

# Bible Survey

## Lesson 18 – Prison Epistles

### Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

When Paul's sojourn in Corinth was completed and the Epistle to the Romans finished, he headed for Jerusalem for the Feast of Harvest, which was celebrated on the day of Pentecost – 50 days after Passover (Acts 20:16). Acts 20:3-21:16 describes his trip to Jerusalem. While he was there Jews from Asia came to Jerusalem to accuse Paul of desecrating the temple by allowing his Gentile companion to enter into the holy place. A riot took place and Roman soldiers had to intervene to rescue Paul. After Paul's speech from the castle steps (His defense before the multitude), he had to be removed from the mob in order to keep him from being killed (Acts 21:17-23:10).

Paul was then placed under Roman custody for the next four years. Two of these years he spent in Caesarea (Acts 23:11-26:32). At this time his case was heard several times, but he was never released even though no decision was made against him. Finally, Paul declared that as a Roman citizen he was appealing to Caesar. His wish was granted. Acts 27 and 28 present Paul's trip to Rome and a brief summary of his life in Rome.

There are four epistles designated as Prison Epistles or Captivity Epistles. These were written sometime between AD 60-62. All of these epistles make reference to Paul's bonds (Eph. 3:1; Phil. 1:13-14; Col. 4:18; Philemon 1). Although it has been traditionally held that all these epistles were written in Rome, some suggest they were written from Ephesus or Caesarea. The traditional view is the most likely.

There is good evidence to place Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon around the same general time period during Paul's imprisonment. Colossians 4:7 and Ephesians 6:21 show that Tychicus carried these two epistles and the similarity between them indicates they were composed about the same time. From Colossians 4:9 it is learned that Tychicus had Onesimus as his companion. Philemon clearly sets forth that Onesimus was the bearer of that letter. These three epistles were probably written around the middle of Paul's Roman imprisonment and Philippians at the close of his captivity. It is generally recognized that Colossians was written before Ephesians.

# Colossians

## 1. The Background

As far as we know, Paul never visited Colosse (2:1). The founding of the church there was probably a result of Paul's extended ministry at Ephesus on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 19:19). It is possible that Epaphras, a fellow servant of Paul's (1:7-8; 4:12-13) founded the church.

The main purpose of the epistle is to deal with \_\_\_\_\_ that threatened the church. The nature of the heresy was a mixture of Judaism and Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a philosophy that claimed to have the answer to the problem of evil in the world. This philosophy led to two practical errors: Asceticism (2:21-23) and license (3:5-17). Paul's answer to this heresy is \_\_\_\_\_, who is the wisdom of God, preeminent over all things and sufficient for all things. This preeminent Christ is "in us" (1:27) and in Him is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3) and all the fullness of the Godhead (2:9). Therefore, we are complete in Him (2:10). There is nothing more we could ask for or nothing more we could need.

## 2. The Summary

Colossians is similar in content to \_\_\_\_\_, but it is also different.

- Ephesians focuses on the *Church of Christ*
- Colossians focuses on the *Christ of the Church*
- Ephesians focuses on the *body*
- Colossians focuses on the *head*

Like Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the first half of the book is \_\_\_\_\_ and the last half is \_\_\_\_\_. Since this is what Christ is, then this is how we ought to live.

This is perhaps the most Christ-centered book in all of the Bible. It serves as a hymn of praise, exaltation and adoration to Jesus Christ.

Paul's message to this church might be summarized in two warnings:

1. Don't let anyone usurp Christ's place.
2. Don't let anyone cause you to deny Him.

Throughout the letter Paul speaks of the *Sufficiency* and *Preeminence* of Christ.

### 3. The Theme of Colossians

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### 4. The Key Verses

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### 5. The Divisions

1-2	Doctrinal
3	Practical
4	Personal

### 6. The Highlights

# COLOSSIANS

## SUFFICIENCY OR PREMINENCE OF CHRIST

DOCTRINAL		PRACTICAL	PERSONAL
1 Deity	2 Doctrine	3 Duty	4 Demonstrate
<p>The Sufficiency of the Person of Christ</p> <p>The Preeminence of Christ's Position</p>		<p>The Sufficiency of Christian Living</p> <p>The Preeminence of Christ Projected</p>	<p>The Sufficiency of Christian Fellowship</p> <p>The Preeminence of Christ in Personality</p>

# Ephesians

## 1. The Background

- A. Paul founded the church (Acts 19-20) – ca. AD 53
- B. Paul fed them with sound meat for at least 3 years (Eph. 1:3-14; Acts 20:31) ca. AD 53-55
- C. After Paul’s release from prison, he visited Ephesus again and left Timothy there when he went on to Macedonia, AD 63 (1 Tim. 1:3). He wrote letters to Timothy when he was there in AD 63-67.
- D. False teachers began to trouble the church (1 Tim. 1:3ff).
- E. Early Christian tradition tells us that John ministered in and around Ephesus from about AD 67 until his exile to Patmos about 25-30 years later (AD 90-95).
- F. The church left its first love about 40 years after it was established (Rev. 2:4).
- G. The church lost its witness and testimony (Rev. 2:5-7).

Since the phrase “\_\_\_\_\_” is missing from the three oldest manuscripts it is believed that this letter was originally a circular letter intended for the churches geographically related to Ephesus. The letter chiefly concerns the headship of Christ over the Church.

Ephesians naturally divides into two sections. The first three chapters are \_\_\_\_\_ and present the purpose of God in establishing the Church. The second part of the book is \_\_\_\_\_. It deals with the walk or conduct of those in the church. The first half deals with Christian \_\_\_\_\_, the second with the Christian \_\_\_\_\_. The first half deals with our \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ, the second deals with our \_\_\_\_\_. That position is that we are “in Christ.” Because we are “in Christ” we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings. We were chosen “in Him” before the foundation of the world and were predestined unto the adoption of sons or placed into a position of adult sons. We immediately go to adulthood in our position “in Christ.” The last three chapters, the practical section of the book, tell us that we should walk worthy of this calling.

## 2. The Theme

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## 3. The Key Verses

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## 4. The Divisions

1-3	4-6
Doctrinal	Practical
Positional	Practical
Doctrine	Duty

## 5. The Highlights

# Philemon

## 1. The Background

Apparently, Philemon lived in \_\_\_\_\_ and was in business there. This is probably why the two letters (Colossians and Philemon) are closely related. Onesimus was Philemon's \_\_\_\_\_ and he had stolen things from his master. He went to Rome to hide out. While he was there he came into contact with Paul and was saved. Under Roman law, a runaway slave could be severely punished or even condemned to death. But Paul sent him back to \_\_\_\_\_ to make right what he had done wrong. Paul then sent this letter requesting that Philemon receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Apparently, Philemon did as Paul requested.

The value of this epistle is twofold. First, it serves as a wonderful illustration of the grace of God and \_\_\_\_\_. It sets forth the doctrine of imputation. Onesimus's sins were charged to Paul (v.18). Secondly, it is an illustration of how Christians dealt with slavery. They called upon the Christian master to show love.

Philemon is one of the four \_\_\_\_\_ (1,9,10,13,23). Verse 22 indicates that Paul expected or hoped to be released soon.

## 2. The Theme

\_\_\_\_\_

## 3. The Key Verse

\_\_\_\_\_

## 4. The Outline

- I. Paul's Commendation of Philemon 4-7
- II. Paul's Defense of Onesimus 8-22
  - A. Basis of the Appeal 8-14
    - 1. Philemon's love
    - 2. Christ's love
  - B. Significance of the Appeal 15-22
    - Paul identifies himself with Onesimus
- III. Paul's Conclusion 23-25

Paul's Conclusion 23-25

Paul's Defense of  
Onesimus 8-22

Paul's Commendation of  
Philemon 4-7

# Philippians

## 1. The Background

The epistle to the church at Philippi was probably the last letter written by Paul during his first Roman \_\_\_\_\_ . Thus, it was written at the close of his two years in the city of Rome. One of the reasons for this epistle was the soon return of Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi.

Epaphroditus had just recovered from a serious illness and Paul was sending him back to his home. This also gave the apostle an opportunity to thank the faithful believers at Philippi for their \_\_\_\_\_ to him while he was in need. He also expressed his sincere love and affection for them. Paul probably felt the need to explain to the church the circumstances he was in and how God caused him to triumph over every situation. Paul's exhortation to \_\_\_\_\_ suggests the possibility of \_\_\_\_\_ in the church at Philippi (1:27; 2:5; 3:13-17; 4:2).

## 2. The Theme

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## 3. The Key Verse

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## 4. The Divisions

1:1-26	Personal
1:27-4:9	Doctrinal
4:10-20	Practical

## 5. The Highlights

# PHILIPPIANS

# THANKSGIVING AND UNITY

1:1 1:26 PERSONAL	1:27 4:9 DOCTRINAL	4:10 4:20 PRACTICAL	Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer
Paul's Exhortations			Paul's Imprisonment
Paul's Acknowledgment of the Gift			

## Things to know

### **Colossians**

- Emphasizes the sufficiency and preeminence of Christ
- Colossians was written from prison

### **Ephesians**

- The first three chapters speak of the believer's position in Christ
- The last three chapters give practical admonitions
- Ephesians is one of the Prison Epistles

### **Philemon**

- Philemon is one of the Prison Epistles
- This epistle illustrates forgiveness and the doctrine of imputation

### **Philippians**

- A thank you letter that admonishes believers to be united
- Philippians is also a Prison Epistle

