

Wednesday Faith Connection

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PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION: April 22, 2020

Colossians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God,
and Timothy our brother.

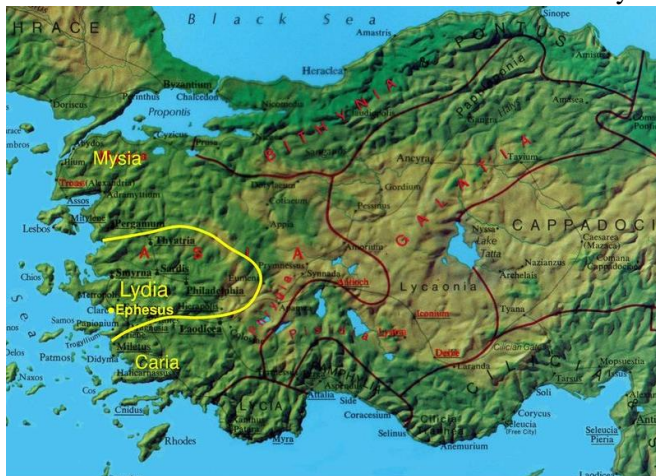
To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

What was happening in Colossae in the first century A.D.?

Q. Where is Colossae?

A. In

- a. Modern day Turkey
- b. A region we sometimes call Asia Minor
- c. On the border of a section of Asia Minor called Lydia



d. On an East-West trade route, 120 miles from the large port of Ephesus

e. following the Menander and Lycus river valleys

f. A thriving region of Christian faith by A.D. 90

– Seven regional churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation 1-3

g. Part of a “Lycus Valley tri-city area” including the cities of

- Hierapolis (medicinal hot springs)
- Laodicea (textiles) – see Col. 4:16
- Colossae (textiles) – see Lydia in Acts 16:14



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What was Paul's connection with the church?

Never been there

“Heard of your faith” (1:4)

“I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face” (2:1)

But Connected through his outreach mission from Ephesus (AD 54-57)

Acts 19:10 Paul preached in Ephesus “for two years, so that all the residents of the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”



The Great Theatre of Ephesus. The view from the audience seating (cavea).

Connected with Paul through a Colossian named – Epaphras

Paul sends greetings from his companion and co-worker, Epaphras, a Colossian, who is with Paul (4:12-13), and who was the first to bring the message of Christ to the Colossians:

Col.1:7 – “*the gospel . . . you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant*” (1:7)

Col. 4:12-13 – “*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.*”

Who were the people of the region?

An inter-racial mix

- Native “Phrygians” from Asia Minor
- Greeks (Alexander the Great)
- Jewish Community – settled 200 years before (possibly >100,000)

Can we find out when the letter was written?

There is no date in the letter itself, but . . . Paul indicates

- He was in prison (1:24, 4:10,18)
- He had plenty Greek companions (4:7-14)

When was Paul in prison?

Difficult to be certain,

but Paul was imprisoned a number of times

not all of which are mentioned in the Bible.

2 Corinthians 11

*18 since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast. 19 For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! . . . 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, **far more imprisonments**, with countless floggings, and often near death. 24 Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea;*

What imprisonments are mentioned in the Bible?

- A.D. 54? When Paul was in Ephesus (Asia Minor)? *See 1 Corinthians 15:32*
- A.D. 58-60? When Paul was in Caesarea (Palestine)? *See Acts 24-26.*
- A.D. 62? When Paul was in Rome. *See Acts 28*
Or . . .
- A.D. 65+ After Paul’s Death? (*if written by a close follower*)

SO – DATE OF THE LETTER?

Written within 20-35 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection

(like going back to 9/11 or the first Gulf War)

What do we know about Paul?

What do we learn from Luke in the Acts of the Apostles?

Acts 21:39

Paul replied, “I am **a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia**, a citizen of **an important city**.”

Acts 22:3

“I am **a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia**, but **brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel**, (the most prominent rabbi/pharisee) educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being **zealous for God**, just as all of you are today.

Acts 16:37

Paul replied, “They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are **Roman citizens**,”

Acts 22:25

Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it legal for you to flog **a Roman citizen** who is uncondemned?”

- **Tarsus**: Politically important, Prosperous, Intellectual center
- **Paul**: schooled in Greek and Jewish learning, Roman citizenship

In a remarkable way,

God provided the background, education and confidence for Paul to move easily between cultures

What do we learn from Paul himself?

The most extensive description of himself is in Philippians 3:5-6

- circumcised on the eighth day,
- a member of the people of Israel,
- of the tribe of Benjamin,
- a Hebrew born of Hebrews;
- as to the law, a Pharisee;
- as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
- as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

How did Paul get to connect with Eastern Turkey and Colossae?

1. Paul was a Pharisee.

What was the driving force in Paul's life as a Pharisee before he became a Christian?

A Pharisee was a super-committed layperson,!

- Paul was a “Hebrew born of Hebrews”
 - of the tribe of Benjamin
 - but not of the tribe of Levi:
- therefore he was not a priest.
 - only men born into a priestly family had access to the intimate presence of God in the Temple
 - The intimate presence of God was symbolized by cloud, or fire (Exodus 13:21), but especially “light” (the Shekinah glory; Psalm 27:1)
- Pharisees were “priest wannabees” (Exodus 19:6)
 - who believed that God would be close to them
 - if they kept the laws of Moses commanded of the priests

2. Paul's conversion

In his conversion, Paul literally “met the presence of God” in the person of Christ

In his conversion, Paul was called by this Jesus to go to the non-Jewish world (the Gentiles) with the good news that God's intimate presence was now to be found freely anywhere in the world through the Messiah, Jesus

Paul's Conversion Story . . . Acts 9, 21, 26

Acts 26:12-18

*12 “I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests [to persecute Christians], 13 when at midday along the road, your Excellency, **I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun**, shining around me and my companions. 14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew[d] language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’*

15 I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord answered, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

16 But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me[e] and to those in which I will appear to you. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from **the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you** 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

The start of a mission all over the Mediterranean world



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