

*Colossians*

# Christ Is All You Need

Winter Bible Study  
February 16-18



## **Introduction to Colossians**

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I am looking forward to this year's Winter Bible Study. Over the last few years during Winter Bible Study, we have studied through books of the Bible such as 1 John and Romans. We have also studied through themes like Kingdom Parables and the Final Week of Jesus' Life during previous Winter Bible Studies. These times together in the Word have been filled with clear Biblical instruction that has increased our knowledge of the Bible and helped us better live out the Christian faith. Our 2014 Winter Bible Study promises to be no different. Our Winter Bible Study for this year is from the book of Colossians with the theme "Jesus Is All You Need."

## **Schedule**

Sunday, February 16

Theme: You Are Complete in Christ

Speaker: Stan Statham, Director of Missions, BASELA

Monday, February 17

You Have a New Nature in Christ

Speaker: Bob Adams, Pastor Emirates, First Baptist Church, Bogalusa

Tuesday, February 18

You Are Empowered through Christ

Speaker: Chad Jenkins, Pastor of Monroe Street Baptist Church

*\*On Sunday night, we will have a Chili-Cook Off starting at 5:00 PM. The Chili-Cook Off will be a fundraiser for our youth. On Monday and Tuesday night, we will have Finger Food Fellowship starting at 5:30 PM each night. All Winter Bible Study Sessions will start at 6:00 PM.*

Years ago when I taught through the book of Colossians on Wednesday night, Mrs. Jo Purvis remarked, "I just love the book of Colossians. It has a powerful message for the church today." During our three sessions, we will only get brief glimpses into the powerful, relevant book of Colossians. So, I thought it would be helpful to write an Introduction to Colossians.

## **Authorship**

Paul along with Timothy are identified as the authors of the letter. The use of the first person singular “I” in reference to Paul throughout the book makes him the primary author of the letter (1:23, 4:18). But some scholars have cast doubt on Pauline authorship based on more developed theological statements in Colossians than other Pauline letters and stylistic differences between Colossians and uncontested letters of Paul.

These arguments against Pauline authorship are weak and do not threaten the accuracy of Scripture. The argument that the theology of Colossians is more developed than earlier theology of Paul should support Pauline authorship rather than reject it. One’s theology tends to develop and mature over time; Paul’s theological development would be no different. The second argument against Pauline authorship based on stylistic differences is not sound. Most Bible readers would be hard pressed to find stylistic differences between Colossians and other works of Paul such as Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Romans.

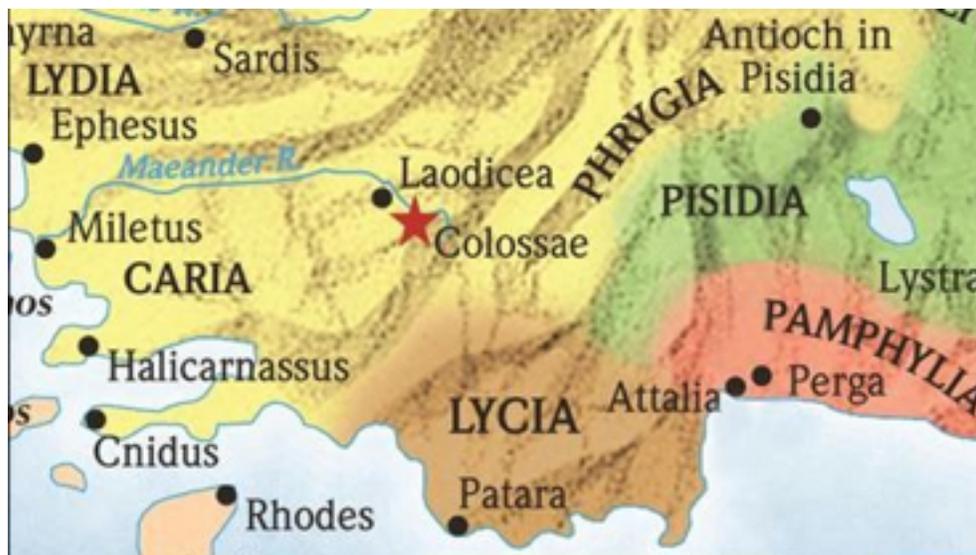
Other evidence overwhelmingly supports Paul as the author of Colossians. Early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius endorse Paul as the author of Colossians. Also favoring the authenticity of Paul writing Colossians is the close connection to the letter of Philemon. Both Philemon and Colossians were written by someone in prison, and both contain names of the same people Timothy, Aristarchus, Archippus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, Onesimus, and Demas showing that both letters were written at the same time and by the same person. Philemon is universally accepted as having been written by Paul, which should also put Colossians in the list of uncontested letters written by Paul.

## **Date**

The letter of Colossians is one of the Prison Epistles along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. The traditional date and place of writing these letters is AD 62 while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Some scholars have suggested alternative imprisonments such as Ephesus or Caesarea. Either of these alternative imprisonments would place the date of Colossians in the early to mid 50’s. It would have been nearly impossible for Paul to have composed four letters while in a far more restricted imprisonments (Ephesus or Caesarea) than Paul’s house arrest in Rome. Acts 28:30-31 states, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” The type of imprisonment in Rome would have afforded Paul the opportunity to see co-workers and have a scribe pen the “Prison Epistles.”

## City of Colosse

The city of Colosse was located in the Roman province of Asia (part of modern day Turkey). The city lay alongside the Lycus River, whose fertile valley provided large crops of figs and olives. During the Persian and Greek empires, an important highway went through Colosse that was part of a major trade route between Ephesus and Sardis. The major trade route established wool as the city's major commercial industry. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Greek historian Herodotus spoke of Colosse as a "Great City." The following century, Xenophon described Colosse as "a populous city, wealthy, and large."



But by the time of the New Testament, Colosse had declined significantly. The major road that once ran through Colosse was rerouted through Laodicia, which helped develop Laodicia into a flourishing city that became the seat of Roman rule in Asia. Another nearby city, Hierapolis became another important city during Roman times because of the city's healing springs. Both Laodicia and Hierapolis are mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Colossians.

While Laodicia and Hierapolis flourished during Roman rule, Colosse waned in significance. The Roman historian Strabo speaks of Colosse as a small town. (Geography 12.8.16) J. B. Lightfoot said, "Without a doubt Colosse was the least important church with which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed." While Colosse may have been forgotten and insignificant, the believers and the church in Colosse were not forgotten by God nor neglected in Paul's ministry.

## **Church at Colosse**

It is worth noting that Paul did not found the church at Colosse nor does any Biblical account place Paul in the city. On his Third Missionary Journey, Paul stayed nearly three years in Ephesus spending much of his time teaching in the school of Tyrannus. While Paul taught in the school, his co-workers spread the Gospel to all Asia, which Colosse was a part of (Acts 19:10).

The co-worker of Paul that became a leading figure in the church of Colosse was Epaphras. Epaphras was a native of Colosse (4:12) and probably came in contact with Paul at Ephesus. At the beginning of the letter, we learn that Epaphras shared the Gospel with the people of Colosse and disciplined the believers within the church (1:7-8).

## **Purpose of the Letter**

Reading between the lines of Colossians 4:12, Paul wrote the letter to the church of Colosse in response to a report about the church that he received from Epaphras. The report must have been disturbing to Paul because the content of the letter mostly addressed false teachings that threatened Christian theology in the church. The false teachings in the church are commonly referred to as the “Colossian Heresy.” Much has been written about the Colossians Heresy. For a brief overview of the Colossian Heresy, check out in our church library *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* by William Barclay. I would argue that there is not a single heresy in the church of Colossians but multiple heresies or false teachings including an early form of Gnosticism and Jewish Legalism.

The Gnostics taught the inferiority of Christ; Paul combats this false teaching by touting the preeminence of Christ. The Gnostics also spoke of higher wisdom that needed to be attained to truly know God. Paul reminded the church at Colosse that knowledge of God does not come through human wisdom but through Christ.

Colosse, along with other cities in Asia, contained large Jewish populations that could explain Jewish Legalism thrust upon the church in Colosse. Jewish Legalism was a false teaching that was not new to Paul but plagued the churches that Paul founded or was associated with. Paul spends chapters 2 & 3 contrasting Jewish Legalism to the true nature of Christian faith and practice.

Outline:

- I. Introduction
  - A. Greeting (1:1-2)
  - B. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
  - C. Prayers for the Church (1:9-14)
  
- II. God's Work in Christ
  - A. Redemption (1:13-14)
  - B. Preeminence of Christ (1:15-18)
  - C. Reconciliation (1:19-23)
  
- III. Paul's Suffering & Service (1:24-29)
  
- IV. False Teaching Denounced
  - A. Come to God through Christ not human wisdom (2:1-10)
  - B. Come to God through Christ not legalism. (2:11-23)
  
- V. Practical Application
  - A. New Nature in Christ (3:1-17)
  - B. The Christian Home (3:18-4:1)
  - C. Final Teachings
    - 1. Continue in Prayer (4:2-4)
    - 2. Make the Most of Opportunities with the Unsaved (4:5)
    - 3. Watch your Speech (4:6)
  
- VI. Conclusion (4:7-18)