

## The Prison Epistles: Colossians – Introduction

Some proper names: Colosse,,Laodicea,, Hierapolis,Rome, Paul, Timotheus,Epaphras, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Marcus,Barnabas, Jesus (Justus), Luke, Demas, Nymphas, Archippus,

The Testament books Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon are known as the Prison Epistles because Paul wrote them during his first imprisonment in Rome sometime between 60-62 a.d. The letters for the Ephesians and Colossians, although having different issues to address, different aims, different truths to underline, contain many of the same prayer wishes for the saints and exhortations for their walk in the Lord. They were written at the same time and were carried to their respective cities by the same person—Tychichus. He also had with him a letter for an individual, Philemon, and he was being accompanied by Philemon’s runaway slave.

The book of Ephesians underlines the church body, emphasizing unity of the church. Colosians emphasizes Christ as the head of the church, his divine identity, and the sufficiency of Christ in salvation: Christ Jesus is enough. Paul also contradicts some heretical teaching (Jewish legalism and the beginnings of Gnosticism) with strong declarations of the truth.

Colossae was located in Asia Minor (100 miles east of Ephesus) , the Roman province of Asia, the country of Phrygia. Also in Phygia were Laodicea (12 miles southeast) and Hierapolis. It had been an important city at one time because a main road to the east ran through it, but that road was relocated through Laodicea, and Colossae declined. Still it was a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles, and Paul, having never been there, needed to address some things.

The church there was started by Epaphras, who probably heard Paul preach the word during his almost three year ministry in Ephesus. Possibly Timothy had assisted in developing the church in the area of Colossae, but Paul had never gone.

Synopsis of heretical teaching Paul must address:

- 1, Stressing the need for observing Old Testament laws and ceremonies
2. Emphasis on having some special or deeper knowledge (gnosis)
3. Worshiping of angels as mediators to God
4. Special selection of the philosophical elite
5. Denying the deity of Christ, just one of many emanations from God

Although Paul does not pull things out point by point, by his teaching and declarations one can see that he is contradicting and counteracting erroneous teaching.