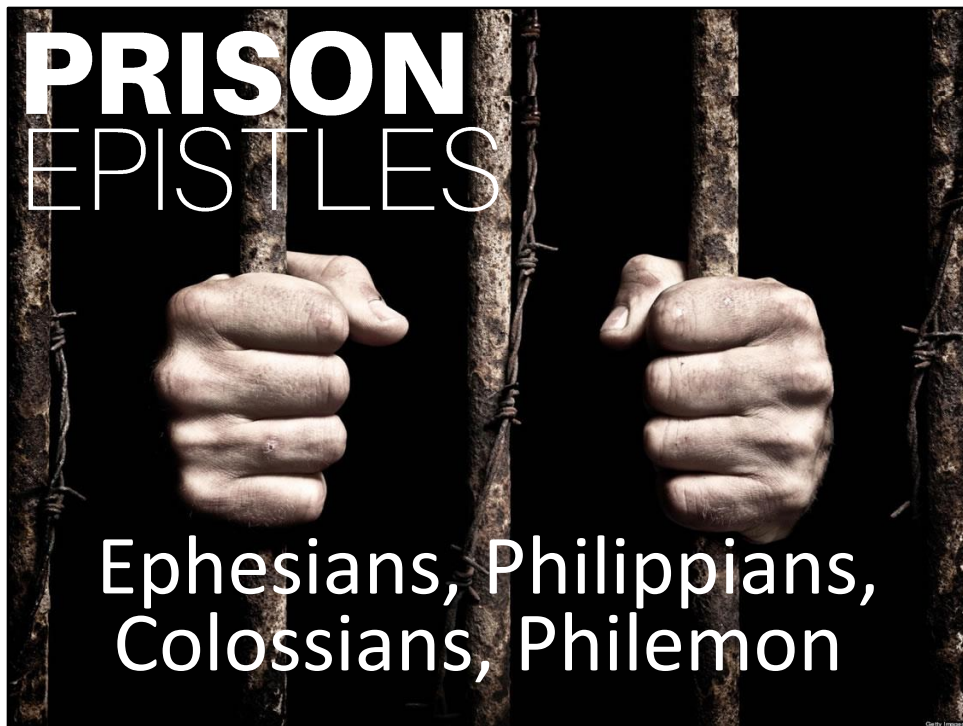
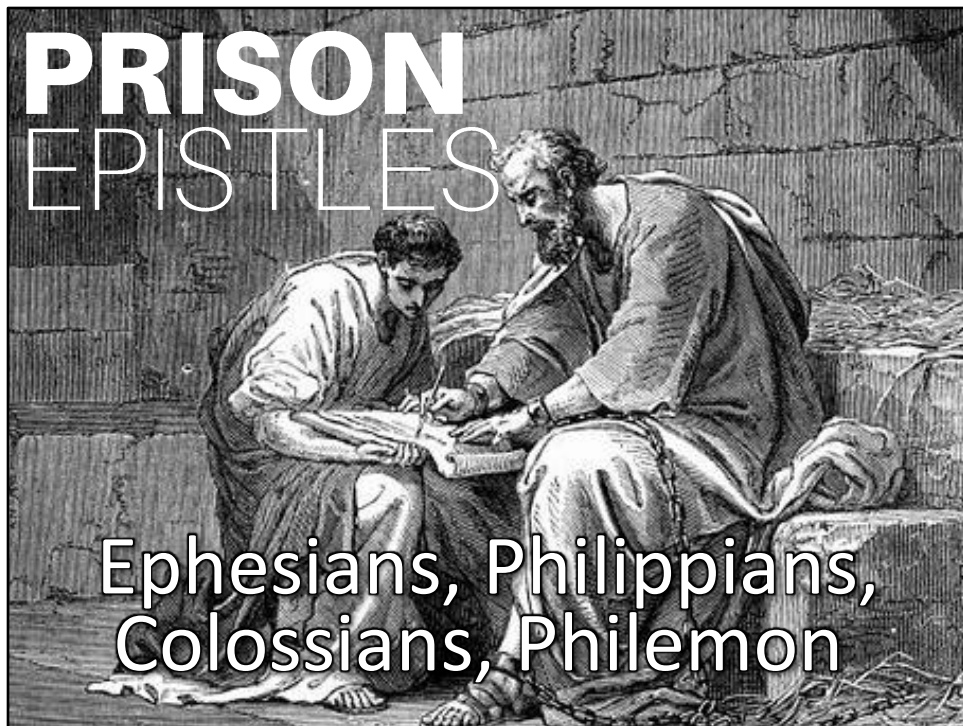


Bishop Lightfoot states in his classic commentary that “Without doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed.” Centuries earlier, Colossae had been “a great city of Phrygia” but it was in the twilight of its influence and importance when Paul wrote to Philemon and Apphia’s house-church there. And yet the message to Colossae with Paul’s highest Christology, has become amazingly relevant in the twenty-first century. With modern scientism making a mockery of science and the world being prodded to the cusp of a wholly unnecessary World War III by Globalist Elites, Christians are called to relate Jesus Christ to the ultimate frontiers. This 2,000 year-old letter, which presents Christ as the architect and sustainer of the universe and the reconciler of all things, both earthly and heavenly, provides the answers. Suddenly this letter to a little flock in a declining city has become perhaps the most contemporary book in the New Testament.



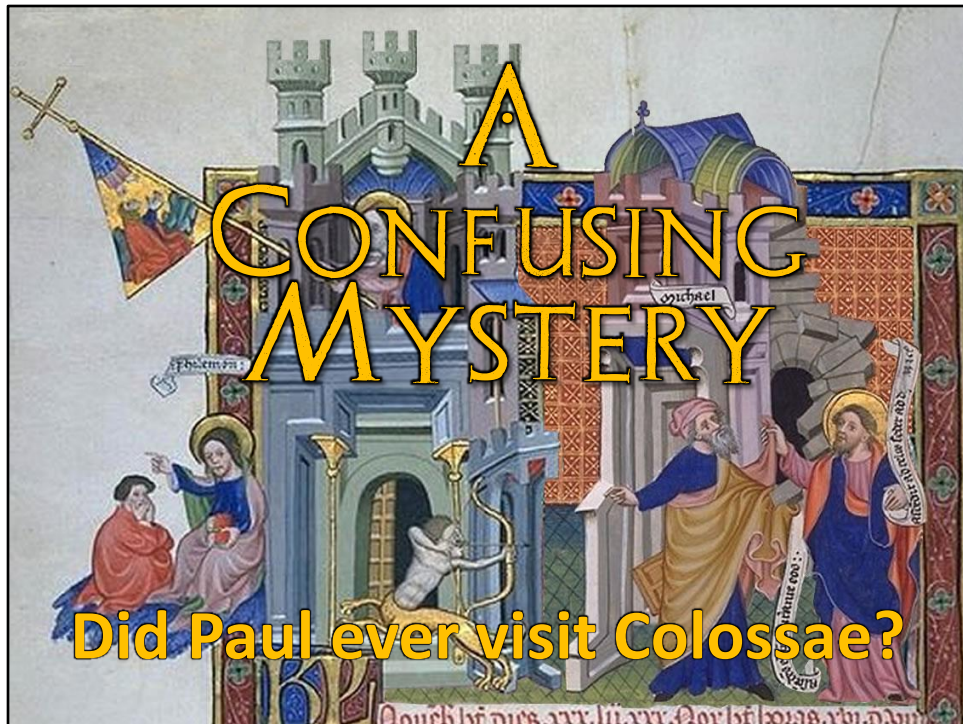
The apostle Paul wrote four of the 27 New Testament letters during his time under house arrest in Rome between approximately 60—62 AD. Each letter — Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon — is addressed to a specific church or, in the case of Philemon, an individual. While each epistle addresses the specific needs of first-century Christians, the message of each is still relevant today. For example, there are many parallels between Ephesians and Colossians, but the emphasis in Ephesians is on the church, the body of Christ, but the emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, the Head of the body.



Epaphras visited Paul in Rome with concerning news about the Colossian ekklesia. In the five years of its existence, false teaching and heresy had taken root there, which involved a combination of Greek speculation, Oriental mysticism, and Jewish legalism, all of which devalued Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. Paul wrote to the Colossians to refute this heresy and encourage believers to continue in their faith grounded in Christ alone.

In this letter, Paul actually used the vocabulary of the false teachers, but he did not use their definitions. He used these words in their true Christian meaning. As we study Colossians, we will find words such as fullness, perfect, and complete, all of which were used by the gnostic heretics. He also wrote about wisdom, which was a key term in the gnostic vocabulary; and he had a great deal to say about angels and spirit powers too.

Tychicus and Onesimus carried Paul's letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Philemon to their destinations, while Epaphroditus delivered the letter to Philippi.

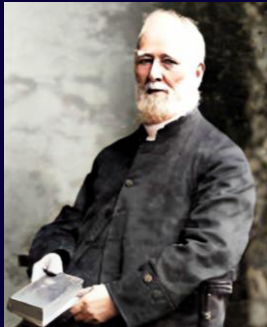


Most modern commentaries state that Paul never visited Colossae. Whether or not Paul ever visited Colossae is not theologically significant, but it does speak to a significant biblical issue. Should believers simply accept everything that we read in a Bible commentary or hear from the pulpit?

My intent is not to challenge either view. Instead we'll simply examine what Scripture says in light of what we know of 1st century geography and history.

Did Paul ever visit Colossae

- Since early times, Paul's founding of the home churches in Colossae and Laodicea was unquestioned. Bishop Theodoret of Cyprus (AD 393-c.466), an influential theologian of the School of Athens, wrote this in commentaries of the Letters of St. Paul.



- But 19th cent. Anglican Charles Alford (Bishop of Victoria, Hong Kong) of Cambridge's Trinity College inferred from Colossians 2:1 that Paul had not seen its members nor visited the Lycus Valley; most modern commentators adopt this latter view.

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[CLICK]

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[CLICK]

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The cause of the mystery

- Early in his Third Missionary Journey (53-57 AD), Paul was three years in Ephesus and the Bible tells us, "*that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*" (Acts 19:10).
- However, his letter to the Colossians (2:1) states:
"I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally."
- There are also no personal greetings to members of the church at Colossae. The implication is that either the local ekklesia had expanded since Paul's visit(s) or that he wasn't directly acquainted with the believers there, only Epaphras was.

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Paul also mentions that Epaphras was his "fellow prisoner" in Rome, suggesting that Epaphras was staying in Rome to assist Paul and that that's why Tychicus and Onesimus were delivering the letters.

Epaphras' 3 Mentions

“... since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” (Colossians 1:7)

“Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” (Colossians 4:12)

“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,...” (Philemon 1:23)



So who was Paul's evangelist in the Lycus River Valley and what do we know of him? Epaphras (e-pah-rus) is found in three verses: Colossians 1:7 and 4:12; and Philemon 1:23.

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Epaphras (“Lovely”)

- He was with Paul during his Roman house arrest (Phil 1:23)
- He was from Colossae (4:12; Phil 1:23)
- He was a believer (4:12), possibly converted by Paul.
- He was a co-worker, a member of Paul’s (Ephesian?) ministry team (1:7)
- He was a faithful minister in Colossae (1:7)
- He was an evangelist in Colossae (and by extension the Lycus River Valley) (1:7; 4:13)
- Laodicea and Hierapolis had thriving first century churches (4:12, Rev 3:14-22).
- He was an advocate for believers in the Lycus River Valley. (1:7)



From this church tradition states that the church at Colossae was founded by Epaphras (e-paf-ras), a disciple of Paul’s Ephesus team. Paul calls Epaphras a “faithful minister”. Epaphras was from Colossae and was an evangelist in the Lycus valley. Both Laodicea and Hierapolis had thriving ekklesia in the first century. Paul shares that Epaphras has reported their faith to Paul and describes him as “wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” The Colossian believers learned from Epaphras, who learned from Paul.

Epaphras was called by St. Paul his “dear fellow servant” and a “trustworthy minister in Christ” (Col 1:7). He is regarded as the founder of the Christian Church at Colossae and apparently also at the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul commends him for his ministry of intercession, for he showed true pastoral concern throughout the Lycus River Valley (Col 4:13).

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From these verses the following may be deduced:

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Epaphroditus

- Epaphras short for Epaphroditus (Επαφρόδιτος), a name common in the first century meaning “lovely, fascinating, charming.”

“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;” (Philippians 2:25)

“Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” (Philippians 4:18)

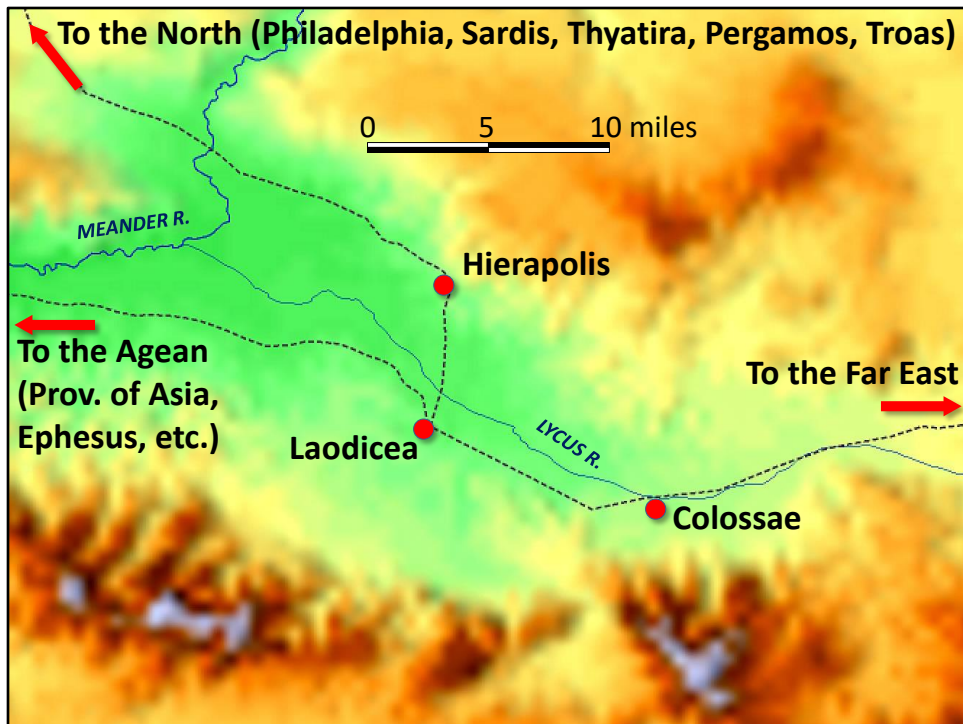


Epaphras is short for Epaphroditus, a common 1st century name that means “lovely, fascinating, charming.” This has led to speculation that these two fellow workers of Paul were one and the same. While that may be, it begs the question why a Lycus River Valley evangelist would be sent to Philippi at around the same time that Paul dispatched Tychicus and Onesimus with the other three “prison epistles” to Ephesus and the Lycus River Valley. Epaphroditus is only mentioned in the Epistle to the Philippians:

[CLICK] “Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;”

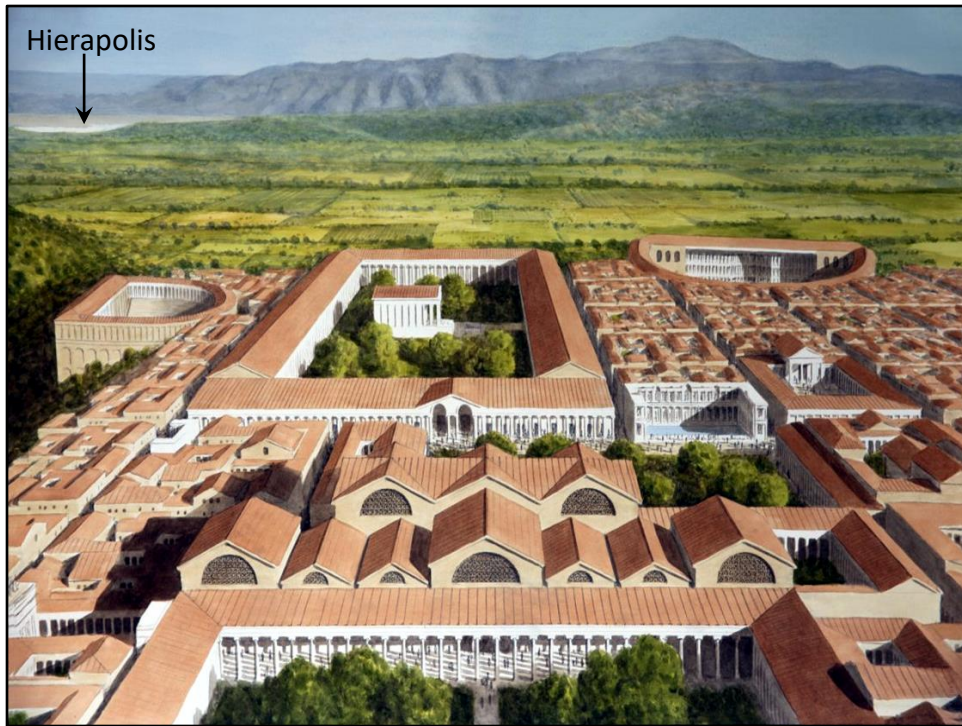
Remember that Philippi in Macedonia was a Roman Colonia, a colony settled by retired Roman Legionnaires after the famous Battle of Philippi in 42 BC that saw Marc Antony and Octavius destroy the 17 Republican legions of Julius Caesar’s assassins Brutus and Cassius. Paul points out that Epaphroditus was a “fellow soldier” and the messenger from Philippi to Paul, and thus likely a retired legionary from Philippi.

[CLICK] “Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”



Colossae was one of three cities located in the fertile Lycus River Valley about one hundred miles inland from Ephesus. The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13, 16). This area was a meeting point of East and West because an important trade route passed through there. There was a large Jewish population in the area after Antiochus III The Great transported 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon to Phrygia around 200 BC to help quell a native revolt. These military settlers were permitted to live in accordance with their own laws, and each was allotted land on which to build and cultivate. They retained strong ties with Jerusalem and the Temple.

All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area. There was a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from both the East and the West. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!



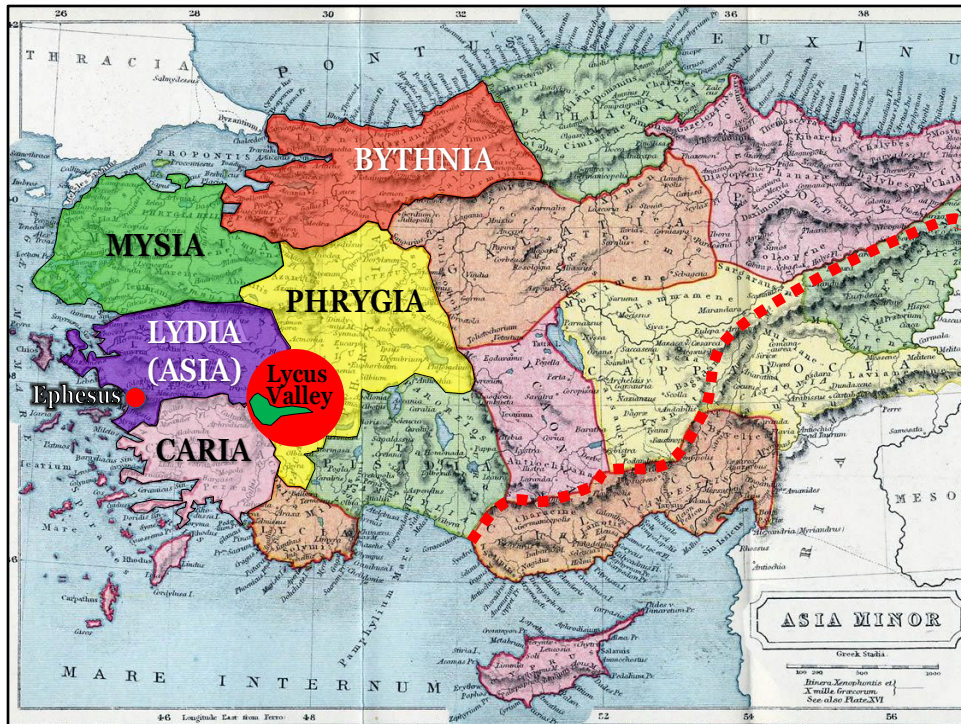
Laodicea was a large and wealthy Roman city, selected by Rome to be the district capitol. To service east-west trade, Laodicea had developed a powerful banking and financial industry, and also was home to a renown medical school and wool industry.



Six miles across the Lycus Valley from Laodicea was another wealthy Roman city, Hierapolis, known for its healing waters from geothermal springs and gorgeous travertine cliffs which earned it the name Cotton Castle. It was a favorite spa destination for wealthy Roman citizens from around the Roman Empire.



Before either Laodicea or Hierapolis has prospered, Colossae had been a prosperous city under a number of successive empires, but gradually it slipped behind Laodicea and had declined into a second-rate city in the 1st century AD.



When the Phrygians destroyed the Hittite Empire around 1200 BC, the valley was on the edge of Phrygia [\[CLICK\]](#), bordering on the kingdoms of Lydia [\[CLICK\]](#) and Caria [\[CLICK\]](#).

From 312 BC – 188 BC, the Seleucid Empire occupied the entire region comprised of the modern countries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. The whole was known as Asia. It was during this period that Antiochus III transported the 2,000 Jewish military settlers and their families to Phrygia and Lydia.

After defeat at the 190 BC Battle of Magnesia by Rome and its allies Pergamum and Rhodes, the Seleucids were forced to sign the Treaty of Apamea and abandon Asia Minor to retreat behind the Taurus Mountains. [\[CLICK\]](#) The Kingdom of Pergamum ruled Mysia, Lydia, Caria, Phrygia and southern Galatia. Then King Attalus III died childless in 133 BC and bequeathed the kingdom of Pergamum to Rome. After putting down some local rebellions, Rome reorganized and combined Lydia, Mysia, Phrygia and Caria into the [\[CLICK\]](#) Roman Province of Asia, governed by a proconsul who resided at Ephesus.

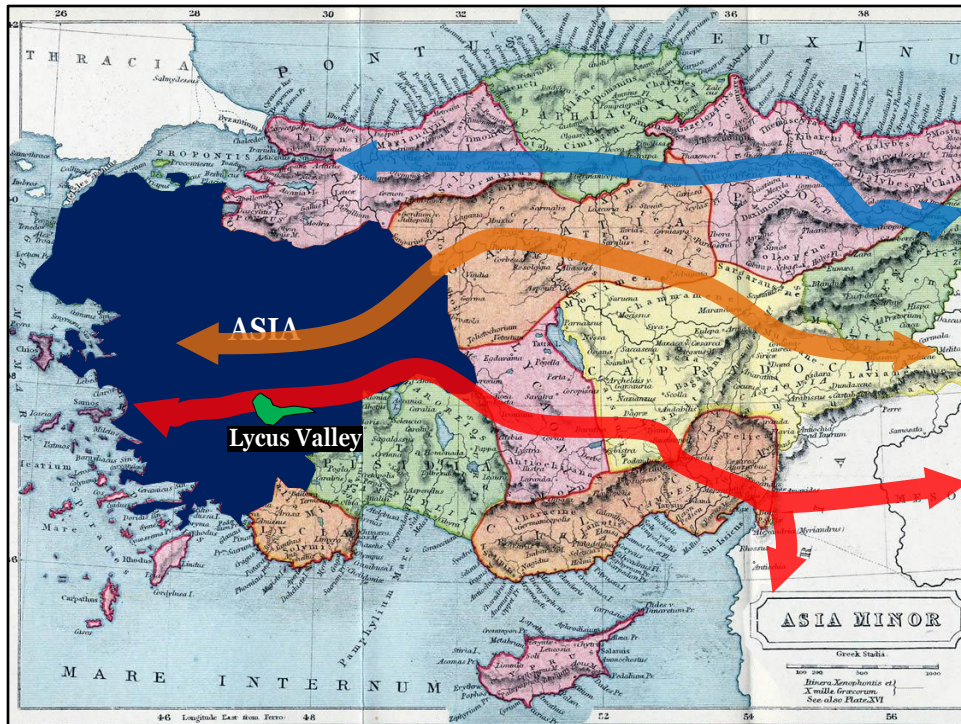


So in the first century, Colossae was located in the Roman Province of Asia. However, Luke tended to use ancient Greek names for the various lands, much like we might say we're in Queensland rather than in Australia or Eastern Australia. For example, Luke used Lycaonia and Galatia, which the Romans had combined into the Province of Galatia. Hence our book of Galatians is probably to the southern Galatians, the Lycaonians. When Luke mentions Phrygia, he refers to Paul's travels through Phrygia including cities Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke also mentions Mysia, which like Phrygia was part of the Roman Province of Asia.

This inconsistency in historical names for the region can be confusing. Luke does his best to add clarity.



The Lycus River Valley [\[CLICK\]](#) was a hub on the chief land route [\[CLICK\]](#) for travel and commerce from Asia Minor to the major Aegean seaports of Smyrna [\[CLICK\]](#), Ephesus [\[CLICK\]](#) and Miletus [\[CLICK\]](#). What with kings fighting kings and armies marching to and fro, the region remained politically unstable until Rome conquered all Asia Minor between 129 and 63 BC. Under the Peace of Rome, Pax Romana, borders were stabilized, roads were built, and city infrastructures were improved.

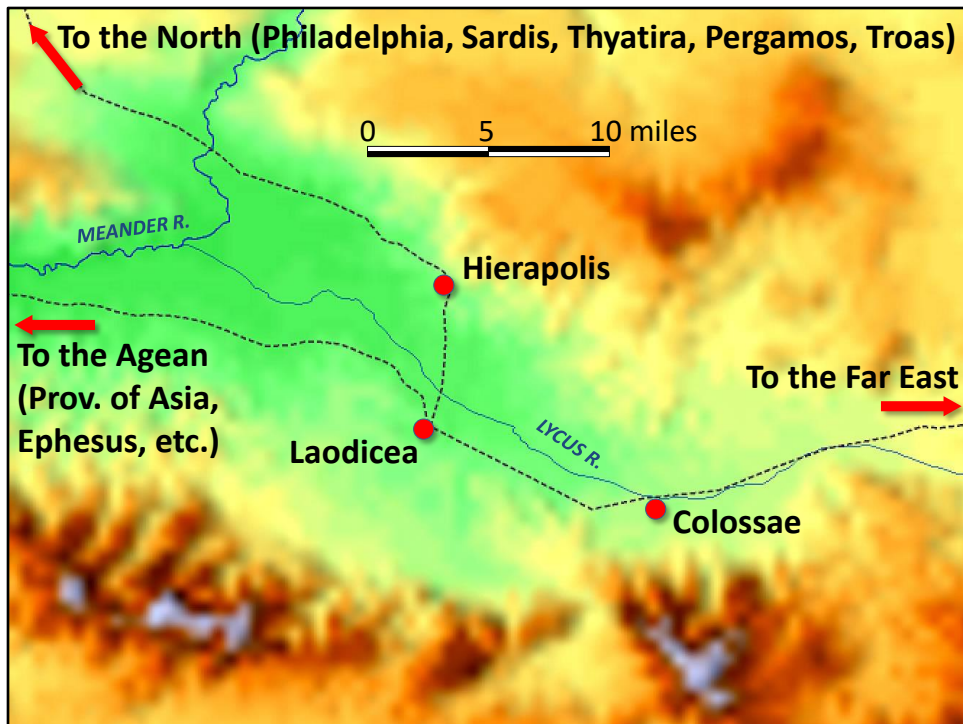


Rome developed three main east-west highways through the Roman Province of Asia Minor.

[CLICK] 1. The South Road west from Ephesus all the way to Tarsus, connecting it to trade routes from Antioch of Syria to the north, south, and east. The south road was the primary commercial route.

[CLICK] 2. The Central Road from **Sardis** northward to Ancyra and then to Melitene on the Euphrates was somewhat longer and went through more mountainous and sparsely populated country.

[CLICK] 3. The North Road from Nicomedia to Satala and then into Armenia was the primary military highway.



The Lycus River Valley was directly on the Main Commercial Route between East and West. But it also was an important intersection that connected the southern commercial route with the middle route at nearby Sardis in Lycia and a spur to the northern military road at the military outpost city of Thyatira in southern Mysia.

Keep in mind that Sardis in Lycia, Thyatira in Mysia, and Laodicea in Phrygia were all technically in the Roman Province of Asia.

So with a better understanding of ancient geography, let's examine what Luke wrote in the Book of Acts about Paul's Missionary Journeys.

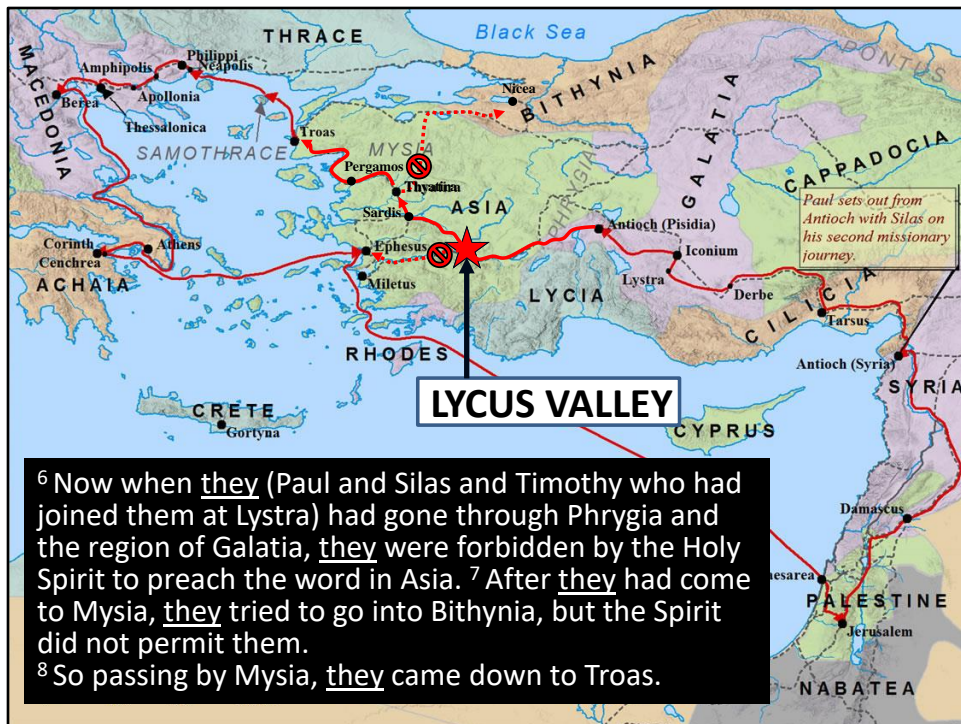


Acts 13-14 covers Paul's First Missionary Journey with Barnabas. They set sail from Antioch of Syria in 47 AD, preached in Cyprus, and then landed at Perga in Lycia. Apparently fearful of travelling in Galatia, Barnabas' nephew John Mark elected to catch a ship home to Jerusalem. The rest travelled to join the Roman Commercial Road at Antioch of Pisidia and travelled along it to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in southern Galatia, planting ekklesia along the way, before returning to Perga's port and sailing back to Antioch of Syria, arriving in 49 AD.



Travelling to Jerusalem to report on their trip and clarify requirements for Gentile believers, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria but broke apart over John Mark. In 50 or 51 AD, Paul and Silas set out overland from Antioch of Syria along the Roman Commercial Road, hoping to establish the ekklesia in large cities like Ephesus, the principal city of Asia and a port on the Aegean coast. However, they were prevented from doing so **[CLICK]** "by the Holy Spirit". Instead they turned toward Bithynia in the north, the shortest land route to Europe and its major Greek city Byzantium. But once more **[CLICK]** the Holy Spirit prevented their plans, and so they moved to Troas. From there, in response to a vision, they sailed to Macedonia and founded churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. After a brief stop in Athens, Paul spent two years in Corinth before sailing via Ephesus to Caesarea Maritima,

visiting Jerusalem, and returning to Antioch of Syria. **This is a typical map of the Second Missionary Journey recorded in Acts 15-18.** What's immediately apparent is that the route seems to run against the Roman Highways. Taking the southern route for the first half, the party was outside Phrygia when they divert northwards and connect with the central route before entering Bithynia and finishing on the military highway.

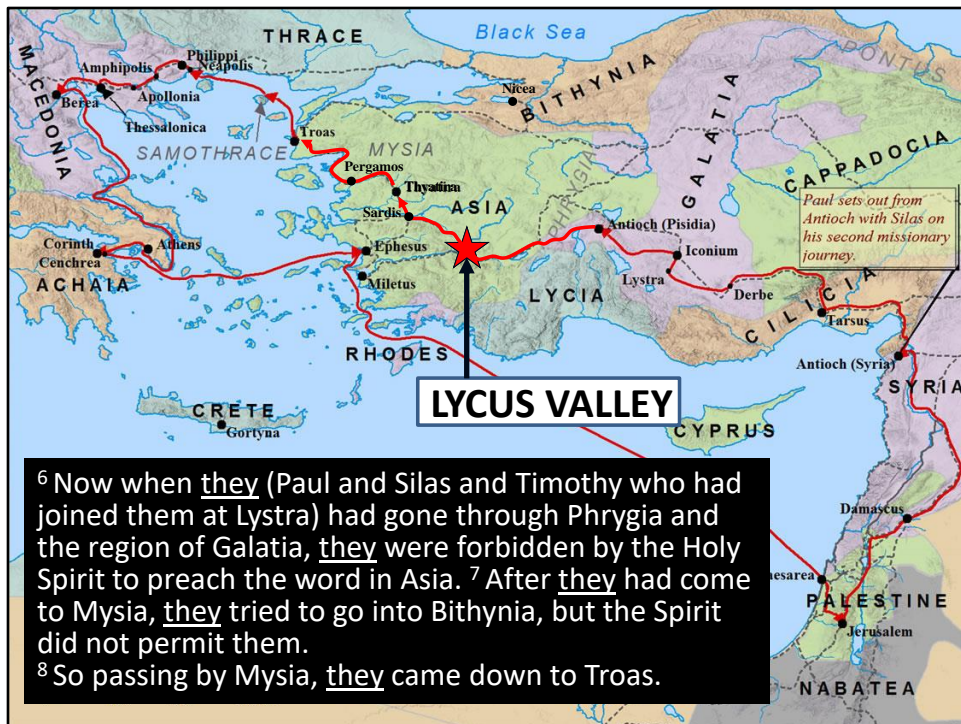


So let's refer to Scripture:

⁶ Now when they (Paul and Silas and Timothy who had joined them at Lystra) had **[CLICK]** gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, **[CLICK]** [Paul wanted to go to Ephesus but] they were forbidden **[CLICK]** by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

(So they took the road north **[CLICK]** past Hierapolis to Sardis and Thyatira at the border of Mysia, where a military road **[CLICK]** linked the garrison at Thyatira with the Northern Military Road, which Paul was keen to take, but) ⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but **[CLICK]** the Spirit did not permit them.

⁸ So passing by Mysia, **[CLICK]** they came down to Troas.

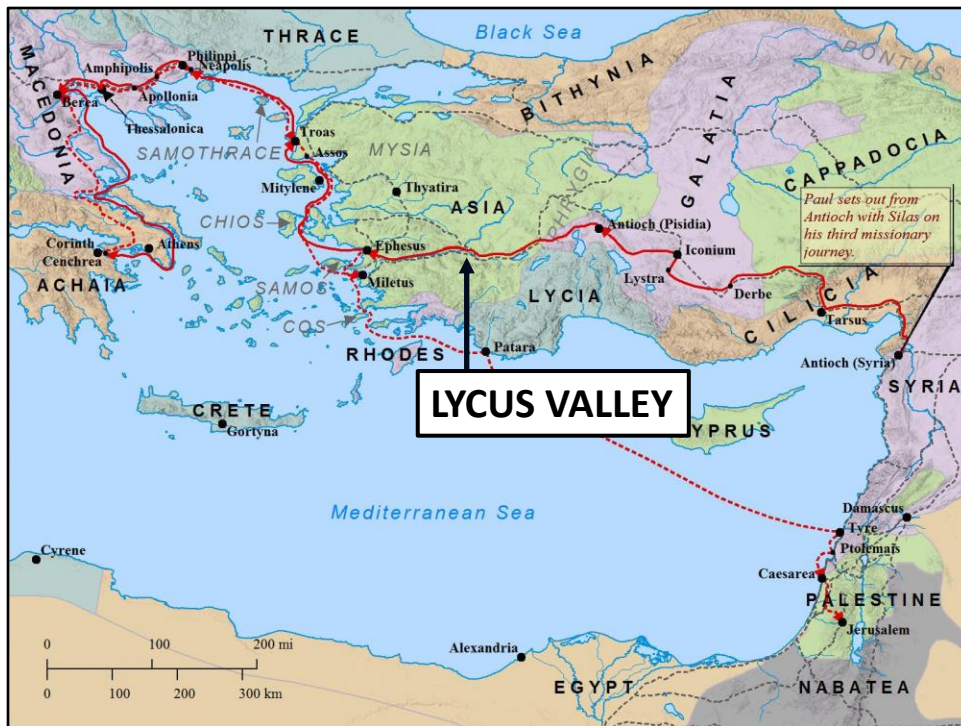


So did Paul actually pass through the Lycus River Valley on his Second Missionary Journey? We can't know for certain, but this route fits Luke's scripture like a glove, while the traditional view only even approximates making sense if Luke disregarded his customary use of traditional Greek names and "Asia" here means the Roman Province of Asia which was comprised of Phrygia, Mysia, Lydia (also called Asia), and Caria. But if that's so, why did he call out Phrygia and Mysia, both part of Asia, specifically in the same passage?

There's one more thing to keep in mind. Luke uses the word "they" (underscored); he in fact has not yet met Paul. They will meet in Troas. Ever careful about his grammar, from Troas onwards, Luke will write in the First Person because he witnessed the events in Acts. But for these three verses he must rely upon what he was told

happened.

Based on this analysis, I personally consider it likely that Paul had travelled through the Lycus River Valley sometime in 51 AD. It was customary for Paul and his team to evangelize in the cities they visited as well as teach in the synagogues. Many Jews lived in the area, and it is likely that some may have witnessed the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem some 19 years earlier.



On his Third Missionary Journey from 53-57 AD, Paul and Silas again left from Antioch of Syria, then the seat of Christianity, and travelled to Ephesus along the Roman Commercial Highway, almost certainly stopping briefly in the Lycus Valley cities of Colossae, Laodicea, and/or Hierapolis. **Acts Chapters 18-21 simply states that they went over the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples; this would have included the Lycus River Valley in Phrygia.**

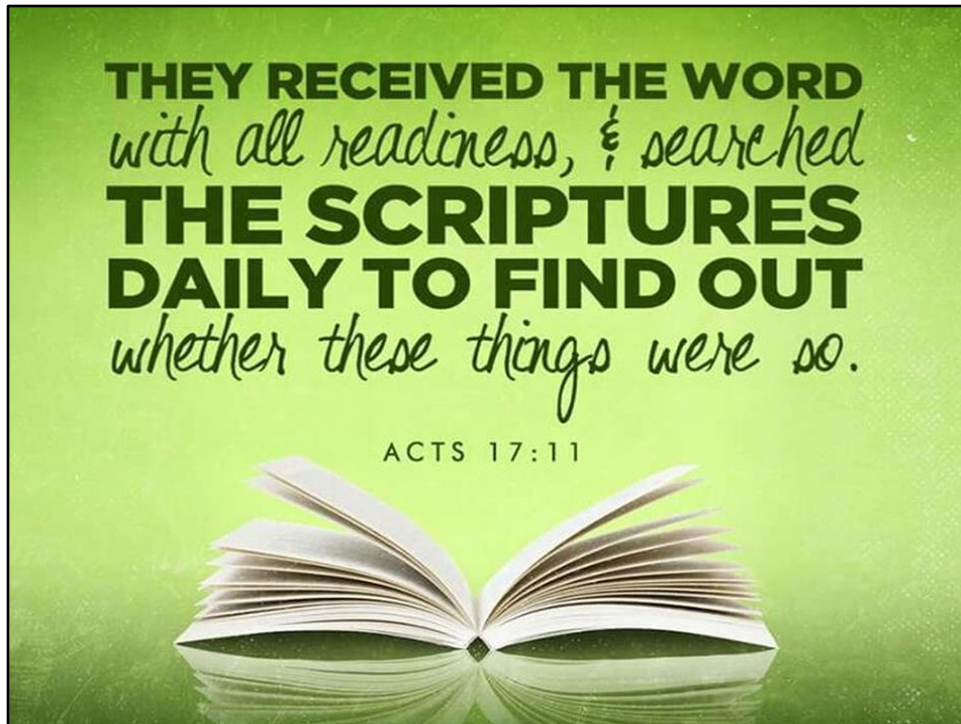
Paul then spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19.1–20.1), where his disciples evangelized the hinterland and he had access by sea to his European churches. He gave his pastoral sermon to the elders of the Church of Ephesus at Miletus on his last trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20.17–38).

So it is probable from Scripture that Paul had visited the Lycus River Valley and at least some of its cities Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis at least twice before his two-year ministry in Ephesus. He therefore personally knew the local people named in the two letters: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, Epaphras, Onesimus, and Nympha. Keep in mind that Paul wrote Colossians about 6 or 8 years after he was last there, and he may have heard that the local ekklesia had grown dramatically since then.



What some call Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey involved his two-year imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima after his arrest in Jerusalem and his subsequent journey by ship to Rome in the years 59-60 AD. Then followed the two-years of house arrest when Paul wrote his prison epistles. Epaphroditus carried his letter to Philippi in Macedonia, while Tychicus and Onesimus carried the Ephesian and Colossian letters and the personal letter to Philemon in Colossae.

Paul expected to be released and hoped to visit Colossae, for he requested Philemon to prepare a lodging for him in anticipation of a visit (Phil 1:23). Paul was released, but we have no hard evidence of his Fifth Missionary Journey taken between 62 and 65 AD.



So what's the takeaway from our brief examination whether Paul ever visited Colossae or not? As I noted up front, whether or not Paul ever visited Colossae is not theologically significant, but it does speak to a significant biblical issue. Should believers simply accept everything that we read in a Bible commentary or hear from the pulpit?

To me it appears that scripture very clearly overthrows at least two "facts" commonly taught in Bible colleges?

1. Were Epaphras and Epaphroditus the same person? Probably not!
2. Had Paul ever visited Colossae (and by extension Laodicea and Hierapolis)? Yes. Paul passed through the immediate area at least twice, around 51 AD and 54-55 AD, and his custom was to stay awhile and evangelize in the major cities he visited. From non-biblical sources we know that caravans usually stopped for one or more weeks at major cities along the way.

Acts 17:11 should be every believer's guide: "These (the Bereans) were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so."



THE
PREEMINENCE
OF
CHRIST

Colossians 1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

The theme of Colossians is that Jesus Christ is preeminent. The gospel message heralds the supremacy, headship, and the sole sufficiency of Christ to the church, which is His body. This little book shows Paul's "full-length portrait of Christ." There is no need to worry about angelic mediators or spiritual emanations. God has sent His Son to die for us! Every person who believes on Jesus Christ is saved and is a part of His body, the church, of which He is the Head. Believers are united to Christ in a wonderful living relationship! Furthermore, nothing need be added to this relationship, because each believer is "complete in him." All of God's fullness dwells in Christ, and each believer shares that fullness!

Charles Wesley wrote from it: *Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I find.*

[CLICK] The Key verse is Colossians 1:18 "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

Outline

Doctrine: Christ's Preeminence Declared

(Colossians 1)

- A. In the gospel message—1:1-12
- B. In redemption—1:13-14
- C. In creation—1:15-17
- D. In the church—1:18-23
- E. In Paul's ministry—1:24-29

Danger: Christ's Preeminence Defended

(Colossians 2)

- A. Beware of empty philosophies—(2:1-10)
- B. Beware of religious legalism (2:11-17)
- C. Beware of man-made disciplines (1:18-23)

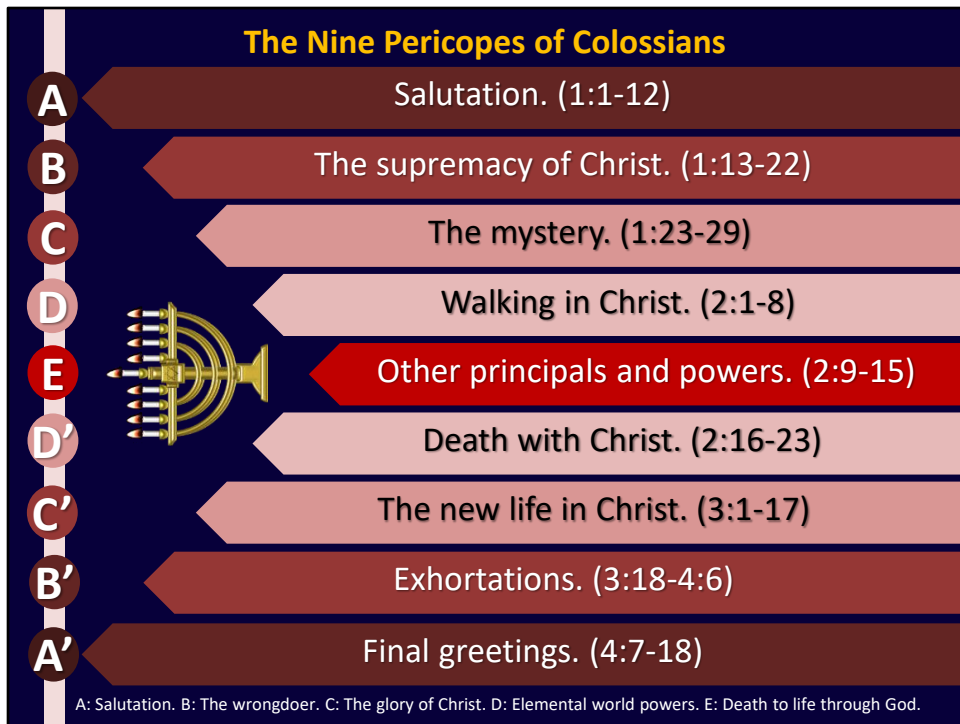
Duty: Christ's Preeminence Demonstrated

(Colossians 3-4)

- A. In personal purity—3:1-11
- B. In Christian fellowship—13:12-17
- C. In the home—3:18-21
- D. In daily work—3:22-4:1
- E. In Christian witness—4:2-6
- F. In Christian service—4:7-18

This relatively brief letter has a three-fold message:

- In the first doctrinal portion, Paul declares Christ's preeminence. **[CLICK]** Paul did not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. Chapter 1 exalts Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the gospel message, redemption, creation, the church, and Paul's own ministry.
- **[CLICK]** He then addresses the danger that has arisen in Colossae and defends Christ's preeminence. **[CLICK]** Paul attacks the heretics on their own ground, exposing the false origin of their teachings and showing how their teachings contradict everything Paul taught about Jesus Christ. The believer who masters this chapter is not likely to be led astray by some alluring and enticing "new-and-improved brand of Christianity."
- **[CLICK]** Finally, Chapters 3 and 4 applies the preeminence of Christ to the daily affairs of life. **[CLICK]** The greatest antidote to false teaching is a godly life, but what we believe determines how we behave. Wrong doctrine **always** leads to wrong living, so right doctrine should lead to right living.



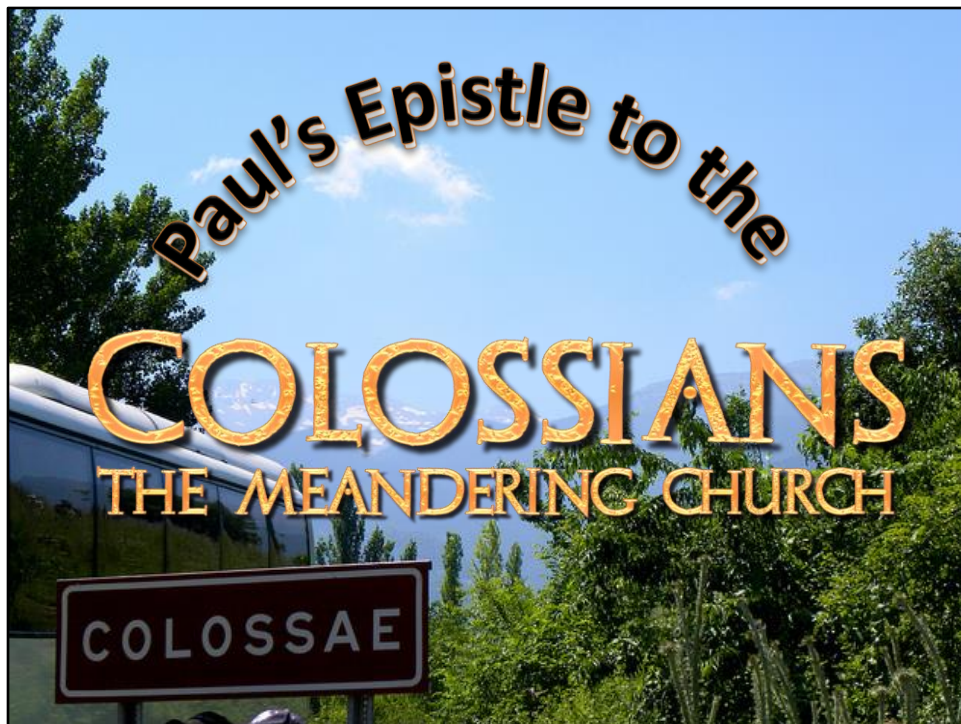
The letter consists of nine pericopes, or thought bubbles, which form a balanced chiasm, or menorah literary structure.

The Nine Pericopes of Colossians

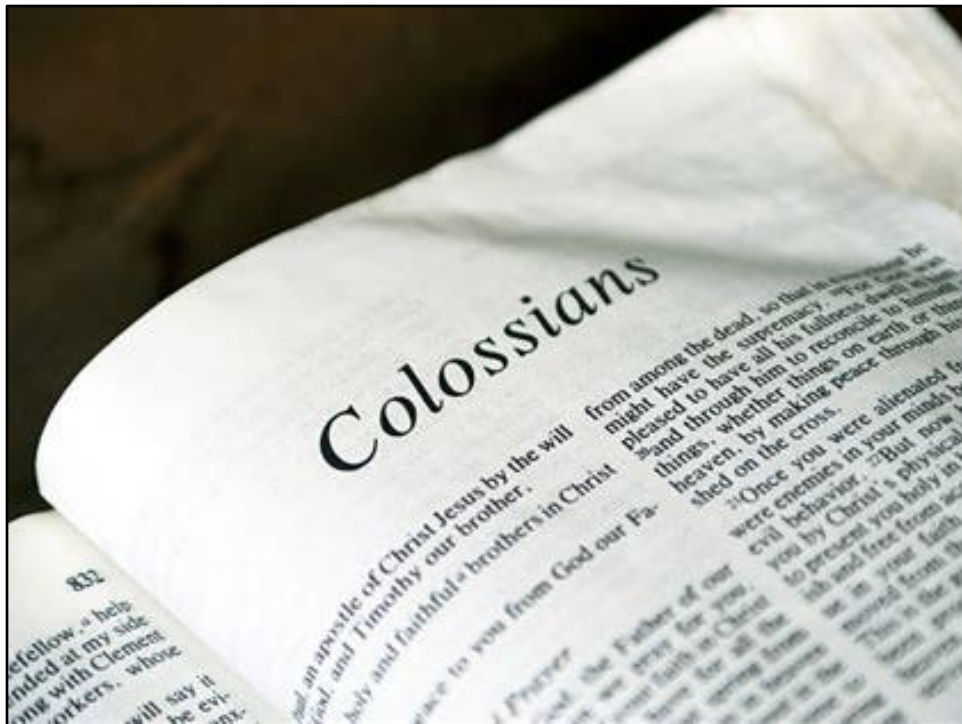
Former half	Relation	Latter half
Salutation (1:1-12) grace to you and peace from God our Father. (1:2)	Grace	Final greetings (4:7-18) Grace be with you. (4:18)
The supremacy of Christ (1:13-22) And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds (1:21)	The wrongdoer	Exhortations (3:18-4:6) For the wrongdoer will receive recompense for the wrong he committed, and there is no partiality. (3:25)
The mystery (1:23-29) to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. (1:27)	The glory of Christ is open to Gentiles	The new life in Christ (3:1-17) When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. (3:4)
Walking in Christ (2:1-8) See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. (2:8)	The elemental powers of the world	Death with Christ (2:16-23) If you died with Christ to the elemental powers of the world, why do you submit to regulations as if you were still living in the world? (2:20)
Christ is Preeminent over all Principalities and Powers (2:9-15) For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (2:9-10)		

This is another way to show the chiasmic structure. It adds a little bit more information by selecting the most relevant verse(s) from the pericope to summarise its main thought. As you can see, both salutation and final greetings focus on grace, a concept near and dear to Paul who knew that he could only be saved by God's grace.

Because Colossians is written to remind the local believers what they were initially taught about Christ's preeminence, and because the Colossian heresy apparently attacks that very concept, the centrepiece of the book confirms that Christ is preeminent over all principalities and powers.



So let's return to Paul, and see how he uses these artistic and literary devices.



Christ is preeminent. Colossians 1:18 will state “He is the head (the lifesource and leader) of the body, the church, and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.” So what is pre-eminence?

Preeminence is:

- The quality of being superior
- It's a high status or distinction given to anything considered to be the best at something
- To be in front of or have priority over
- To be foremost in time, place, order or importance
- To Hold first place in Rank and Influence.

The Bible is the blueprint for building our lives and finishing strong. Colossians presents 4 building blocks for our lives, that help us to give Jesus preeminence:

- Chapter 1 the focus is “Downwards” on building Christian roots
- Chapter 2 builds “Upwards” building up our “RELATIONSHIP” with Him
- Chapter 3 looks “Inward” and stresses our “RESPONSIBILITY” in Him
- And Chapter 4 Builds “Outward” as we walk and run in wisdom in the world.

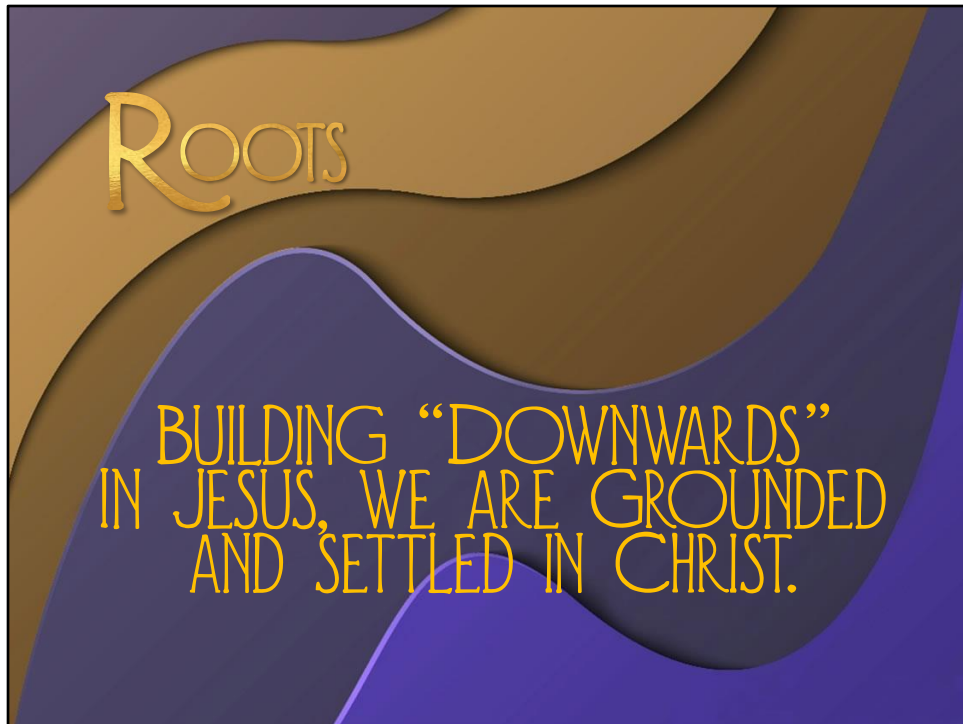
So as we LET HIM have “first place in Rank and Influence” in our lives WE ARE LIFTED UP. Think of an area of your life, right now that is “Struggling” begin to be intentional about giving Him preeminence there, He will LIFT YOU UP! Through Colossians we

discover 4 building blocks for our lives, that help us to give Jesus preeminence, each chapter represents one of these blocks:



Chapter 1 declares the preeminence of Christ. Colossians was written because a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call gnosticism, threatened the purity and peace of the Colossian assembly. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word gnosis (KNOW-sis), which means “to know.” (An agnostic is one who does not know.) The gnostics were the people who were “in the know” when it came to the deep things of God. They considered themselves the “spiritual aristocracy” in the church and promised people such a close union with God that they would achieve “spiritual perfection” and spiritual fullness when they entered into the prescribed teachings and ceremonies. There was also a “full knowledge,” a spiritual depth, that only the initiated could enjoy. This “wisdom” would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things. Of course, all of this teaching was but man-made philosophy. We’ll discuss this more later on.

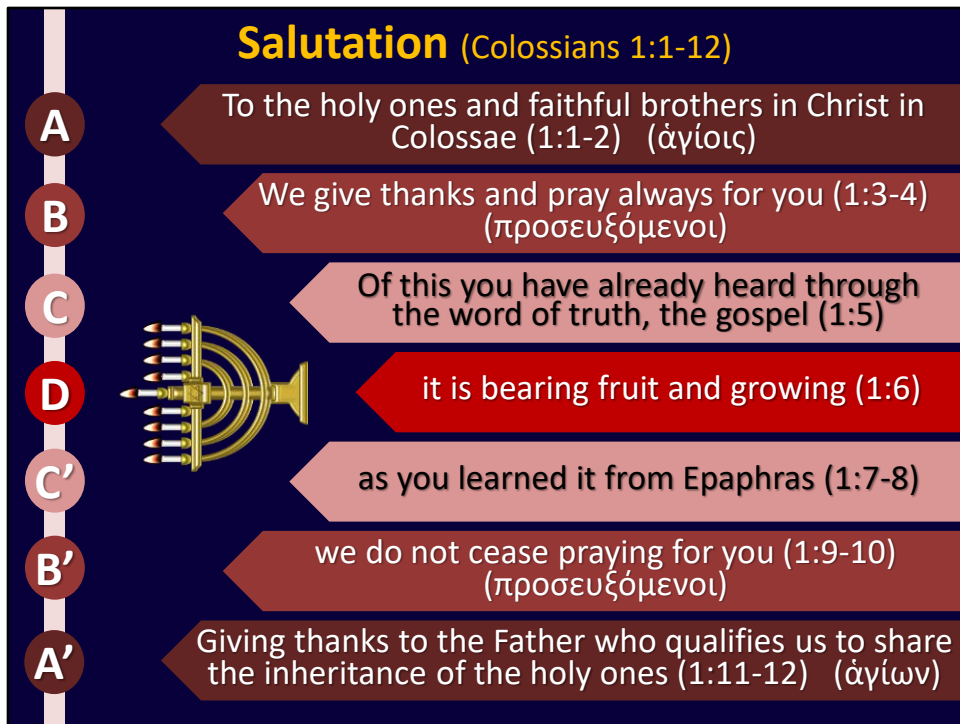
Paul counters this by declaring that Jesus Christ settled the sin question and completely defeated all satanic forces in His work on the Cross, and He put an end to the legal demands of the Mosaic Law. All that the believer needs is Jesus! He alone is Preeminent!



Chapter One is about our ROOTS in Christ. By Building “Downwards” In Jesus, we are Grounded and settled in Christ. (1:23)

Building downwards speaks about digging foundations, going deeper, allowing the roots of our lives to be settled in Christ.

Note that Paul builds this foundation through prayer. Paul and Jesus both model prayer for us. Both gave thanks to the Father for all He has done for us.



The salutation declares Christ's preeminence in the Gospel message, which the Colossians had heard declared truthfully by Epaphras. Paul didn't start his letter by directly attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. Instead, he began by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the gospel message, redemption, creation, the church, and Paul's own ministry. The people to whom Paul was writing had become Christians because of the gospel message brought to them by Epaphras, and Paul reminded them of the foundation of their faith. Last week, we examined Paul's doctrinal defense of Christ's preeminence through the gospel message.

Salutation (Colossians 1:1-12)		
Former half	Relation	Latter half
Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ <i>who are</i> in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1:1-2)	The Holy Ones	strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (1:11-12)
We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; (1:3-4)	Prayer	For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing <i>Him</i> , being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (1:9-10)
because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, (1:5)	Hearing the Gospel	as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. (1:7-8)
Bearing Fruit which has come to you, as <i>it has</i> also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as <i>it is</i> also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; (1:6)		

Because the salutation was only 12 verses, I have shown the entire passage here broken out in the chiasmic structure.

READ

Paul has reviewed the primary characteristics of the gospel message:

1. It centers in a Person—Jesus Christ.
2. It is the “Word of truth”
3. It is the message of God’s grace
4. It is for the whole world

He further reminded the Colossians that:

- They had heard the gospel; They believed in Jesus Christ
 - They were disciplined by Epaphras
 - They became faithful in Christ and bore fruit. Faith, hope, and love are among the firstfruits in the spiritual harvest and these spiritual graces are among the evidences that a person has truly been born again. This hope is “laid up” for believers in heaven.
1. Paul then prayed for their spiritual intelligence
 2. He prayed for their practical obedience in their Christian walk
 3. He prayed for moral excellence in their wisdom and character, their patience, endurance, joyfulness, and thankfulness.

The supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:13-23)

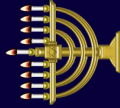
A

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us to the kingdom of the Son (1:13-14)

B

By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth (1:15-16)

C



He is the head of the body, the church (1:17-18)

B'

to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάχει) all things to Himself, whether things on earth or in heaven (1:19-20)

A'

yet He has now reconciled (ἀποκαταλλάχει) in his fleshly body through his death (1:21-22)

A: Forgiveness. B: Everything in heaven and earth. C: The Head of the church.

The second pericope in Chapter 1 also shows a very clear concentric parallelism. Unsurprisingly, the central message of this section on the supremacy of Christ is on Christ as the Head of the body, the church. The false teachers in Colossae, just like today, usually don't deny the importance of Jesus Christ, they simply dethrone Him, giving Him prominence but not preeminence. In their philosophy, Jesus Christ was but one of many "emanations" through which people could reach God. Paul will strongly refute this claim with four unanswerable arguments:

1. Christ Is the Savior (1:13–14); He is the only possible solution to sin for us sinners!
2. Christ is the Creator!
3. Christ is the Head of the Church!
4. Christ is the Beloved of the Father!



¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

The word “conveyed” is translated in the KJV as “translated”, which describes the deportation of people from one country to another. History records that Antiochus the Great transported at least 2,000 Jews from Babylonia to Colossae.

By abolishing the “...power of darkness...” Paul rules out the whole system of aeons and angels that the Gnostics placed above Christ. It is Christ’s Kingdom in which he is King. He has moral and spiritual sovereignty in the Kingdom that will be established. Paul seems to contrast the realm or sphere of the new age—the light, with that of the present age, **the evil sphere or authority (exousia) of darkness**. Elsewhere this evil sphere is equated with the power of Satan.

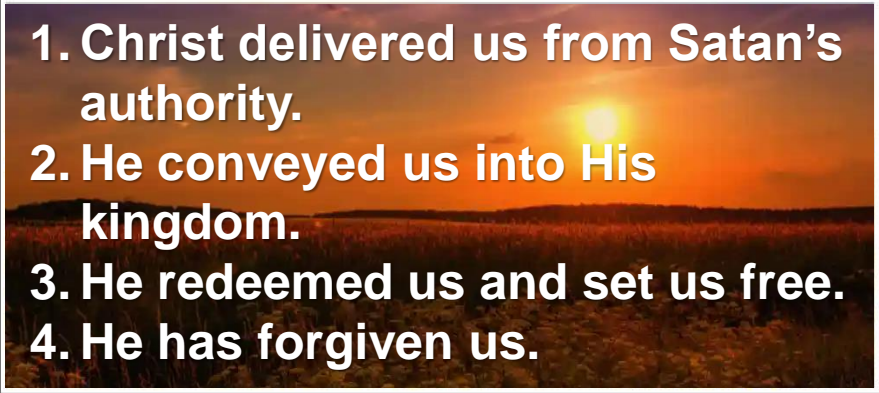


¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,
¹⁴ in whom we have **redemption** through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

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Paul continues his indirect criticism against Gnosticism. They denied that the Messiah had come in the flesh. They taught that one did not need the atoning sacrifice of his blood for salvation, because he was never really human. They emphasized that salvation could only be attained through the secret knowledge that Christ had given his disciples.

Eerdmans states: "Increasingly, scholars recognize that Christianity's proclamation of a divine savior provided the catalyst for the Gnostic movement. Many Gnostics traced their teaching back to him and the secret teaching he purportedly revealed after the resurrection. Gnostic christologies offer a savior without the incarnation (a Christ-spirit) who gives knowledge instead of calling for faith . . ."

- 
1. Christ delivered us from Satan's authority.
 2. He conveyed us into His kingdom.
 3. He redeemed us and set us free.
 4. He has forgiven us.

¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,
¹⁴ in whom we have **redemption** through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul counters this in two powerful verses by stating that:

1. **[CLICK]** Christ delivered us from the power of darkness and the authority of Satan.
2. **[CLICK]** He conveyed (or translated or transported) us into His kingdom. He didn't merely free us, He moved us into His Promised Land.
3. **[CLICK]** He redeemed us (paid our ransom and met the Holy demands of God's Law) and truly set us free.
4. **[CLICK]** He has forgiven us; Jesus not only set us free but he has cancelled every debt so that we cannot be enslaved again.

Salvation

“I have been saved;
I am being saved;
and I will be saved.” —Earl D. Rachmacher

Justification	Past Tense	Separation from the Penalty of Sin	The gift from God of everlasting life received by faith alone in Christ alone (Jn 3:18; 5:24; Eph 2:8-9).
Sanctification	Present Tense	Separation from the Power of Sin	A progressive work that involves the faith and the works of the believer.
Glorification	Future Tense	Separation from the Presence of Sin	A result of the previous aspects. All believers will be glorified (resurrected and given a body like Christ), but some will have more glory (i.e. reward) than others. This is what Hebrews speaks of.

Redeemed through His blood, the forgiveness of sins is a done deal. Ephesians 2:8-9 states “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

We’ve discussed before the three tenses of salvation: “I have been saved; I am being saved; and I will be saved.” Paul is claiming that reality loud and clear to the Colossians. Redemption by Christ’s blood is the present possession of every believer in Christ. The New Age arrived with Christ’s resurrection and every believer enters it upon conversion.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.



“He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him **my firstborn**, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”

Psalm 89:20-29

¹⁵ **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.**

In contrast to the Gnostics (and Muslims) who maintains that God can never be known or understood, we have One who has made God known to us. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...”

Paul used the word image, which means “an exact representation and revelation.”

The writer to the Hebrews affirms that Jesus Christ is “the express image of His Person” (Heb 1:3). Jesus was able to say, “He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). In His essence, God is invisible; but Jesus Christ has revealed Him to us (Jn 1:18).

“...firstborn of all creation” means He existed prior to all creation.

This is a Messianic title from Psalm 89:20-29

[CLICK] “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.



¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

In verses 15 through 18, Paul contradicts the Gnostic view of creation and the structure of the Godhead. The Gnostics believed that between God and matter lie a host of spiritual powers, collectively termed the fullness (*pleroma*) of God. From its lowest rank comes the creator, a demiurge (**di-me-ahge**). Fallen spiritual powers, often linked with stars, now rule the world. The Gnostics saw the angels as emanations from the Most High God. They were all imperfect, with the highest and most ancient of them being more ethereal and inviolate than those in the next level down. To discredit this Gnostic teaching on the "fullness of the Godhead," Paul specifically states that Christ is the "firstborn of every creature," thereby establishing his preeminence in the order of creation.

The Gnostics taught that the demiurge created the earth and mankind. Paul simply responds that the entire creation, both material and spiritual, was accomplished by God through Christ.



All things were created through Him and for Him.

[CLICK] ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

“...consist” = sunistemi, to be compacted together, to cohere, to be constituted with, to be held together. In other words, Jesus Christ holds everything in existence together.

God is the Sustainer of the universe: He is not uninvolved, remote, de-tached and impersonal—leaving things to run themselves. He energizes all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). He cares about the sparrow that falls to the ground, the widow, the orphan, and the homeless. He cares about you.

God does not lose track of His children but watches over them with infinite, patient, intimate, precise, Fatherly care. He also intervenes from time to time to alter the status quo in response to prayer, and even alters the course of entire nations.

Paul is not going to let the Gnostics slander the one true God!!!

18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.



'Christ washing the Feet of the Disciples' by Jacopo Tintoretto, 1575-1580.

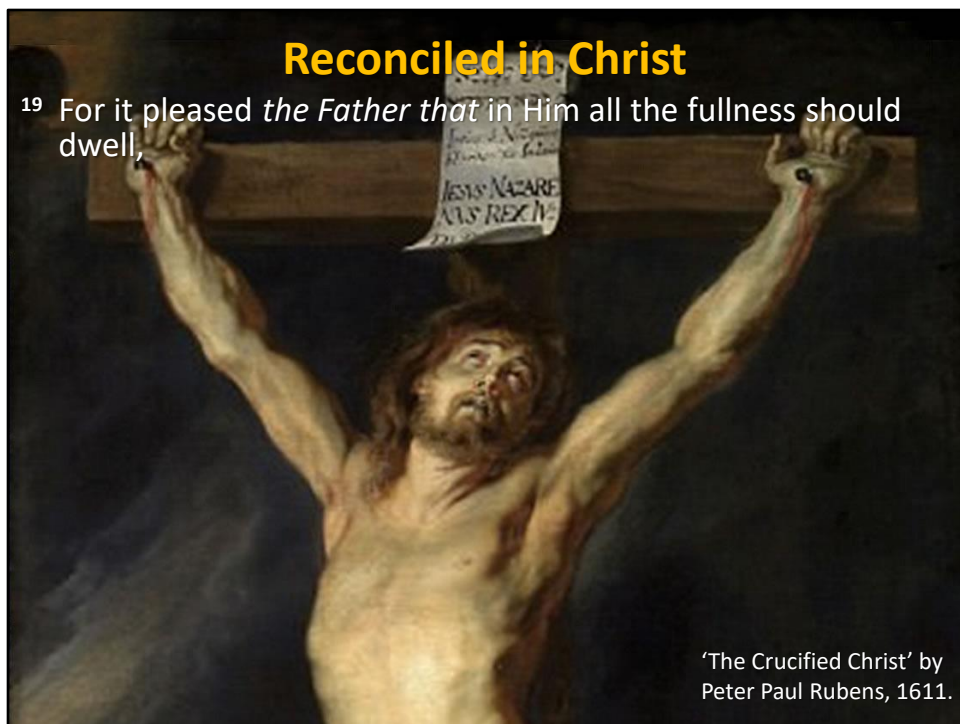
And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.

...the beginning": The originator. The Alpha and Omega, Aleph and Tau (Rev 1:8-10, 17-18). As the body of Christ (not "body of Christians") the church is not merely a "society" but is defined in terms of its organic communion with Christ.

The word for "...preeminence": proteuo is only used in Colossians. It's the theme of the epistle.

Reconciled in Christ

¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father that in Him* all the fullness should dwell,



'The Crucified Christ' by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611.

For it pleased *the Father that in Him* all the fullness should dwell, Paul now tells the Colossians what the Gnostics' favorite term "...fullness" = pleroma, actually means. It is the sum total of all divine power and attributes. But it is NOT the totality of the various spiritual 'levels' and the beings or entities that they presumed without evidence to exist. What it is is the fullness of God. And it dwelt permanently in Jesus Christ. God the Father was in Him! This fullness was not something added to Jesus Christ it was a permanent part of His essential Being, His very constitution. God is fully manifested in Him!

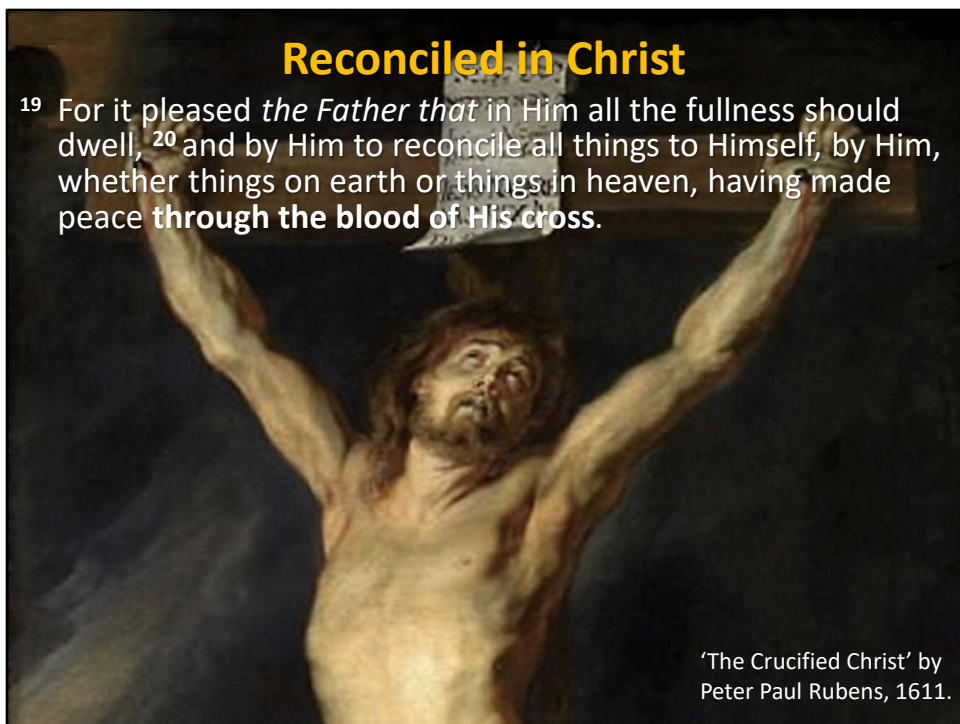
Paul's argument for the primacy of Christ, which began in verse 15, rebuts the Gnostic teaching on the nature of the Godhead. It is not through the hierarchy of angels (aeons) that Christians are reconciled to God, but rather through His son, Yeshua the Messiah.

This answers Socrates' statement to Plato, and criticisms made by gnostics, "It may be that the Deity can forgive sins, but I do not see how."

Jesus, sinless man, took on Himself the punishment for the sins of mankind, and God forgave them.

Reconciled in Christ

¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace **through the blood of His cross.**



'The Crucified Christ' by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611.

²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

"...the blood": By His blood He has taken care of all of our needs. Paul gives three main truths:

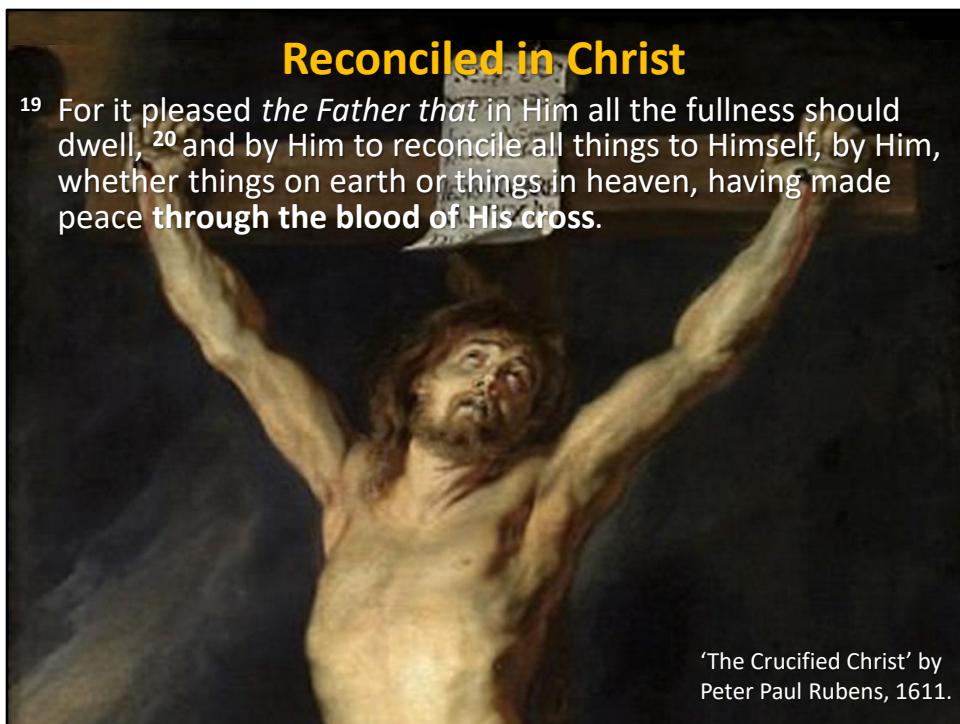
- 1) Jesus has taken care of all things.
- 2) Jesus is sufficient; all that we need is in Him.
- 3) God is pleased when Jesus is honored and given preeminence.

For the Gnostics, God was the ultimate, nameless, unknowable being called the 'Abyss.' He is perfect, but the material world is alien to the divine nature. How, then, does earth exist at all with all its imperfections and evils? The Gnostic answer is that the **FULNESS** (Gr. *pleroma*) of the deity could only flow out in emanations or aeons or angels. This is the only way the gulf between God and mankind can be bridged. The highest aeons are close to divine, being spiritual and free from matter, and the Gnostics worshipped these with many other grades of angelic hosts are to be worshipped.

Paul basically says this confabulation is all rubbish. Christians are not reconciled to God through angels, but through God's Son.

Reconciled in Christ

¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace **through the blood of His cross.**



'The Crucified Christ' by
Peter Paul Rubens, 1611.

Paul again contrasted the false Gnostic beliefs about Christ not actually coming in the flesh with the truth of the gospel, which shows that the Messiah **did** live on earth as a human. Paul says that Christ's death on the cross will reconcile the Colossians to the Most High God, as long as they faithfully hold fast to the original gospel that was preached to them.

Catch our breath

Thus far Paul has described:

- Christ's relationship to the Father (1:15)
- Christ's relationship to the Creation (1:16-17)
- Christ's relationship to the Church (1:18,19)
- Christ's relationship to the Cross (1:20)



Thus far Paul has described:

- Christ's relationship to the Father (1:15)
- Christ's relationship to the Creation (1:16-17)
- Christ's relationship to the Church (1:18,19)
- Christ's relationship to the Cross (1:20)

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.



²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

Man is never called upon in Scripture to make his own peace with God (Rom 5:1) It was in heaven that sin began...] For the apostle, assurance always had to be present tense. And, while God's election is not vacillating, it can be affirmed only in terms of profession (Rom 10:9); conduct (1 Cor 6:9); and, the witness of the Spirit (Rom 8:9)

[CLICK] ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.


The purpose of this reconciliation is personal holiness. Your identity is wrapped up in what God did for you, and not in what you do for yourself. God does not make peace so that we can continue to be rebels. A two-fold headship here: 1) Over all creation; 2) As Head of the Church.

[CLICK] Your identity should be wrapped up in what God did for you and not what you do for yourself.

The mystery (Colossians 1:24-29)

A Mission of the apostles (1:24-25)

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,
25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

B  The mystery (1:26-27)

26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.
27 **To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles:** which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

A' Mission of the apostles (1:28-29)

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.
29 To this [end] I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

And now we come to the third pericope in Chapter 1, which is a divine secret that Paul has been honored to present, a mystery hidden from the beginning of time which Paul is about to reveal by divine revelation.

Wow! Paul is playing the Gnostics at their own game here!

But the main reason for this slide is to demonstrate the concentric parallelism of this pericope.

- Paul's mission is to fulfill the Word of God.
- Now he's blessed to be able to reveal a real mystery, that salvation is available to the Gentiles as well as Jews.
- And everything that has gone before in the letter is focused on Paul's mission.