

Sunday, November 3, 2019—Introduction to the Book of Colossians

Introduction

- 12 years ago, a group of 30 of us meet for the first time in the cafeteria of Apex Spring and Stamping. This was the beginning of Grace Life Bible Church.
- The first time we met in 2007, I taught on Paul's Core Ministry Strategy as the model for how we were going to structure the ministry here at Grace Life Bible Church.
- Between Acts 13 and 20, a period of 10-12 years, Paul established churches in four Roman provinces: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia.
- In Acts 13 there were no churches in these provinces; by Acts 20:1-3 (when Paul wrote Romans) Paul could speak as if his work there was done and could plan extensive journeys into the far west without anxiety that the churches he left behind would perish in his absence.
 - Romans 15:14-24
- How did Paul accomplish this amazing feat? What was his strategy?
 - He **evangelized** strategic cities to establish a beachhead of believers.
 - Establish local churches in urban centers that could reach into the surrounding areas (Acts 15:36, 16:12, Acts 17, 18:10, 19:35).
 - He **edified** the new believers in sound doctrine.
 - He **established** the communities of believers into organized local churches.
 - He **enlisted** key men that could be trained to carry on the work and lead the churches in his absence.
 - Ordained and established elders that would be responsible for the care and oversight of the local churches (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5).
 - He used the local churches as a base from which to **expand** the gospel into outlying communities.
 - Paul needed saints to partner with him in the ministry. In order to be successful every ministry needs people to share of their time, talents, and finances (Philemon 24, Colossians 4:11).

- This morning we are going to see all these components working together as we begin our introduction to the book of Colossians.

The Church at Colosse

- Colossians 1:1-2—Paul is writing to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.”
- Verse 2 is the only time in scripture that the city of “Colosse” is mentioned.
- Colossians 2:1—the reason for this is that Paul never meet the Colossians in the flesh i.e., he never visited the city on any of his Apostolic journeys. There is no record in the Acts chronology of Paul ever having gone to Colosse.
 - Colossians 1:4, 9—at the Colossians was written Paul had merely “heard” of the faith of the Colossians.
- Understandably, this raises questions as to how and whom was the church at Colosse established.
- J. Sidlow Baxter provides the following details on the city of Colosse in his *Explore the Book*.
 - “Colosse was a Graeco-Phrygian city in the Roman proconsular “Province of Asia.” This province coved the western area of the large peninsula which nowadays is known as Asia Minor. The capital of “Asia” was Ephesus, situated near the middle of the western coast of the peninsula. Some hundred- and twenty-miles inland from Ephesus were three cities, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse, in the river valley of the river Lycus.” (Baxter, 198)
- Colossians 2:1, 4:13, 15-16—these three cities are mentioned in connection with each other in the book of Colossians.
- Regarding these three cities, Baxter goes on to say:
 - “Like Thyatira (much father north again) these three cities were noted for the manufacture of dyes, especially crimson (then called purple). Another source of prosperity lay in the excellent pasture for sheep and the resultant trade in wool. The population was heterogeneous but basically Phrygian; these seems also to have been a large and wealthy Jewish community. Colosse had earlier been “a great city of Phrygia” (Herodotus), and “a populous city, prosperous and great” (Xenophon), but at the time when Paul’s epistle was written it had fallen behind Laodicea and Hierapolis. It was in decline. Not long afterward, so it would seem, the city became finally disintegrated in a violent earthquake which shook those parts.” (Baxter, 199)

- Given that Paul never visited Colosse himself, it seems reasonable to infer that the church was established there via converts from Paul's substantial ministry in the province of Asia.
 - Acts 20:31—Paul spent three years teaching in Ephesus the capital of Asia.
 - Acts 19:8-10
 - Acts 19:14-17—the working of God in Ephesus was well known throughout the province of Asia.
 - Acts 19:26—Demetrius says that Paul's ministry in Ephesus reached “throughout all Asia.”
- Therefore, we conclude that the church in Colosse was established through Paul's mighty ministry in the Roman province of Asia.
- Colossians 1:7-8—Epaphras appears to be the prime evangelist of the city of Colosse.
- Colossians 4:12—Epaphras is from Colosse.
- Colossians 4:13—his ministry seems to have extended to Laodicea and Hierapolis as well.
- Colossians 1:7—presumably, Epaphras got saved under Paul's ministry in Ephesus who then carried the contents of Paul's preaching to Colosse. Paul calls Epaphras his “dear fellowservant.”
- We can also infer from the verses that the church at Colosse met in the house of Philemon.
 - Colossians 4:9—Onesimus was from Colosse.
 - Philemon 1-2—Philemon had a church meeting in his house.
 - Philemon 10—Paul beseeches Philemon on behalf of Onesimus.
- Now a number of years later, Baxter says “about 6 years later” Epaphras has traveled to Rome to visit Paul who is under house arrest (Acts 28:30-31). While the report is generally favorable (Col. 1:8) Epaphras shares with Paul his concern regarding some doctrinal concerns he sees rearing their ugly head within the assembly (Col. 2:8-23).
- Colossians 4:7—after hearing the report of Epaphras, Paul penned the letter to the Colossians and sent it to them via the ministry of Tychicus and Onesimus.
 - Ephesians 6:21—Tychicus probably carried the letter to the church at Ephesus on the same journey.

- Next week we will consider the structure of the book as well as the nature of the doctrinal problems in Colosse that the book is seeking to address.

Conclusion

- I Timothy 2:4—in my view this verse has always been one of the key verses of this ministry. While my understanding has grown and expanded over the past 12 years my goal has remained the same “preach the word.”
 - II Timothy 4:2
- II Corinthians 9:6-7—make announcement regarding the mortgage.