

Twelve Lessons

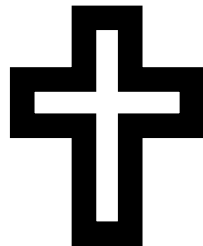
on

Colossians

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INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS – LESSON 1

Introduction: In this lesson we will begin by learning background information. A good understanding of the historical and moral characteristics surrounding this epistle will certainly help in the study of it.

Lesson Goals:

1. Explain the historical, religious, and moral background of the city of Colosse.
2. Help to establish the need or purpose of the epistle to the Colossian Church by pointing out the errors within the church.

Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:

1. Emanations – That which issues, flows or proceeds from any source, substance or body. In our study of Colossians, it speaks of the erroneous view presented by false teachers who suggested that Christ was not God but only a messenger sent from God.
2. Preeminence – Precedence; priority of place; superiority in rank or dignity.

I. THE CITY OF COLOSSE

A. The Location of Colosse

1. The city of Colosse was situated in the valley of the Lycus river. The city was approximately 10-12 miles north of the two more prominent cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. Colosse was approximately 120 miles east-southeast of Ephesus.
2. Colosse stood on a very important trade route from Ephesus to the River Euphrates. This great highway of commerce guaranteed the city's wealth and continual growth in ancient times.
3. There was tremendous seismic activity in this region. Asia Minor has a documented history of earthquakes. The majority of the seismic activity is in the Lycus Valley.
4. Being located in this "valley of earthquakes", Colosse enjoyed several benefits.
 - a) The mineral pools – The seismic activity of the area produced many mineral pools. The medicinal value of the waters brought many travelers for rest and relaxation.
 - b) The calcareous deposits from the hot springs created beautiful natural sculptures. These mineral deposits drew thousands of tourists to see the magnificent beauty.
 - c) The earthquakes caused the river to consistently flood the valley floor creating extremely fertile plains. The fertile ground allowed for excellent pastures for raising livestock. The Colossians took advantage of this fact by raising enormous herds of sheep. Colosse was famous for its production of wool. In fact, the name Colosse is relative to a special type of purple wool known as *colossinus*.

B. The History of Colosse

1. The city of Colosse was first established as a resting place on the great highway linking the eastern and western regions of Asia. The beauty and agricultural wealth of the area caused many to permanently reside in Colosse making their livelihood in wool and dyeing.
2. Xerxes visited the region in 481 BC. The army of Xerxes marched as far as the Lycus Valley in its quest to defeat Greece. At this time Colosse was described as "a great city of Phrygia". (Lightfoot, pp. 24)
3. In 401 BC, Cyrus the Younger. At this time, the city was "a populous, prosperous and great". (Pictorial Bible Dictionary, pp. 176)
4. Some fifty years before the birth of Christ, Strabo described the city as a "small town". The political power of Laodicea made the closer Hierapolis a more desirable town than Colosse. The continual earthquakes of Colosse along with its further distance of travel caused many to turn to the south, deserting the city.
5. Later the road system of Phrygia was changed and the main highway to Colosse was not well maintained. This fact crushed the economy of Colosse.
6. Colosse was located on the valley floor. This location made the city vulnerable to raids by the Saracens in the 7th and 8th centuries. During this time, most of the residents move to a new city, Chonae, built on the slope of Mt. Cadmus, much like Laodicea and Hierapolis. (Pictorial Bible Dictionary, pp. 176)
7. The Turks overtook the city and completely destroyed it in the 12th century.

II. THE CHURCH OF COLOSSE

A. The Founding of the Church

1. Many have a misconception that Paul started the church of Colosse. Colossians 2:1, *“for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.”* This verse evidences the fact that the church had never met Paul.
2. The connection of Paul to Colosse came in the form of a young man most likely converted during Paul’s three year ministry at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Colossians 1:7, *“As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.”*
3. Acts 19:10,26 reveals the fact that “all Asia” heard the Gospel through the missionary efforts of Paul.
4. Epaphras was a native of Colosse and moved back there after his conversion. Epaphras took the Gospel message back to Colosse and the Colossian church was founded under his ministry, Col. 1:4-7; 4:12-13.
5. It is believed that the church was founded in the home of Philemon who also lived in Colosse. See Col. 4:9 and also the letter to Philemon.
6. At the time of the writing, it is believed that Archippus was the pastor of the church. See Col. 4:17. Some believe Archippus was the son of Philemon. See Phil 2.
7. The letter was written during Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome and was sent by Tychicus, who also bore the epistle to the Ephesians and the letter to Philemon. Onesimus, returning to his master, traveled with Tychicus

B. The Fallacies of the Church

1. Paul’s correspondence with the Colossian church was due to the visit he received from Epaphras while in Rome. Epaphras traveled more than 1,000 miles to inform Paul of the heretical doctrines in Colosse.
2. The false teaching was a mixture of Judaism, Gnosticism, Mysticism, Greek philosophy, and Christianity.
3. Although difficult to define, the heresy evidences the teachings of the Gnostics and Essenes.
4. First, we will identify the characteristics of the Gnostics.
 - a) The name Gnostics is derived from the word “gnosis” meaning “knowledge”. The Gnostics believed they possessed exclusive knowledge concerning God. The possession of this exclusive knowledge, they believed, separated them from the majority of mankind. They considered themselves superior.
 - b) The exclusive knowledge was granted upon “christening”.
 - c) The doctrine suggested that all matter was evil, and that God could have no contact with matter. They believed that all things were simply “emanations” from God. The problem with this doctrine is that it degraded the Son of God. They taught that since Christ came to the earth in the form of a human body, He was matter and only an emanation from God, not God Himself.
 - d) The Gnostics went so far as to declare that all contact with God must come through emanations, such as angels. Thus we see the theme of Colossians which is the “Preeminence of Christ.” The Gnostic’s system supposedly gave the believer a special “full knowledge” which no one else could possess. It is amazing that these people used the word “full” as many false religions do today. You will notice that Paul uses the word full many times to show the Colossians their error.
 - e) The doctrine of the Gnostics in Colosse included legalistic practices, strict asceticism, certain “holy” days, and that some foods were sinful. To summarize their doctrine read Col. 2:21-23. They placed symbolism over substance.
 - f) The epistle to the Colossian church emphasizes the “Preeminence of Christ.” All through the epistle you will notice words like “all”, “fullness”, and “filled.” In chapter 3, verse 11, we see the theme that Christ is “all and in all.” In chapter 2, verse 10, we see the theme that we are “made full in him.”
 - g) If Christ is given the rightful place in the believer’s life there is no need for such things as legalism, man-made philosophies, strict diets, observance of holy days, and discipline of the flesh. Colossians is a call for spiritual maturity. Paul teaches that while religious practices in the flesh may look very spiritual, they are not beneficial to the inner man. This is exactly what many are guilty of today. True spirituality has been replaced with personal preferences of sacrifices and service.