An Overview Of The Book Of Colossians

The City Of Colosse:

Colosse was a city of southwestern Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor) in what is now Turkey The city was situated on the Lycus River not far from where that river joined with the Meander River. Colosse was located about 125 miles east of Ephesus near the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. These two cities were 10 and 13 miles respectively northwest of Colosse, which was the oldest of the three cities. Originally Colosse lay on the trade route from west to east. This location made it an important city. But then the main road was changed and moved north near Hierapolis and Laodicea. Those two cities then grew in importance and surpassed Colosse in wealth and prestige. Colosse declined to a relatively small, unimportant village. It retained its fame for its wool and its municipal independence under the Romans.

The Church Of Colosse:

Mission work in Colosse was done by a man named Epaphras (see Colossians 1:7). Paul called him his "dear fellow bondservant." Epaphras had probably gone to Ephesus where he heard the gospel of Jesus from Paul. Afterwards he returned to his home in Colosse to start a congregation there. He likely did so under Paul's guidance. The church of Colosse appears to have consisted of mostly Gentile converts. Philemon was one of its members, to whom Paul wrote the letter we know now as the Book of Philemon.

The letter to the Colossians, like the letter to the Romans, was a letter addressed to a congregation that Paul had not established himself. Most of the members were unknown to Paul, as it appears from Colossians 2:1 in which he wrote: "For I want you to know how great a struggle I am having in your behalf and for those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen me personally." Yet Paul enjoyed a close connection with the church in Colosse, which was located in the same Roman province of Asia in which Ephesus was the capital and where Paul had labored for more than two years. People from that entire area came to hear Paul, no doubt from Colosse as well. Furthermore, those who worked with Paul as well as those who were converted by Paul's preaching carried the gospel of Jesus to the entire area, for Acts 19:10 states: "He continued to do this for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

The Writer Of The Letter To The Colossians:

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," Colossians 1:1

For more information about Paul and his ministry, see An Overview of the Book of Acts, which is at the beginning of the Book of Acts.

The Recipients Of The Letter To The Colossians:

"To the saints[1] in Colosse and faithful brothers in Christ," Colossians 1:2

The Date Of The Letter To The Colossians:

The latter part of A.D. 60 to 61

The Occasion For The Writing Of The Letter To The Colossians:

Epaphras, leader of the church in Colosse in Asia, came to Paul in Rome with good news and bad news about the church of Colosse. The good news was the gospel had born fruit among the Colossians (see Colossians 1:5, 6), who were continuing in the faith (see Colossians 1:4) in Christ and in love for their fellow believers. The bad news was the Colossians were being troubled by a new teaching that was contrary to the gospel which Epaphras had been preaching to them. The new teaching claimed a profound knowledge apart from Christ (see Colossians 2:8), an emphasis on following prescribed rituals (see Colossians 2:16), the worship of angels (see Colossians 2:18), and ascetic self-abasement (see Colossians 2:18 & 20-23). The new teaching which included the worship of angels indicates that it invoked spiritual powers rather than calling on Christ in whom the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form (see Colossians 2:9).

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[1] Lit. holy ones; likewise throughout the Book of Colossians

The new false teaching in effect denied the total sufficiency of Christ for salvation and the completeness of Christ's atonement. The details of the new false teaching are difficult to describe, because Paul did not write about them point by point. Rather, Paul overwhelmed the false teaching and smothered it with the full and complete riches of Christ, his person and his redemptive work--the Christ who is the true God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Savior and God/Man who reconciled by his blood the sinners of the world to God, and who is the power of the believers' faith. In Christ is found the real knowledge, fullness, and completeness. Thus, Paul asserted that Christians have no need for human philosophy and wisdom to be complete. They are complete in Christ, in whom they have the divine wisdom of his gospel and the perfect, complete salvation.

To deal with the new false teaching, Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. Paul then dispatched his co-worker Tychicus to carry his letter to the church of Colosse (see Colossians 4:7,8). Paul's letter was a circular letter to be shared with the other churches in the area, particularly nearby Laodicea (see Colossians 4:16).

When Paul dispatched his letter to the Colossians, he sent the slave Onesimus with Tychicus back to his master Philemon, who was a member of the church of Colosse. This may explain why Paul wrote a longer section on the slave/master relationship than on the other human relationships, and why Paul emphasized his readers should forgive one another as God forgave them in Christ.

Theme Of The Letter To The Colossians:

"You have been made full in (Christ)," Colossians 2:10

Colossians

Part 1: Introduction Colossians 1:1-14

A. Greeting Colossians 1:1, 2

1 ¶ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy the brother;
2 To the saints[2] in Colosse and faithful brothers in Christ:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.[3]

B. Thanksgiving for the Colossians Colossians 1:3-8

¶ 3 We are always giving thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ while praying for you,
4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints
5 because of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, which you heard beforehand in the word of truth of the gospel,
6 which has come to you. And as it is bearing fruit and growing in all the world, so it is also *doing* among you, from the day you heard *it* and came to know for certain the grace of God in truth;
7 as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ in our behalf,[4]
8 who also made your love in the Spirit known to us.

C. Prayer for the Colossians Colossians 1:9-14

¶ 9 For this reason also we, since the day we heard *of your faith and love*, do not stop praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the precise knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
10 to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Lord with the desire to please *him* in every way, bearing fruit and growing in every good deed by means of this[5] precise knowledge of God,
11 being strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory for all patient endurance and steadfastness, with joy

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[2] Lit. holy ones; likewise throughout the Book of Colossians

[3] Some early manuscripts also include "and our Lord Jesus Christ"

[4] Some early manuscripts read "in your behalf"

[5] Lit. the

12 giving thanks to the Father, the One who made us fit for our[6] share of the inheritance of the saints in the light,
13 who rescued us out of the power of darkness and transferred *us* into the kingdom of his beloved Son,
14 in whom we have redemption,[7] the forgiveness of sins.

Part 2: The Complete Sufficiency of Christ and His Gospel Colossians 1:15-2:23

A. The Complete Sufficiency of Christ According to His Person Colossians 1:15-18

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,
16 for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions[8] or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him,
17 He himself is before all things and all things hold together in connection with him.
18 And he himself is the head of the body, of the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself came to have first place in all things.

B. The Complete Sufficiency of Christ According to His Work Colossians 1:19-23

¶ 19 For the Father[9] was pleased to have all his[10] fullness dwell in him
20 and through him to completely reconcile all things back to himself again, having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him, *I say*, whether the things upon the earth or the things in heaven.
21 And although you were formerly alienated and enemies in your[11] mind in your wicked deeds,
22 yet now he has completely reconciled *you* back again by his body of flesh through death, to present you in his presence holy and without blemish and blameless,
23 if indeed you continue in the faith, established and firm, and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

C. The Complete Sufficiency of Christ's Gospel Colossians 1:24-2:5

¶ 24 Now I am rejoicing in the things I suffered[12] for your sake, and I am filling up in my flesh the things that are lacking of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church,
25 of which I myself have become a servant by virtue of the office of administrator of God that was entrusted to me for you to bring to completion t*he preaching of* the word of God,
26 the mystery that has been hidden from earliest times and from generations, but now has been made known to his saints,
27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of this[13] glory,
28 whom, as for us, we are proclaiming, warning every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, that we may present every person complete in Christ;
29 for which I am also toiling, straining according to his power that is working mightily in me.
2 ¶ For I want you to know how great a struggle I am having in your behalf and for those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen me personally,[14]
2 in order that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, indeed for all the riches of a full assurance of understanding, *and* for a precise knowledge of the mystery of God, *namely* of Christ,

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[6] Lit. the
[7] Or, a ransoming from, a buying back
[8] Or, ruling powers
[9] Lit. he
[10] Lit. the
[11] Lit. the; likewise with the next "your" in this verse
[12] Lit. in the sufferings
[13] Lit. the
[14] Lit. have not seen my face in the flesh

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
4 I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with a persuasive argument.
5 For even though I am absent in the flesh, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing over seeing[15] your orderly condition and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

D. Christ and His Gospel Free You from the Heretical Human Regulations Being Imposed on You Colossians 2:6-23

¶ 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, keep living[16] in him,
7 having been firmly rooted in him, and continuing to be built up in him, and being established in the faith just as you have been taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.
8 Continue to see to it that no one takes you[17] captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the fundamental principles of the world, and not in accordance with Christ.
9 For in him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form,
10 and you have been made full in him, who is the head over[18] all rule and authority,
11 in whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by human hands in the removal of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ,
12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with *him* through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.
13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your sinful flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,
14 having blotted out the handwriting in decrees against us,[19] which was opposed to us, and he has taken it out of the way[20] by having nailed it to the cross.
15 When he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he disgraced them publicly, having led them in a triumphal procession in him.
¶ 16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you in regard to eating and drinking or in the matter of a *religious* festival or a new moon festival or a Sabbath day,[21]
17 which are a foreshadowing of things to come, but the reality *is* in Christ.[22]
18 Let no one who takes pleasure in humility and the worship of angels rob you of the prize of victory; such a person[23] goes into curious details about things that he has seen in visions, who is puffed up without cause by his fleshly mind,
19 and who does not take hold of the head, from whom the entire body, being supported and held together by the joints and sinews, grows with the growth that God brings about.[24]
¶ 20 Since you died with Christ from the fundamental principles of the world, why, as continuing to live in the world, do you subject yourselves to rules and regulations, *namely*:
21 "Do not handle!" "And do not taste!" "And do not touch!"
22 (which things are all *destined* to perish by being used up) according to the commandments and teachings of men,
23 which things are being regarded as a matter of wisdom in self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

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[15] Lit. rejoicing and seeing
[16] Lit. keep walking
[17] Lit. that there shall be no one who takes you
[18] Lit. of
[19] A referral to the Mosaic law with its commandments that charge us with our sins
[20] Lit. carried it away from the midst; the Mosaic law with its decrees and demands for punishment of our sins stood between God and us; this God carried clear away
[21] Or, Sabbath days
[22] Lit. of Christ
[23] Lit who
[24] Lit. with the growth of God

Part 3: Live Your New Life with Christ Colossians 3:1-4:6

A. Set Your Mind on the Heavenly Things Colossians 3:1-17

3 ¶ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God;
2 keep setting your mind on the things above, not on the things upon the earth,
3 for you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.
4 When Christ, your life, appears, at that time you yourselves will also appear with him in glory.
¶ 5 Strike the members *of your body* dead[25]to such[26] things upon the earth *as*: illicit sexual intercourse, impurity, depraved passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry,
6 because of which things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,
7 in which things you yourselves also formerly walked when you used to live in those things.
8 But now, as for you, rid yourselves also of all these things:[27] wrath, rage, malice, slander, obscene language from your mouth;
9 keep from lying to one another, since you have stripped off the old man[28] with his evil deeds,
10 and have clothed yourselves with the new man who is being renewed in a precise knowledge according to the likeness of Him who created him,
11 where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian,[29] Scythian,[30] slave, free, but Christ is the all and in all.
¶ 12 Therefore, as the elect[31] of God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience,
13 bearing with one another and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against someone; just as the Lord also forgave you, in the same way you also *forgive others*.
14 Moreover, in addition to all these clothe yourselves with love, which holds them together to complete *them*.[32]
15 And let the peace of Christ continue to rule in your hearts, for which you were also called in one body; and always be thankful.
16 Let the word of Christ keep dwelling in you richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs while singing with gratitude in your hearts to God.
17 And everything, whatever you may be doing in word or in deed, *do it* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

B. Let Your New Life in Christ Be Evident in Your Personal Relations Colossians 3:18-4:1

¶ 18 Wives, keep subjecting yourselves to your husbands, as was *always* fitting in the Lord.
¶ 19 Husbands, love your wives and keep from being bitter to them.
¶ 20 Children, always obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord.
¶ 21 Fathers, keep from irritating your children, so they do not become discouraged.
¶ 22 Slaves, always obey your earthly masters in all things, not in eye-service as men-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.
23 Whatever you do, keep doing your work from your heart, as for the Lord and not for men,
24 because you know that you will receive the reward of the inheritance from the Lord. For the Lord Christ keep serving as slaves!
25 For the one who does wrong will receive *the punishment for* what wrong he did, and there is no partiality.

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[25] Or, make dead, put to death, slay

[26] Lit. the

[27] Lit. all the things

[28] A term for the old, sinful nature that was inherited from Adam

[29] Barbarian was a term for non-Jewish and non-Greek speaking people who spoke their respective native languages; it was not a term for savages

[30] A person who lived in what is now southern Russia

[31] Or, chosen

[32] Lit. which is a bond of completeness

4 1 Masters, always grant what is right and fair to your slaves, because you know that you yourselves also have a Master in heaven.

C. Let Your New Life in Christ Be Evident in Prayer and in Your Conduct Colossians 4:2-6

¶ 2 Continue to be devoted to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving,
3 praying at the same time for us also, that God may open for us a door for the word, that we may speak[33] the mystery of Christ, on account of which I have been imprisoned,
4 that I may make it known clearly as I ought to speak it.
5 Go on conducting yourselves wisely toward those outside *of the church*, making the most of the time.
6 *Let* your manner of speaking[34] always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you know how to answer each one.

Part 4: Conclusion Colossians 4:7-18

A. Paul's Circumstances Colossians 4:7-9

¶ 7 Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will make all the things about me known to you.
8 I sent him to you for this very reason,[35] that you may come to know how things are going for us[36] and that he may encourage your hearts.
9 *I sent him* with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you; they will make everything *that has happened* here known to you.

B. Personal Greetings Colossians 4:10-15

¶ 10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greeting, as does[37] Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions, that if he comes to you, welcome him),
11 and Jesus who is called Justus, these are the only fellow workers in the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, who have become a comfort to me.
12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, sends his greeting to you. He is always struggling for you in his prayers, that you may stand firm in all the will of God *as* mature and fully convinced *Christians*.
13 For I bear witness to him that he has much concern about you and those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis.
14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas send their greetings to you.
15 Greet the brothers in Laodicea and Nympha and the church in her house.[38]

C. Closing Instructions Colossians 4:16, 17

16 And when this letter has been read among you,[39] also[40] have it read in the church of the Laodiceans, and my[41] letter *that will come* from Laodicea, you yourselves also read that.
17 And tell Archippus, "Continue to take care of the ministry which you received in the Lord, that you keep fulfilling it."

D. Paul's Closing Greeting Colossians 4:18

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[33] Lit. to speak
[34] Lit. your word
[35] Lit. thing
[36] Lit. the things concerning us
[37] Lit. and
[38] Or the latter part of the verse could be "Nymphas and the church in his house": either reading could be the correct one.
[39] Lit. beside you, or, at your side
[40] Lit. cause or do that also
[41] Lit. the

¶ 18 This[42] greeting is by my hand, Paul's. Continue to remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you all.[43]

[42] Lit. the

[43] The word "all" is added because the pronoun "you" in the Greek is plural.