**The City Of Colossae**

Cities grow as they develop commercial centers that provide jobs for their residents. The ancient city of Colossae was built on a major trade route through the Lycus River Valley in the Roman province of Asia Minor (in the southwest corner of modern-day Turkey). There the Co­lossians manufactured a beautiful dark red wool cloth (*colossinum*) for which the city became famous. But Colossae’s importance as a business center diminished significantly around 100 BC, when the neighboring city of Laodicea was founded as an active and commercially aggressive competitor. The two towns, along with neighboring Hierapolis, were destroyed by earthquakes in AD 17 (in the reign of Tiberius) and again in 60 (in the reign of Nero). Rebuilt after each earthquake, Colossae never regained its early prominence, and by 400 the city no longer existed.

**The Colossian Church**

The Apostle Paul had spent two years planting a church in Ephe­sus, and in [Acts 19:10](https://ref.ly/Acts%2019.10;niv?t=biblia) we learn that, radiating from that center, “all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.” Whether Paul himself fanned out in missionary activity throughout the province or whether some of his converts did so, a church was planted in Colossae. It is likely that Epaphras founded the Colossian church ([Col. 1:7](https://ref.ly/Col.%201.7;niv?t=biblia)), and from 1:21 we assume that the church was composed mainly of Gentiles.

Philemon was a citizen of Colossae and an upright leader in that church. He also was a slaveholder whose slave Onesimus had escaped, had later encountered the Apostle Paul, and had responded to the gospel message about Jesus. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul addresses how our relationship to God through Jesus Christ affects us in the workplace. Specifically, he writes about how slaves are to do their work for their masters and how masters are to treat their slaves. The short personal letter to Philemon extends our understanding of Paul’s command in [Colossians 4:1](https://ref.ly/Col%204.1;niv?t=biblia).

**The Purpose Of The Letter**

The letters to the Colossians and to Philemon are believed to have been written by Paul from prison sometime circa 60 to 62. At that time, Nero was the cruel and insane emperor of the Roman Empire who could ignore the claims of Paul’s Roman citizenship.

From prison, Paul had heard that the Colossian Christians, who had at one time been strong in their faith, were now vulnerable to deception about the faith (2:4, 8, 16, 18, 21–23). He wrote to refute each of the theological errors the Colossians were tempted to embrace. The letters, however, take readers far beyond these issues of deception. Paul cared deeply that all of his readers (today as well as the Colossians two thou­sand years ago) understood the context of their lives within God’s story, and what that looks like in their relationships on the job.