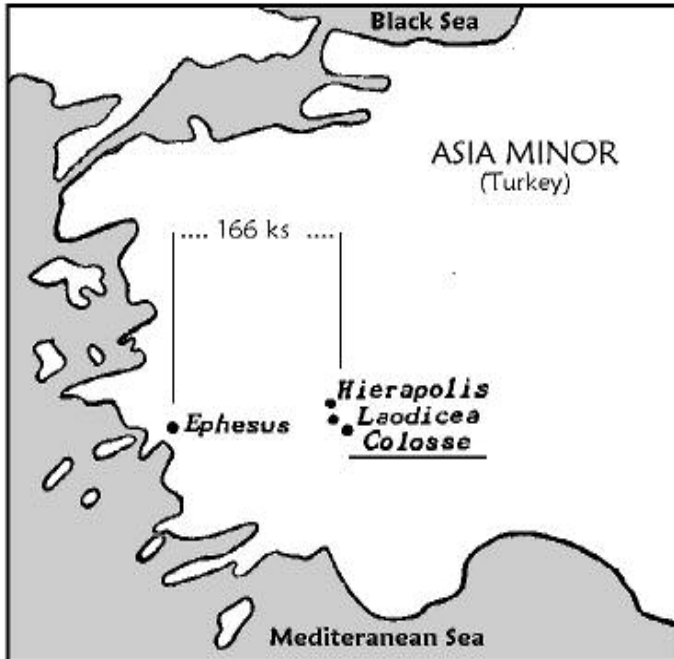


BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH
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"The Supremacy of Christ - Studies in Colossians"
Sunday, August 1, 2004 : Study 1
"INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS"

Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

1. THE CITY



The city of Colossae was situated in the very beautiful and fertile valley of the Lycus river in what is now South West Turkey.

In Paul's day the area was the Roman Province of Asia. Ephesus, the Capital City, was approx. 170 kilometres away.

Whilst still a fair size, Colossae had been in decline for some time - unlike its near neighbours of Laodicea and Hierapolis. It is probably the least important city from which one of Paul's letters has been preserved.

Colossae stood on the main road from Syria to Greece. The area was very fertile and produced figs, olives and wool. The city was, therefore, a trading centre & supply point for travellers with an agricultural base.

The region is prone to earthquakes. A large one flattened the area in 61AD., just a year or so after Paul's letter was written. Laodicea was rebuilt, but Colossae was abandoned. A mound now marks where the ancient city stood but it has never been properly excavated.

Once a prosperous city, in **DECLINE** at the time of Paul's letter,
destroyed by an earthquake soon after and never rebuilt.

2. THE PEOPLE

Because it lay on a major road, Colossae's population was very mixed because over time it collected people from all over the Roman world. Three larger ethnic groups made up the bulk of the population. Phrygians (native to the area, mostly agriculture), long-standing Greek settlers (commonly found along trade routes throughout what used to be Greek Empire), and Jews. (Josephus records that 2000 Jewish families were forcibly settled in the area in the latter half of the 2nd century BC.)

COSMOPOLITAN : a mix of cultural and religious traditions.

3. THE CHURCH

During Paul's 3rd. Missionary journey, around 53 to 57AD, he had a lengthy stay in Ephesus "*holding discussions in a hall every day ... for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.*" (Ac19:9-10)

From 1:7 and 4:12-13, it seems that Epaphras heard Paul teach in Ephesus and then returned home and had some significant role in establishing the Churches at Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul himself had not visited Colossae personally. (2:1)

The Church had an uncertain beginning ... but what mattered was :

- that Epaphras had FAITHFULLY passed on the Good News about Jesus. (1:5b,6b,7).
- .. not the status of their City or Church, but the SUBSTANCE of what they heard & accepted!

4. THE LETTER

Shares a common structure with the Ephesian Letter but personalised for its Colossae readers with its own emphasis to meet their particular situation. Paul had presumably heard about them from Epaphras (1:4,7-8) and writes to them from prison, probably in Rome. (cf 4:3 & 9 with Phm10-13)

A. THE THREAT : From the letter we can reconstruct the basic threat that the Colossian Church was facing. Col2:8 is the key verse : *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition .. rather than on Christ"*

This infant Church faced two inter-related threats

"Deceptive philosophies" ... ways of THINKING - patterns of belief.

"Human Tradition " ways of BEHAVING - a system of rules and regulations.

These early Christians faced a community that was hostile to their beliefs about Jesus. Under pressure, some who had professed faith in Christ had *"lost connection with the head"* - were turning away from commitment to him alone. (2:19)

Why is this a return to captivity? Because in Jesus ALONE is

1. RECONCILIATION with God. (1:20 *"...all things..... making peace..."*)
2. REGENERATION to new life. (2:12,13 *"raised with him ... made you alive"*)
3. FORGIVENESS from God. (1:22b *"present you ... without blemish."* , 2:13)
4. VICTORY over evil (2:15 *"disarmed principalities & powers, triumphing over them"*)
5. GROWTH in morality. (3:1 *"Have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above."* 3:5 *"Put to death"* 3:12 *"clothe yourselves"*)

B. THE THEME of the letter is the SUPREMACY of Christ.

... summed up in the phrase *"Christ in you, the hope of Glory."* (1:27)

Jesus is Rescuer (1:13); Redeemer; (1:14); Image of God (1:15a, 19, 2:9); Pre-eminent in creation (1:15b), & in "New Creation" - the Church (1:18,19) Sustainer (1:17b); Reconciler (1:19); Hope (1:27); Wisdom & Knowledge (2:3) Life-giver (2:13); Forgiver (2:13b-14), Victor (2:15); The "Fulfilment" of all Laws and Festivals (2:17);

C. THE CENTRAL ISSUE summed up in John 14:6

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

If they (or we) believe that truth is RELATIVE - that Jesus is only one way among many to God - they (and we) will be happily accepted. In the ancient world (and ours), people may have had their "favourite" god, but it was considered "mature" to worship other people's as well!

But if they (or we) believe that truth is ABSOLUTE - that Jesus is the only way to God - then expect pressure! As it was then; so it is now.

Jesus plus other beliefs - OK with the world around us.

.... but Jesus ... sufficient, complete, absolute

Two thousand years separates us from the early Christian community in Colossae - but similar pressures are common to both them and us for we live in a community that finds offensive an insistence that In Jesus alone is found access to and acceptance by God and therefore to him alone should by our allegiance and worship.

Pamela Bone, an Assistant Editor of the Melbourne Age, wrote an article on July 13, 2004 in response to Treasurer Peter Costello's affirmation of the Ten Commandments. She wrote :

"It is clear that before anything else, God's commandments are about shoring up God's position. Do people really, in this day and age, want to obey a God who, like a Third World dictator, insists above all on unconditional, absolute reverence to Himself?"

Her comments could have come straight out of Colossae from the First Century

"Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mould" (Rom12:2; Phillips Translation)