 1:15-16).

- _____ [mm] *were to be worshiped because their help was essential for salvation.* Jesus, in fact, was viewed in the same category as an angel whose help was needed to break through a barrier that had been formed by demons between God and man. Paul emphatically condemns the worship of angels (Col 2:18).
- *Jesus is not* _____ [nn]. Since God was the opposite of evil matter, he could never become man. Yet speaking of Jesus, Paul says, “In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9), and “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).
- *Jesus in not fully* _____ [oo]. Since matter was viewed as evil, it was inconceivable that Jesus would take on a human body. But Paul stresses that Christ “has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death” (Col 1:22).
- *Jesus alone is not* _____ [pp] *for salvation.* This is similar to what was said in the first point, but needs further elaboration. Paul repeatedly attacks this false teaching. He wrote of his desire to “present every man complete in Christ” (Col 1:28). It is in Christ that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Col 2:3). “All the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9). And, finally, Paul sums up Christ’s sufficiency with these words: “in Him you have been made complete” (Col 2:10).
- *Advocated* _____ [qq]. Asceticism is harsh treatment of the body and denying it of anything pleasurable. Paul makes it clear that asceticism plays no role in salvation. He asks, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ . . . in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?” (Col 2:20-22). He condemned such teaching as “matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col 2:23).
- *Promoted* _____ [rr] *dietary laws and holy days.* Those things, Paul said, are not necessary for salvation: “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day” (Col 2:16).
- *Embraced* _____ [ss]. Paul said the only circumcision that matters is spiritual circumcision that happens when we’re baptized into Christ. “In [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11).

Although the Colossian heresy contained many diverse elements, at its core was a denial of the sufficiency of _____ [tt] for salvation. The theme of the book, then, can be summed up in the words: “Christ is all in all.” (Col 3:11). He is God (Col 2:9), Creator (Col 1:16), Savior (1:20;

2:13-14), the Head of the church (Col 1:18). It was Paul's desire in writing Colossians that his readers would realize that Christ has "come to have first place in everything" (Col 1:18).

LESSONS FROM COLOSSIANS

- The present age will not end in a nuclear or environmental disaster, but with the _____[uu] of Christ in all His glory (Col 3:1-4).
- The new life in Christ should affect all _____[vv] (husband and wives, parents and children, employers and employees) (Col 3:18-4:1).
- Concentrate on things _____[ww] (Col 3:1-2).
- As _____[xx] in human flesh, Jesus' word is authoritative and absolute (Col 1:15; 2:9).
- There is _____[yy] true church and Jesus is its _____[zz] (Col 1:18). No other religious leader is on par with Jesus.
- In the act of _____[aaa] God performs a supernatural operation on us and removes our sin (Col 2:11-12).
- We've _____[bbb] to our old selves; act like it! (Col 3:5)
- Let God's _____[ccc] make its home inside us (Col 3:16).

KEY PASSAGES FROM PHILIPPIANS

- Colossians 1:13-14
- Colossians 1:15-20
- Colossians 2:8-9
- Colossians 2:11-12
- Colossians 3:1-4
- Colossians 3:16-17
- Colossians 4:2-6

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] Prison	[ss] circumcision
[b] Colossae	[tt] Christ
[c] Ephesus	[uu] return
[d] Roman	[vv] relationships
[e] textile	[ww] above
[f] purple	[xx] God
[g] insignificant	[yy] one
[h] decline	[zz] head
[i] earthquake	[aaa] baptism
[j] Gentile	[bbb] died
[k] Jewish	[ccc] Word
[l] gospel	
[m] Jewish	
[n] pagan	
[o] Colossae	
[p] heard	
[q] not	
[r] Epaphras	
[s] Philemon	
[t] Rome	
[u] circuit	
[v] three	
[w] converted	
[x] Ephesus	
[y] gospel	
[z] Laodicea	
[aa] danger	
[bb] Rome	
[cc] preventative	
[dd] encouragement	
[ee] warnings	
[ff] strengthen	
[gg] heresy	
[hh] Greek	
[ii] Jewish	
[jj] adequate	
[kk] visions	
[ll] evil	
[mm] Angels	
[nn] deity	
[oo] human	
[pp] sufficient	
[qq] asceticism	
[rr] Jewish	