

# LESSON 1

---

## INTRODUCING COLOSSIANS; GREETING

### INTRODUCTION

The Book of Colossians is one of the great works of Christian literature. It contains instructions that are important for Christians of every age and that touch on major themes of the Bible. Perhaps the most significant of these themes is the exalted nature of Jesus, who is the image of God. Paul presented God's design for healthy family relationships. He also warned against following human philosophy and traditions instead of Christ. In addition, the letter is personal in the sense that many individuals were in the background of its composition.

### THE AUTHOR

The internal and the external evidence point to Paul as the author of the Colossian letter. Until the 1800s, no one questioned his authorship. Objections to Paul as the author are based on style, vocabulary, and some doctrinal statements. However, Any objections of this kind are overcome by the weight of evidence that points to Pauline authorship.

1. What external and internal evidence favors Paul as the author of Colossians?
2. What are some of the similar teachings between Colossians, Ephesians, and Galatians?

### THE PLACE OF ORIGIN AND DATE

Paul wrote Colossians while he was in prison (4:3, 10, 18; see Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 16; Philem. 1, 9, 10, 13). His longest stays in prison were in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) and Rome (Acts 28:30). As a missionary, he spent the longest period of time in one location at Ephesus (Acts 20:17, 31). Therefore, these three cities are the ones most frequently mentioned as possible locations for the writing of Colossians.

3. Where, most likely, was Paul when he wrote Colossians, and how can we come to this conclusion?

## **THE DESTINATION**

This letter was written to the Christians at Colossae. Colossae was a city of Phrygia, a region in the kingdom of Pergamum. In 133 B.C., the last ruler of the Attalid dynasty bequeathed the kingdom of Pergamum to the Roman Senate and the Roman people. Colossae was then reconstructed as a Roman province. Today, Colossae is an abandoned mound in Turkey. To this date, it has never been excavated.

4. What was the city of Colossae like at the beginning of the Christian era?
5. What was the nature of religion and worship in Colossae at the time of Paul's writing?

## **THE PROBLEM OF HERESY**

The Colossian letter includes a strong message but leaves uncertainty as to what problems had arisen in the church in Colossae. Had specific errors infiltrated the church, or was Paul warning against the possibility of false teaching in general?

6. What seems to have been the condition of the Colossian church when Paul sent his letter?
7. What are the possible heresies Paul may have written in response to?

## **THE PURPOSE AND MAJOR THEMES**

The purpose for the letter depends on the view one has of the Colossian heresy. If a heresy had arisen in the Colossian church, then Paul's purpose in writing the letter was to warn them to remain faithful to Christ. If a heresy had not yet arisen, then he wrote to warn them not to digress from Christ and to assure them that He is above all and is all Christians need.

The Book of Colossians, even though a short book, contains many of the important themes of the Bible. It includes very little that is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. It compacts discussions of numerous doctrinal, moral, and social problems that confronted the congregation in Colossae and have plagued subsequent generations of Christians.

8. Specifically, what seems to have been Paul's main purpose in writing to the Colossians?
9. What are the five major themes of the Book of Colossians?

### **FROM PAUL AND TIMOTHY (1:1)**

Paul introduced his letter to the Colossians by identifying himself as the author with apostolic authority. He referred to Timothy as his companion and brother in Christ. Following this, he proceeded to address his Colossian brothers in Christ and to wish for them blessings from God.

10. Why did Paul never use his Hebrew name, Saul, in his letters?
11. What events from the latter portion of Paul's life can we infer from his letters and uninspired tradition?
12. Why did Paul include the words "an apostle" after his name in verse 1?
13. What do the words "Jesus" and "Christ" mean?
14. What was the nature of the association between Paul and Timothy?

### **TO FAITHFUL COLOSSIAN BRETHREN (1:2)**

Perhaps no significant reason can be given for Paul's use of different terms when writing to the churches. He addressed the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Galatian brethren as "churches." In his letters to the Romans, Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, he addressed them as "saints." The term "church" means an organized group of Christians, while "saints" applies to individuals who make up that group. He may have used "saints" in order to give his letters a more personal touch.

15. What does Paul mean when he uses the word "saints"?
16. What does it mean that the Colossians were "in Christ"?
17. What does the word "grace" mean as Paul uses it here?
18. What is the significance of the word "peace" in this verse?