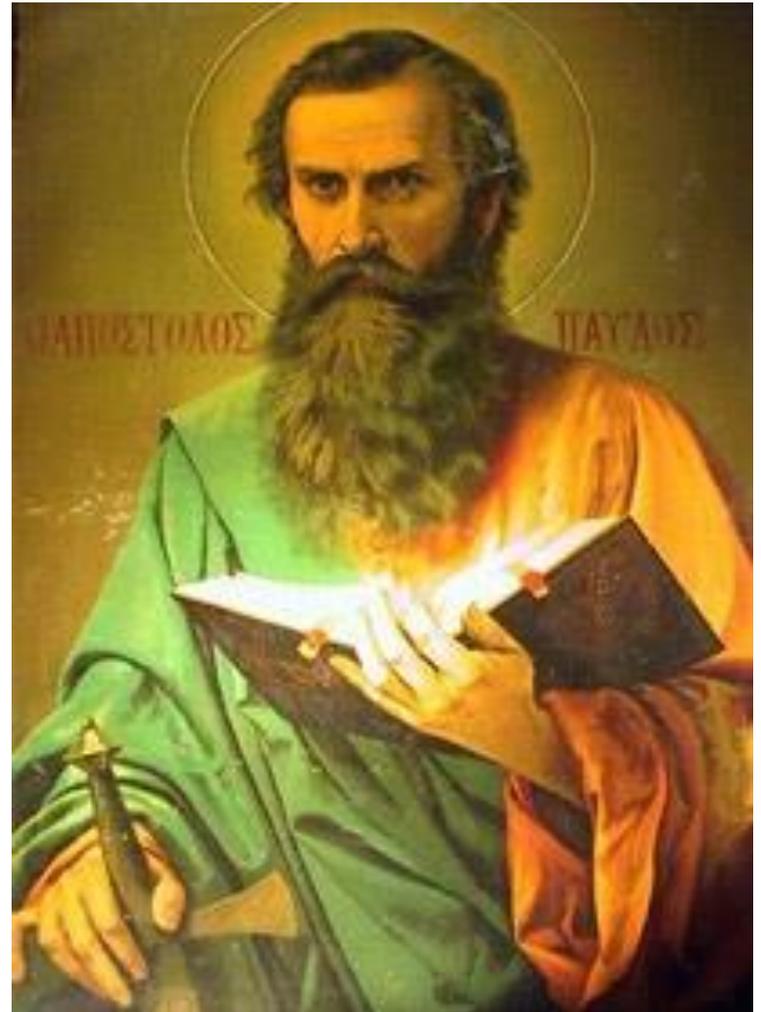


**Letter to the
Colossians
Bible Class #16**



INTRODUCTION:

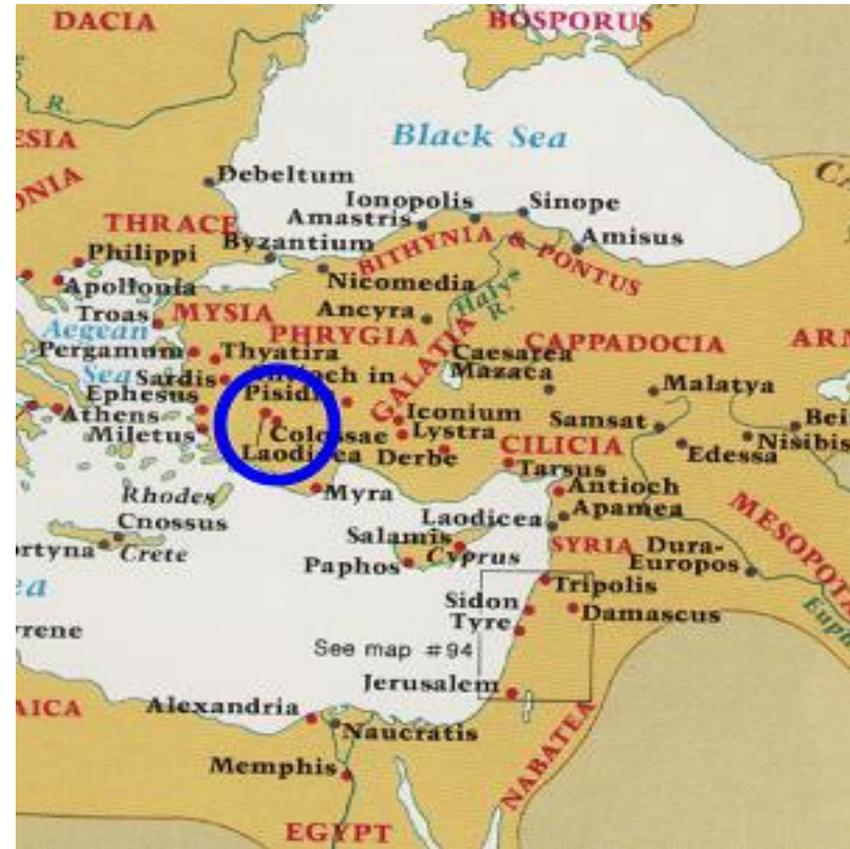
The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians, usually referred to simply as Colossians, is the twelfth book of the New Testament. This letter is addressed to a congregation at Colossae in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor, about 120 miles east of Ephesus.

At the time of writing, as the letter says, Paul had not visited there, (Colossians 1:4; 2:1).

AUTHORSHIP:

It was written, according to the text, by Paul the Apostle and Timothy to the Church in Colossae. *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother to the holy ones and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father.”* (Colossians 1: 1-2).

Pauline authorship was held to by many of the early Church Fathers of the First and Second centuries, such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen of Alexandria and Eusebius.



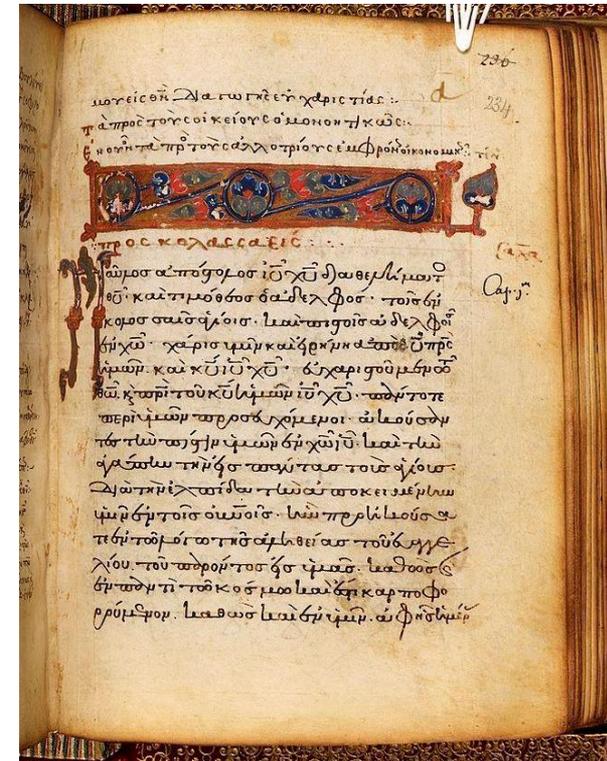
WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN (AND CONTEXT):

Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians while in prison, but his several imprisonments leave the specific place and date of composition uncertain.

On this point the same problem exists as with Ephesians and Philippians. Traditionally the house arrest at Rome, in which Paul enjoyed a certain restricted freedom in preaching (see Acts 28:16–28), or a second Roman imprisonment has been claimed as the setting. Others suggest a still earlier imprisonment at Caesarea (see Acts 23:12–27:1) or in Ephesus (see Acts 19). Still others regard the letter as the work of some pupil or follower of Paul, writing in his name. In any case, the contents are often closely paralleled by thoughts in Ephesians.

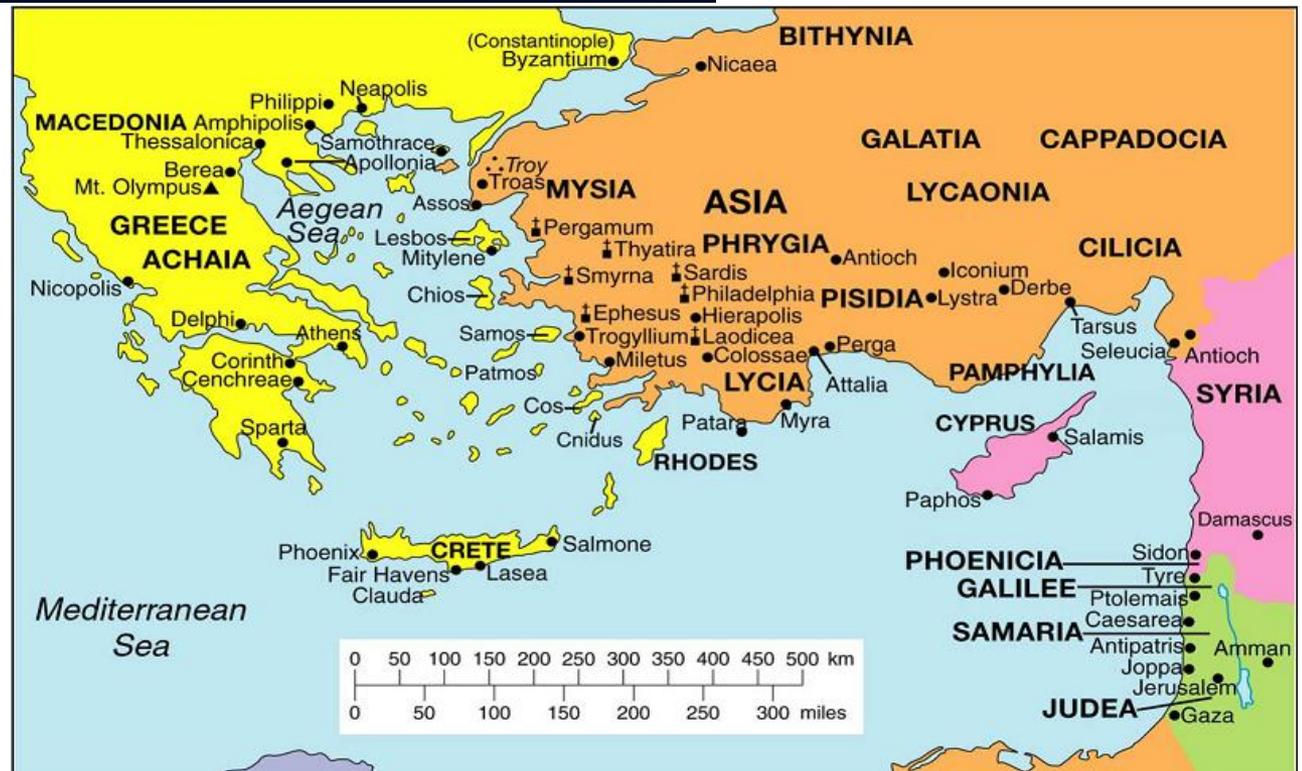
The three cities that are mentioned in Colossians, Colossæ, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, were situated about 120 miles east from Ephesus in Phrygia, in Western Asia Minor, Colossæ and Laodicea being on the banks of the Lycus, a tributary of the Mæander. All three were within two or three hours' walk from one another.

Majority opinions suggest Colossians was written between mid-50's to late 60's.



Church of Colossae

- Mostly Gentiles
- Founded by Epaphras (1:7)
- Paul did not start church : His fellow Missionary did
- *Paul's mission strategy = evangelise & start churches in main cities & send out his fellow missionaries to smaller towns in the region*
- Paul had not met them – but still prayed much for them (1:3,9)



OVERVIEW:

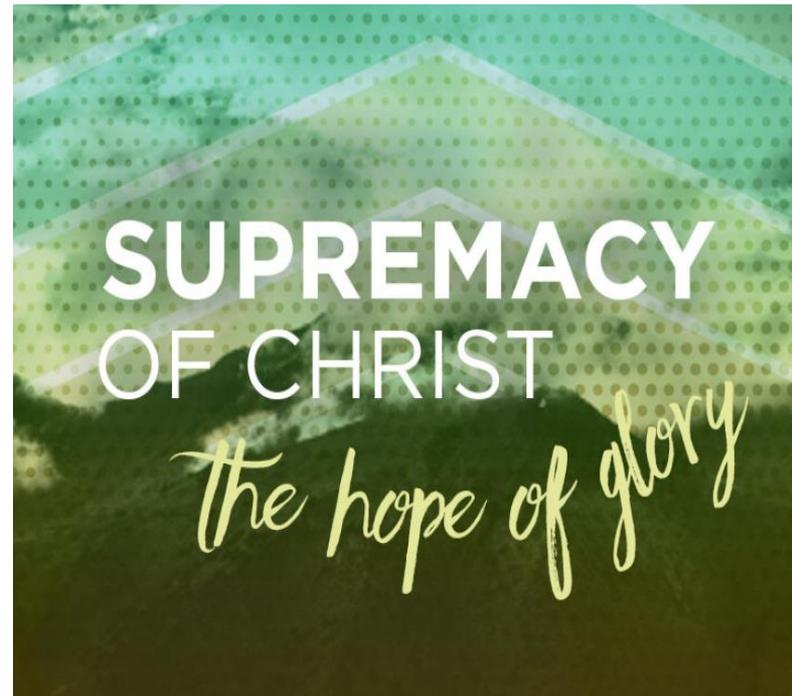
The community had apparently been established by Epaphras of Colossae (Colossians 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 23). Colossians was written as a warning against certain false teachers, about whom St. Paul had probably heard from Epaphras, his "*fellow-prisoner*" and the founder of the Church of the Colossians.

Problems, however, had arisen, brought on by teachers who emphasized Christ's relation to the universe (cosmos). Their teachings stressed angels (Colossians 2:18; "*principalities and powers,*" Colossians 2:15), which were connected with astral powers and cultic practices and rules about food

and drink and ascetical disciplines (Colossians 2:16, 18). These teachings, Paul insists, detract from the person and work of Christ for salvation and are but "*shadows*"; Christ is "*reality*" (Colossians 2:17).

It is unnecessary for the Christian to be concerned about placating spirits (Colossians 2:15) or avoiding imagined defilement through ascetical practices in regard to food and drink (Colossians 2:20–23).

Paul makes it clear the absolute supremacy of Christ over all things. Paul commends the community as a whole (Colossians 1:3–8); this seems to indicate that, though the Colossians have been under pressure to adopt the false doctrines, they have not yet succumbed.

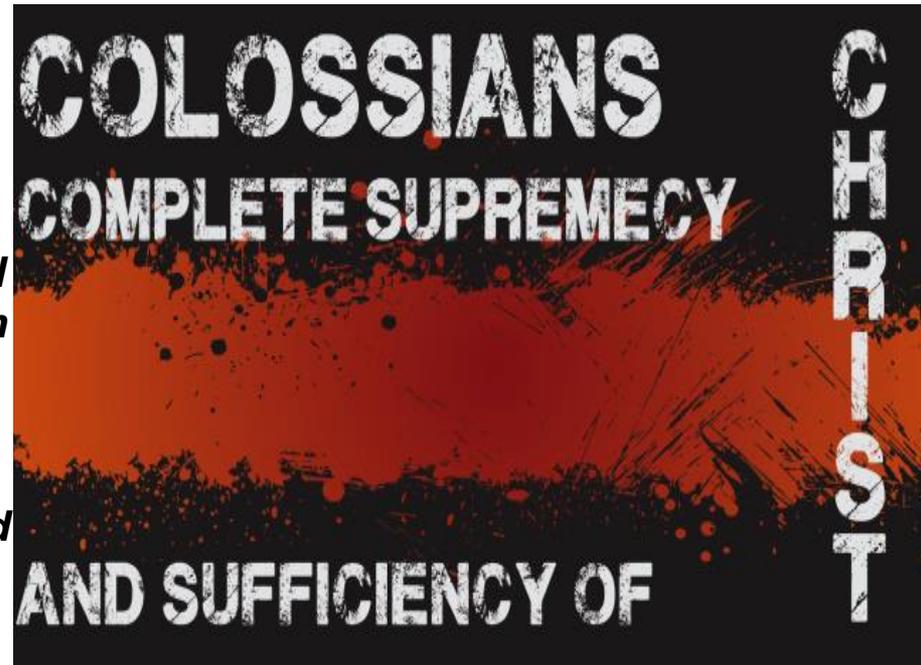


CONTENT OF COLOSSIANS:

Central to the message of Christ' superiority and the sovereign role of Christ, we read: “*For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead [in] transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross; despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it.*”(Colossians 2: 9-15).

The Ideal Christian Life in the World, and true Christian asceticism consists in the conquering of personal sins (Colossians 3:5–10) and the practice of love of neighbor in accordance with the standard set by Christ (Colossians 3:12–16).

Paul admonishes the Colossians to “*Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving*”. (Colossians 4:2–3).



Colossians contains 4 chapters, and is divided as follows:

- I.) Address (1:1–14)
- II.) The Preeminence of Christ (1:15–2:3)
- III.) Warnings against False Teachers (2:4–23)
- IV.) The Ideal Christian Life in the World (3:1–4:6)
- V.) Conclusion (4:7–18)

OTHER COLOSSIANS HIGHLIGHTS:

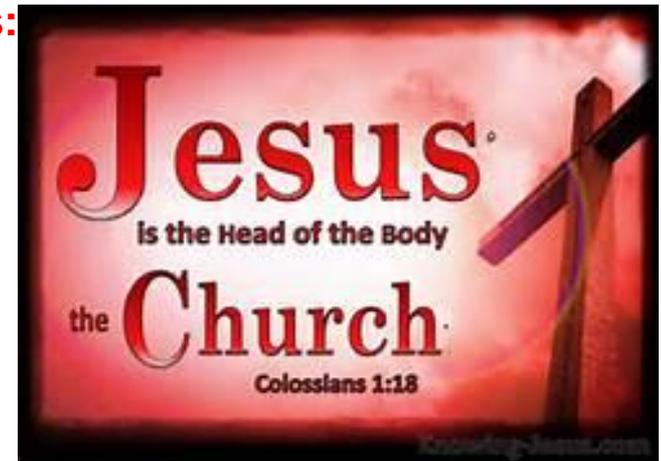
I. Address (Colossians 1:1–14)

Prayer for Continued Progress:

“be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1: 9-14).

II. The Preeminence of Christ (Colossians 1:15–2:3)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him* were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness* was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross [through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven.” (Colossians 1: 15-20).*



III.) Warnings against False Teachers (Colossians 2:4–23)

A General Admonition.

“I say this so that no one may deceive you by specious arguments. For even if I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing as I observe your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world* and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2: 4-8).

Practices Contrary to Faith.

“Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. These are shadows of things to come; the reality belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, delighting in self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, inflated without reason by his fleshly mind, and not holding closely to the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and bonds, achieves the growth that comes from God”. (Colossians 2: 4-8).

IV.) The Ideal Christian Life in the World (Colossians 3:1–4:6)

Renunciation of Vice.

“Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: c immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God* is coming [upon the disobedient]. By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. But now you must put them all away: * anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3: 5-10).

We are all one in Christ, there is no difference.

**“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”
(Colossians 3: 11-12).**

V.) Conclusion (Colossians 4:7–18)

RESOURCES USED AND RECOMENDED:

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>
- Agape Bible Study at: http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php
- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm
- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J. At: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited
- Paul's Letter to the Colossians by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D. At: <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Colosseans.htm>
- Brown, Raymond E. An Introduction to the New Testament. New York: Doubleday, 1997. "Epistle (Letter) to the Colossians" (620-637).

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Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C.