

Encyclopedia entries on Colossae

COLOSSAE

COLOSSAE k-losç [Gk.

Kolossai

] (Col 1:2); AV COLOSSE. A city of Phrygia on the Lycus River, one of the branches of the Maeander, and 3 mi. (5 km.) from Honaz Dag (Mt. Cadmus), 8435 ft. (2570 m.) high. It stood at the head of a gorge where the two streams unite, and on the great highway traversing the country from Ephesus to the Euphrates Valley, 13 mi. (21 km.) from Hierapolis and 12 mi. (19 km.) from Laodicea. Its history is chiefly associated with that of these two cities.

Early, according to both Herodotus and Xenophon, Colossae was a place of great importance. There Xerxes stopped 481 B.C. (Herodotus vii.30) and Cyrus the Younger marched 401 B.C. (Xenophon Anabasis i.2.6). From Col 2:1 it appears unlikely that Paul visited there in person, but its Christianization was due to the efforts of Epaphras and Timothy (1:1,7); it was the home of Philemon and Epaphras. That a church was established there early is evident from 4:12; Rev 1:11; 3:14. As the neighboring cities Hierapolis and Laodicea increased in importance, Colossae declined. There were many Jews living there, and a chief article of commerce, for which the place was renowned, was the colossinus, a peculiar wool, probably of a purple color. In religion the people were especially lax, worshiping angels (cf. Col 2:18). Of them Michael was the chief, and the protecting saint of the city. It is said that he once appeared to the people, saving the city in time of a flood.

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properly Colossae. A city on the Lycus, an affluent of the Maeander. To the Christians there was addressed Paul's epistle, before he had seen their face (Col 2:1; 1:4,7-8). Epaphras probably founded the Colossian church (Col 1:7; 4:12). Colosse was ethnologically in Phrygia, but politically then in the province of Asia. On the site of the modern Chonos. The foundation of the church must have been subsequent to Paul's visitation, "strengthening in order" all the churches of Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:24), for otherwise he must have visited the Colossians, which Col 2:1 implies he had not. Hence, as in the epistle to the Romans, so in the epistle to Colosse there are no allusions to his being their father in the faith, such as there are in 1 Cor 3:6,10; 4:15; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:1. Probably during Paul's "two years" stay at Ephesus, when "all which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:10,26), Epaphras, Philemon (Philem 2,13,19), Archippus, Apphia, and other natives of Colosse (which was on the high road from Ephesus to the Euphrates), becoming converted at Ephesus, were subsequently the first preachers in their own city. This accounts for their personal acquaintance with, and attachment to, Paul and his fellow ministers, and their salutations to him. So as to "them at Laodicea" (Col 2:1). He hoped to visit Colosse when he should be delivered from his Roman prison (Philem 22; compare Phil 2:24).

The angel worship noticed in Col 2:18 is mentioned by Theodoret as existing in his days. A legend connected with an inundation was the ground of erecting a church to the archangel Michael near a chasm, probably the one noticed by Herodotus. "The river Lycus, sinking into a chasm in the town, disappears under ground, and, emerging at five stadia distance, flows into the Maeander" (7:30). Two streams, one from the N. the other from the S., pour into the Lycus, both possessing the power of petrifying. The calcareous deposits on the plants, and obstructions which the stream met with, gradually formed a natural arch, beneath which the current flowed as Herodotus describes; the soft crust was probably broken up by an earthquake. In the 4th century the council of Laodicea (in the same region) in its 35th canon prohibited calling upon angels.

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