

Colossians study 1 – Introduction and chapter 1, verses 1 - 20:-

The town of Colossae was in the valley of the river Lycus sixty miles or so upstream from Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor. It was not far from the town of Laodicea famous for its thermal springs – see Revelation chapter 3 verses 14 – 22.

The Letter the Church at Colossae, like Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon was written from prison and was delivered with the Epistle to Philemon and possibly Ephesians by Tychicus and Onesimus (Colossians chapter 4, verses 3 and 7 – 9; see also Philemon verses 10 - 12 and Ephesians chapter 6, verses 21 – 22). Early tradition says that Paul wrote it in Rome during the imprisonment recorded in Acts 28 (c. A.D. 61 - 63). There is the possibility that it was written during an imprisonment in Ephesus in A.D. 55 / 56, however this is less likely.

This letter follows Paul's familiar pattern of the teaching of the basics of the Christian faith - 'What to believe' (chapters 1 and 2) followed by the importance of its influence on the life of a Christian - 'How to act' (chapters 3 and 4). Compare with Romans chapters 1 – 11 followed by "*Therefore . . .*" at the beginning of chapter 12 – similarly Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1 and Philippians chapter 2, verse 12.

Chapter 1, verses 1 – 2:-

The typical greeting to "*the saints and faithful brethren in Christ . . .*". Note that the word "*saints*" is used by Paul and others to refer to Christian believers, not used as denoting a specially 'holy' Christian person! If we are 'in Christ' we are a 'saint'.

Verses 3 – 8:-

A 'thanks be to the Lord God' for the faith and growth of the local Church at Colossae. The evangelising of the area was done by Epaphras "*a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf*". He had journeyed to Rome and was with Paul in prison. (see Philemon verse 28).

Verses 9 – 20:-

In the original Greek, these verses are one long sentence without a 'full stop'! As Paul begins to pray for his Christian brothers and sisters at Colossae he is caught up in praise and thanksgiving to God the Father who "*has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*" (verse 13). That this was one of the key teachings of the early church is seen in the way it is used by the writers of a number of the New Testament Epistles – see 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9 and 1 John chapter 1, verses 5 – 7 and chapter 2, verses 7 – 11.

In verses 15 – 20 there is a glorious description of the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I used these verses as part of the short thought for 'The Incarnation'. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .*". In Christ all things were created. If there was an inclination to worship angels (chapter 2, verse 18) or other 'heavenly beings', Paul emphasises that they were created through Christ and for Christ! - verse 16. Through Christ all things were to be reconciled to God the Father, things both earthly and heavenly. This reconciliation was brought about by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. It is through the death of the Lord Jesus that "*we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*". (verse 14).

Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, the unique agent of cosmic reconciliation. Remember that it is the Father in Colossians who is said to have delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. The Son is the agent of reconciliation and salvation not merely of the church, but in some sense redeems the rest of creation as well "*all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*" (see Romans chapter 8, verses 19 – 23).

"Almighty God, Father of all mercies . . . We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace and for the hope of glory."

(From the General Thanksgiving, Book of Common Prayer)