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Article 51: Colossians at a Glance

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COLOSSIANS AT A GLANCE

This book emphasizes the head of the body (Jesus) as opposed to Ephesians which stressed the body (the church) of the head. In the epistle Paul speaks of the deity of the Savior, the danger of the serpent and the duty of the saints.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

THE PREEMINENCE OF THE PREEMINENT ONE, THE GLORIES OF THE GLORIOUS ONE.

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Paul**. He was also known as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). This relentless enemy of Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:5, 19; 26:11; Gal. 1:13) would, following his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), become the greatest missionary, church planter, soul winner, and theologian in church history, authoring nearly half of the New Testament books!
2. What? The books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.
3. When and where? Written around 60 A.D. from Rome.
4. Why and to whom? This epistle is a defense against the false philosophies of the day, and to present the preeminence of Christ. It was addressed to the church at Colosse.

KEY EVENTS

1. Paul's prayer for the church; Christ's deity and the church described as a mystery
2. Warnings in regards to the enemies of the church
3. Holy living by the people in the church
4. Closing challenges and greetings from Paul's co-workers

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Paul**, author of Colossians and at least 12 other New Testament books, church planter, evangelist, missionary, and perhaps the greatest of all the apostles
2. **Tychicus**, sent by Paul to Colosse during the apostle's first Roman imprisonment to bring to the church the Epistle of Colossians
3. **Epaphras**, prayer warrior from Colosse who had come to Rome that he might assist Paul during the apostle's first imprisonment
4. **Onesimus**, a runaway slave whom Paul led to Christ
5. **Luke**, author of the gospel of Luke and Acts, who served as Paul's personal physician

KEY PLACES

1. **Colosse**: a city in Asia Minor whose church located there would receive one of Paul's four letters written during his Roman imprisonment, namely, the Book of Colossians

2. **Laodicea:** a city in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. Paul instructed the believers in Philippi to send the epistle he had written them to the church in Laodicea, and also that they request and read the letter he had sent to the Laodicean believers.

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. In an introductory nutshell, this book gives us (1) the most concise description of Christ's superiority and (2) Satan's false isms that can be found in all the Bible!
2. Christ's superiority (1:15-20)
 - The express image of the invisible God
 - Indwelt by all the fullness of God
 - His eternal existence
 - Creator of all things
 - Sustainer of all things
 - Reconciler of all things by His death on the cross
 - Head of the church
 - First to be resurrected from the dead (that is, who never died again)
 - Grand summary: In light of the above, all things find their purpose in Him
3. Satan's isms
 - Worldly philosophy (2:4)
 - Hollow human tradition (2:8)
 - Legalism (2:16, 17)
 - Self abasement (2:18a)
 - Worship of angels (2:18b)
 - Exotic visions (2:18c)
 - Asceticism (2:20-22)
 - Self-made religion (2:23)
4. Colossians may have been Paul's first written prison epistle.
5. Due to the small size of Colosse, this church may have had fewer members than any other New Testament church.
6. This book provides one of two New Testament commands for the church epistles to be exchanged and read before the various local assemblies (compare Col. 4:16 with 1 Thess. 5:27).
7. The shorter form of Paul's benediction, characteristic of his later letters, occurs for the first time here (4:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Titus 3:15).
8. Colossians reveals at least three divine mysteries (truths not made known in the Old Testament).
 - The mystery that Jesus Christ would be 100% God and 100% man (2:2, 9)
 - The mystery that the believer would be indwelt by Christ (1:26, 27)
 - The mystery that both Jews and Gentiles would share in the body of Christ (4:3)
9. Of the seven references to the church in Laodicea (the most carnal in the New Testament) five are to be found in Colossians (2:1; 4:13, 15, 16). (For the other two, see Rev. 1:11 and 3:14).
10. Colossians may be contrasted to other Pauline epistles. Thus:
 - In Romans we are *justified* in Christ.
 - In 1 Corinthians we are *enriched* in Christ.

- In 2 Corinthians we are *comforted* in Christ.
 - In Galatians we are *free* in Christ.
 - In Ephesians we are *quicken*ed in Christ.
 - In Philippians we are *happy* in Christ.
 - In Colossians we are *complete* in Christ.
11. This book thus presents the glorious culmination of it all. We are complete in Christ.
12. This completeness is four-fold:
- Building *downward*— "*Grounded and settled and ... not moved away from the hope of the gospel*" (1:23). This is the *deeper* life.
 - Building *upward*— "*Built up in him, and stablished in the faith*" (2:7). This is the *higher* life.
 - Building *inward*— "*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*" (3:3). This is the *inner* life.
 - Building *outward*— "*Walk with wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time*" (4:5). This is the *outer* life.
13. The church at Colosse was probably started during Paul's third missionary journey. Although he personally never visited the city (see Col. 2:1), he did spend two years teaching the Word of God in Ephesus at the house of Tyrannus (see Acts 19:9-10). Colosse was only 90 miles east of Ephesus. It is therefore suggested that one of his students during this time was a man from Colosse named Epaphras. After graduating from the two-year T.B.I. (Tyrannus Bible Institute), Epaphras may have gone back to evangelize the entire Lycus Valley. This valley, some ten miles long, contained three important cities: Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse. Laodicea was only 12 miles from Colosse.
14. It is therefore possible that Paul's zealous young student started both the church in Colosse and the one in Laodicea. (See also Col. 4:16 and Rev. 3:14-22.) The Colossian church was composed mainly of Gentile membership (see Col. 2:13). Paul intended to visit it upon his release from prison (Philem. 22). The church in Colosse may have met in the home of Philemon, for he lived at Colosse with one of his slaves, Onesimus (Col. 4:9 and the book of Philemon). Some time after its beginning, the church at Colosse was infected by a deadly virus known as Judaistic Gnosticism. This represented the worst of both the Jewish and Greek world of thought. The "J-G virus" consisted of the following:
- Salvation could be obtained only through knowledge. This meant only those with superior intellects could hope to achieve salvation. Faith (belief without materialistic proof) was silly and useless.
 - Matter itself was evil. The J-G virus taught that the world was created by a series of angelic emanations. In other words, God (the original source) created an angel who in turn created another angel, who created yet a third, etc. Finally the last of these angels created the world as we know it today.
 - While this philosophy admitted to the *transcendence* of God (that he is above everything), it denied his *immanence* (that he is also in everything). This view immediately ruled out the incarnation of Christ, special divine creation, prayer, faith, miracles, the second coming, and the accuracy of the Bible.
 - The goal of human life was either morbid *asceticism* (avoiding all joys of life, and abusing the body for the spirit's sake) or that of unrestrained *licentiousness* (if it

feels good, do it). The first was known as Stoicism and the second view Epicureanism. Scofield once observed: "Pure Christianity lives between two dangers ever present: the danger that it will evaporate into a philosophy ... and the danger that it will freeze into a form."

- In conclusion, it may be said that the J-G virus error included dietary and Sabbath observations, circumcision rites, worship of angels, and the practice of asceticism. (See Col. 2:11, 16; 2:18; 2:21-23.)
15. Epaphras was apparently unable to deal properly with this vicious strain and thus makes the dangerous and wearisome thousand-mile trip from Colosse to Rome to seek Paul's advice.
 16. When he left Colosse, Archippus assumed the pastorate (Col. 4:17). Archippus may have been the son of Philemon (Philem. 2). Upon reaching Rome and informing Paul, Epaphras was evidently also imprisoned (Philem. 23). This was doubtless because of bold preaching.
 17. Paul writes the Colossian epistle to deal with the disease and sends it back by one of his trusted top lieutenants named Tychicus (Col. 4:7; cf. Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

1. Ephesians:

- Colossians in a sense concludes that which Ephesians introduces. In Ephesians Paul dwells upon the body of the church, while in Colossians he writes of the head of that body. Because of this, both books are somewhat similar. For example, 78 out of the 95 verses in Colossians are nearly identical to those in Ephesians.
- It has been said that Colossians is to Ephesians what Galatians is to Romans.
- Both Colossians and Ephesians record similar prayers (Col. 1:9-14; Eph. 1:15-23) and admonitions to sing God's praise (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19, 20).

2. John and Hebrews:

All three books declare Jesus to be the creator of all things

- John (1:3, 4)
- Colossians (1:16, 17)
- Hebrews (1:2, 3)

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. Jesus Christ (1:1)
2. Lord Jesus Christ (1:2)
3. Christ Jesus (1:4)
4. God's dear Son (1:13)
5. The image of the invisible God (1:15a)
6. The first born of every creature (referring to priority of position 1:15b)
7. Creator of all things (1:16)

8. Existing before all things (1:17a)
9. Sustainer of all things (1:17b)
10. Head of the church (1:18)
11. The first born from the dead (1:18)
12. The prominent one (1:18)
13. The incarnate God man (1:19; 2:9)
14. The universal reconciler (1:20)
15. The possessor of all wisdom (2:3)
16. The head of all principalities and powers (2:10)
17. The one seated on God's right hand (3:1)
18. The Lord Christ (3:24)