

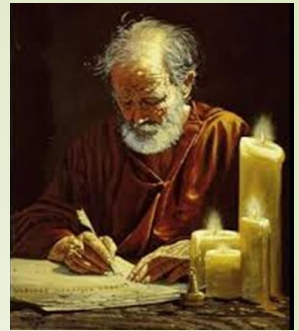
# Colossians

Life in Christ

**GCI Tasmania, Camp Clayton,  
October 20th-26th, 2014**

# Colossians: Background

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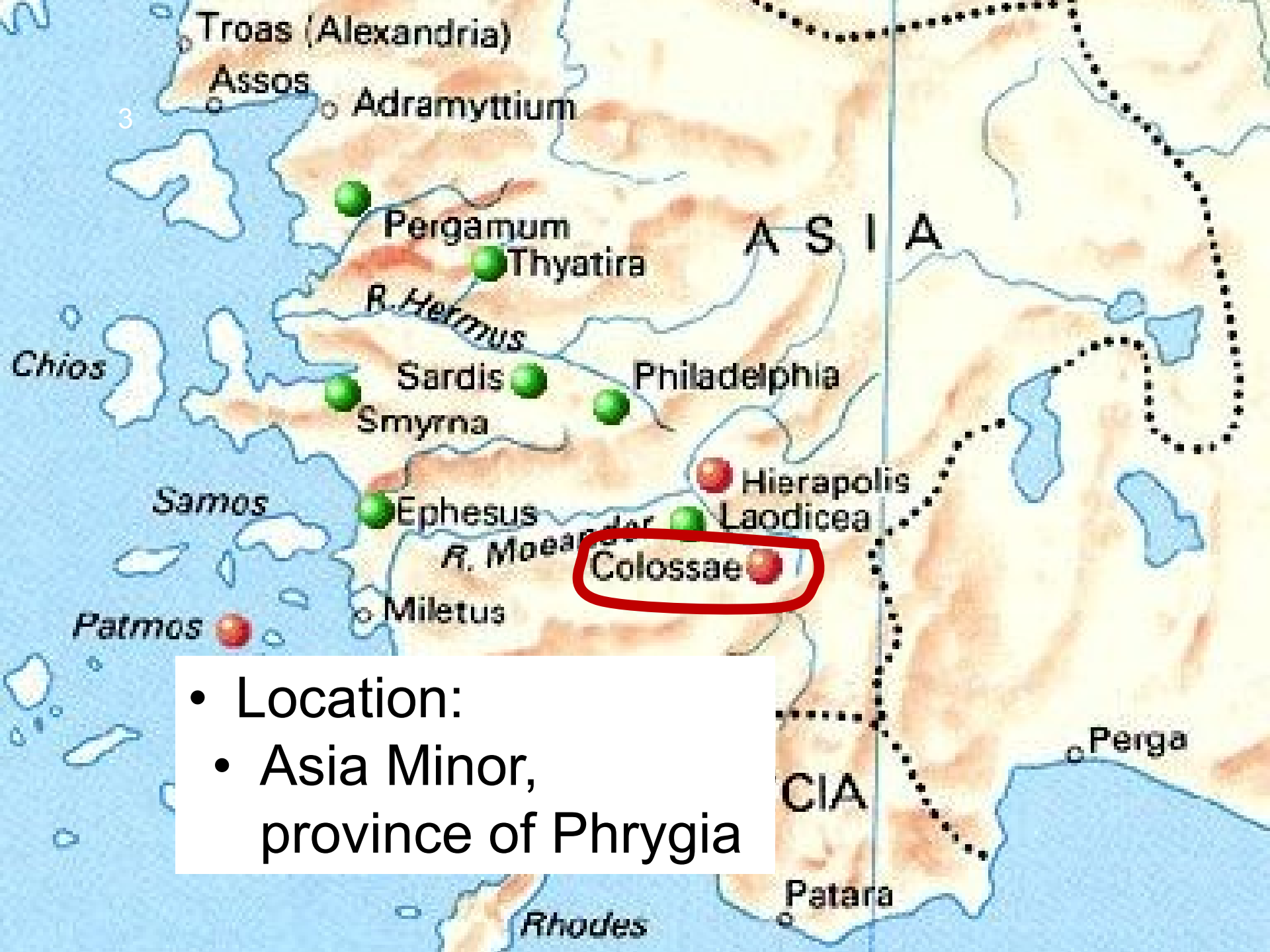


## ➔ Author & Date

Tidball; It is self-evidently written late in Paul's ministry, but probably before 61 AD when Colossae was most likely destroyed by an earthquake.

It may have been actually penned by Timothy, who is mentioned in the opening greetings (1:1) under Paul's direction.

It was probably written from Rome. The associated letter of Philemon was certainly written from there. (p.10)



- Location:
- Asia Minor,  
province of Phrygia

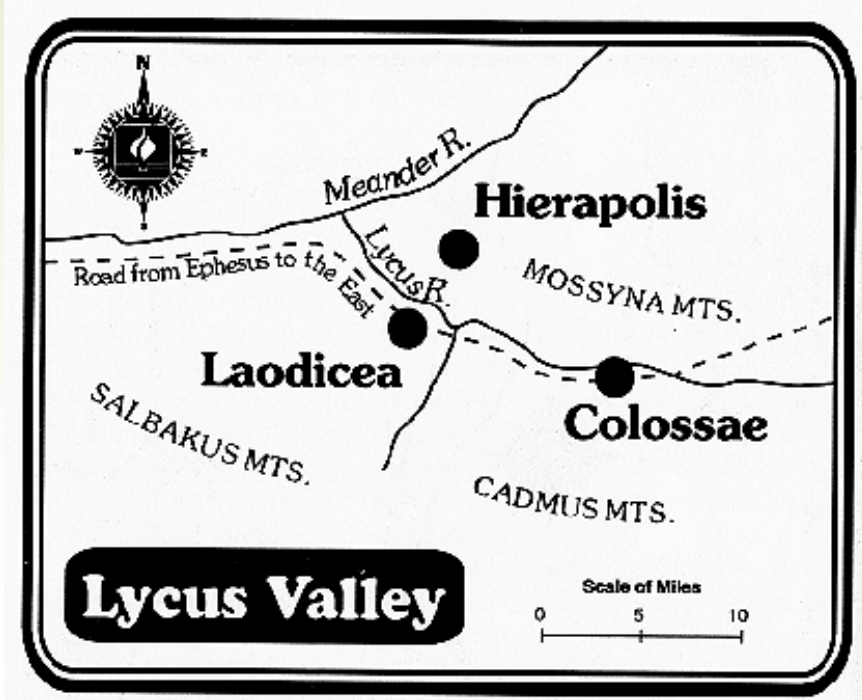
# Colossians:

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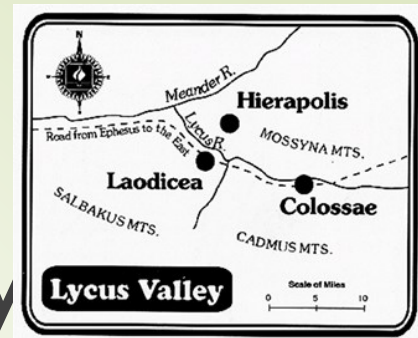
## ➤ Time and place

*Harpers Bible Commentary:*

Originally an important trading center, it was soon overshadowed by its neighboring cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea (4:13, 15-16), and disappears from history after it was hit by an earthquake in ca. A.D. 60



# Colossians: Background



## ➤ Colossae and the Lycus Valley

Tidball; By Paul's time the town had declined in size, prosperity and significance.

The district was subjected to earthquakes. The significance of this for any understanding of the sociology of Colossians lies in the sense of insecurity and the fear of being subject to malevolent powers that the citizens of Colossians may have felt.

Some centuries after the New Testament era, Colossae relocated, because of continuing earthquake activity. (p.15)

- J.B. Lightfoot: 'Without doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St Paul was addressed'.

# Colossians: Background

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## ➤ **Colossae and Its People - *Industry***

Tidball; Colossae was composed of ordinary man and women who earned their living by farming crops, looking after sheep, shearing, dyeing and in other ways processing their wool and selling it and the textiles produced from it in the marketplace.

Literacy was as low as 10-15 per cent. It was essentially oral culture. It was distinguished by its ordinariness. (p.16)



# Colossians: Background

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## ➤ *Economic Conditions*

Tidball; Nearly 90% lived off agriculture, and agriculture was primitive, inefficient and undeveloped. (p.18)

‘Over 99% of the Empire’s population could expect little more from life than abject poverty.’ (Meggitt, Paul, p.54)

It created enormous disparities of wealth but the overwhelming majority of people lived lives ‘dominated by work and the struggle to exist’. They repeatedly experienced toil, hardship and hunger.

[they] lived brutal and frugal lives, characterised by struggle and impoverishment.’ (Meggitt, p.73), (p.18-19)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

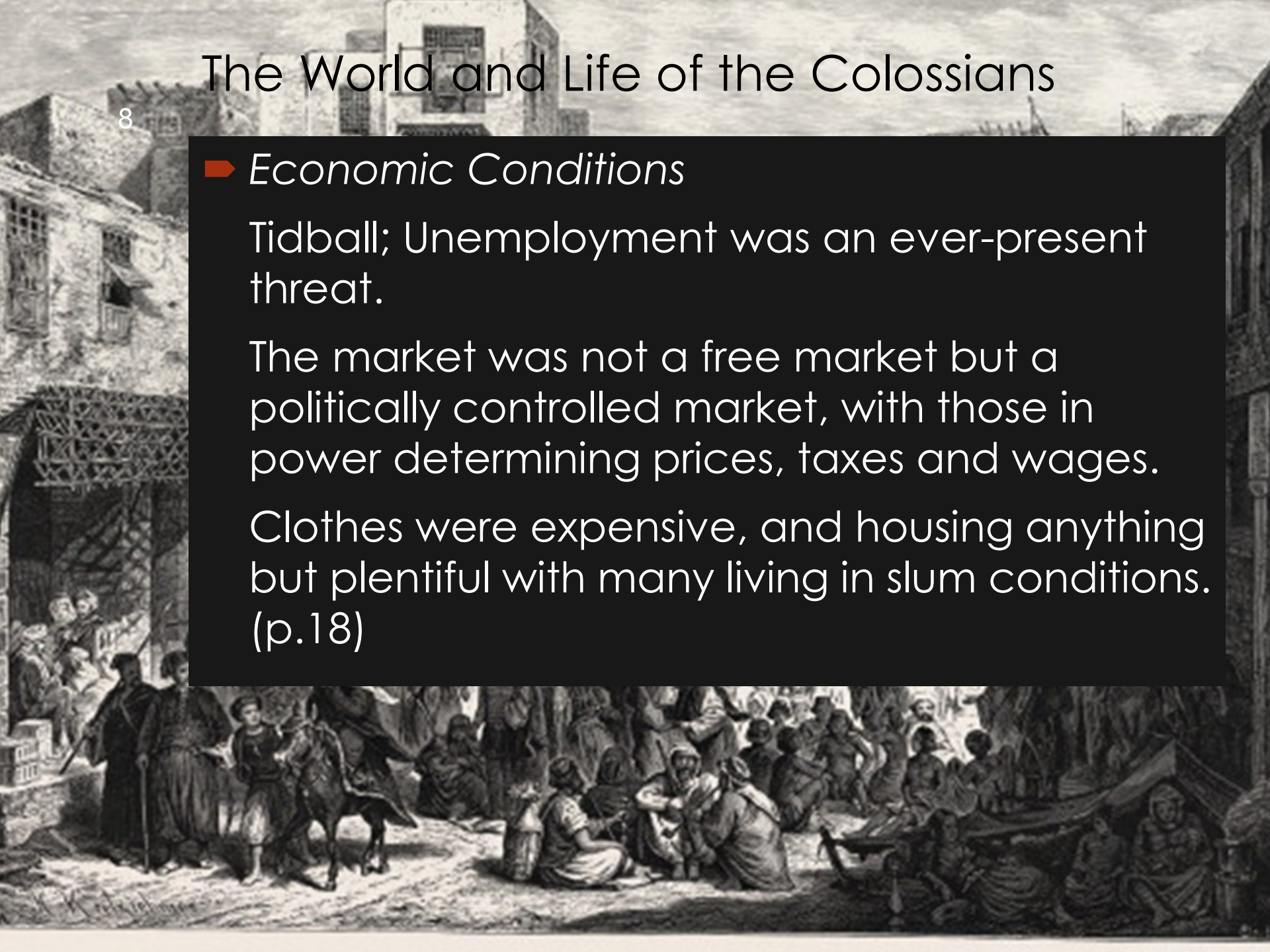
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## ➤ *Economic Conditions*

Tidball; Unemployment was an ever-present threat.

The market was not a free market but a politically controlled market, with those in power determining prices, taxes and wages.

Clothes were expensive, and housing anything but plentiful with many living in slum conditions. (p.18)





# Colossians: Background

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## ➤ **Colossae and Its People - Jewish Population**

Tidball; Colossae had a significant Jewish population.

...'the presence of local Jewish communities was often a real factor in the life of the early Christian churches in Asia Minor' generally.

... key practices included observance of the Sabbath, of food laws and of 'ancestral traditions'.

These customs, and others, are all reflected in the teaching that Paul's opponents were advocating according to Colossians. (p.19-20)

# Colossians: Background

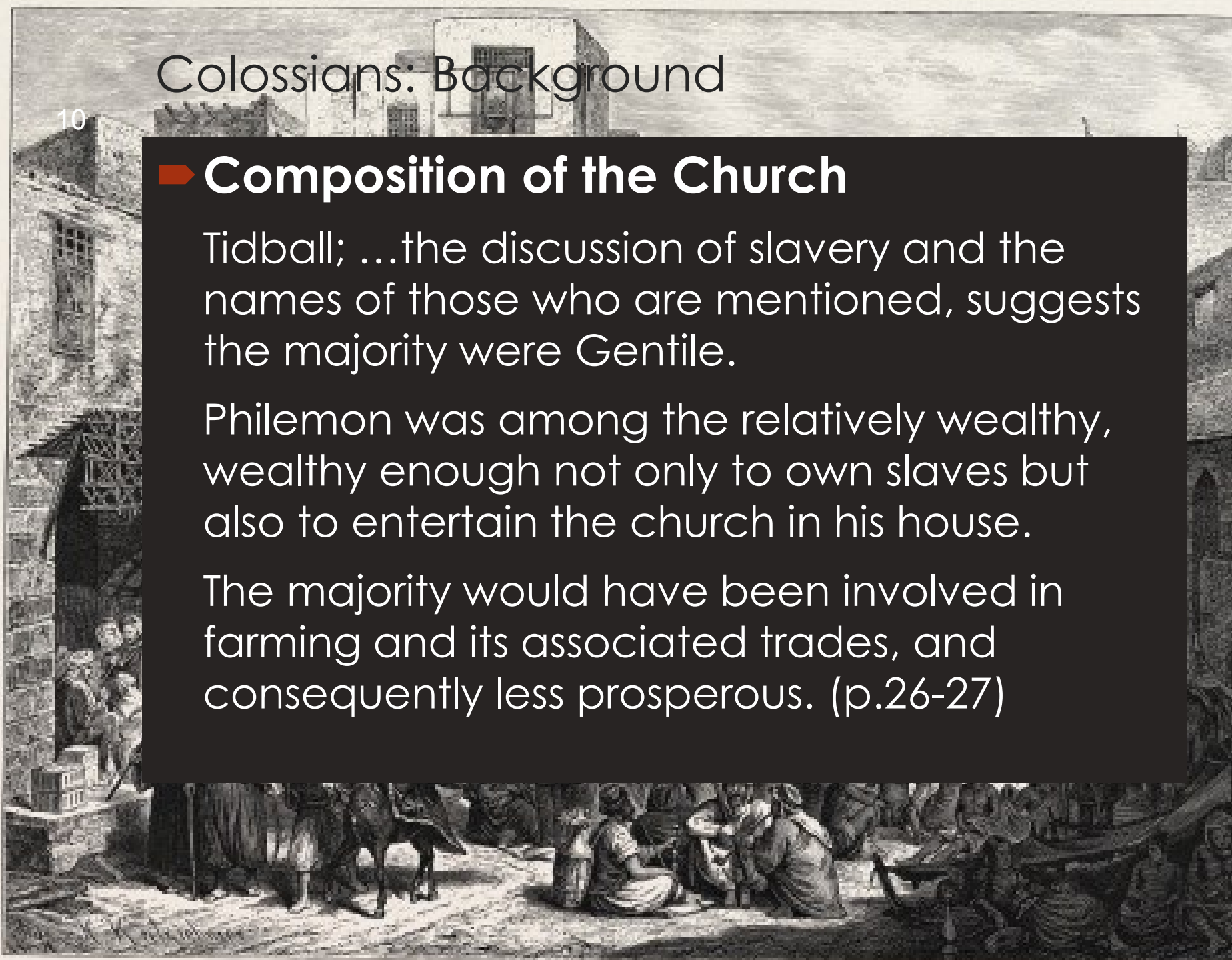
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## ► **Composition of the Church**

Tidball; ...the discussion of slavery and the names of those who are mentioned, suggests the majority were Gentile.

Philemon was among the relatively wealthy, wealthy enough not only to own slaves but also to entertain the church in his house.

The majority would have been involved in farming and its associated trades, and consequently less prosperous. (p.26-27)



# Colossians: The Colossian “Problem”

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Tidball; The reason why Paul wrote Colossians is to combat the threat to Christian identity.

The features of the misguided teaching involved ‘philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirit of the universe’ (2:8).

It involved the observance of food regulations and a sacred calendar (2:16), as well as adoption of ascetic practices and visionary experiences which were somehow related to the worship of angels (2:16-23 ). (p.60)

# Colossians: The Colossian “Problem”

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Tidball; Andrew Lincoln concludes ‘It is quite possible that the Hellenistic Jew who had left the synagogue to join a Pauline congregation or a Gentile convert who has had some previous contact with the synagogue would advocate such a philosophy, and the writer evidently was concerned that it might appeal to others among dominantly Gentile Christian readers’. (p.60)

The disturbers of ‘truth’ seek to ‘condemn’ and ‘disqualify’ (2:16,18) those who refuse to practise their rules and undertake their rituals. (p.61)

# Colossians: The Colossian “Problem”

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## ➤ The Colossian “problem: Lessons

R.C. Lucas; The churches of Christ can never be immune from the intellectual and spiritual pressures and fashions of their time. While we see this clearly when we look back...it is less easy for us to recognize this frankly in our own times.



# Colossians: Purpose

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## ➡ Purposes

Bible Knowledge Commentary; Three purposes seem to have been in Paul's mind as he wrote Colossians.

1. First, he sought to show the deity and supremacy of Christ in the face of the Colossian heresy (1:18; 2:9).
2. Second, he wanted to lead believers into spiritual maturity (1:28; 2:6-7).
3. Third, he wanted to inform them about his state of affairs and elicited their prayers on his behalf (4:2-8)..

# Colossians: Purpose

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## ➡ Summary;

Derek J. Tidball; Colossians could be fairly described as the most intriguing of the Pauline letters.

Colossians sets out some of the most developed theology in New Testament...Its exposition of the person of Christ as a cosmic ruler and of the Christian believer as being already 'raised with Christ' (3:1) advance Christian understanding beyond its previous limits...(p.1)

# Colossians: Purpose

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Tidball, In contrast to the pick-and-mix approach of his opponents and the false teaching they are being offered, the gospel is reliable, attractive and effective.

Their need was to remain true to it and apply it to every aspect of their lives, rather than to believe it needed supplementing in anyway. (2:6-7, 9; 3:1-4). (p.61)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

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➤ Why did these Gentiles become Christians?

Tidball; As E. Schillebeeckx puts it, the people 'were aware of a cosmic fault, a kind of catastrophe in the universe, a gulf between the higher (heavenly) and the lower (earthly) world.

The problem of meaning and meaningless is experienced in cosmic terms and is expressed in a longing for salvation which will consist in the restoration of the unity of the cosmos.'  
(p.30)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ➡ Conversion;

Tidball; ***'He has rescued us . . . transferred us' (1:13)***

Colossians 1:13 describes conversion as being transferred from one realm, that of 'the power of darkness', into a different one, that of 'the kingdom of his beloved Son'. The language is the language of salvation. The Colossian converts have been 'rescued'.

Christians had been subject to the tyranny of darkness but had now been released from that life-draining power and become subjects of another Lord, that of God's Son.  
(p.37)



# The World and Life of the Colossians

- Conversion;
- Tidball; There has been a clear transfer of allegiance from one government to another. The decisive event of the cross broke the power of those who previously controlled their lives and has permitted the converts to experience release and freedom. They have been rescued, not so that that they can live autonomously – for, given their flawed human natures, that would simply result in a new form of bondage – but so that they can come under the authority of a new Lord, under whose rule they would experience the freedom, love, security and harmony the Creator intended. (p.37)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ➤ Conversion;

Tidball;

The transfer of one governing authority to another is the basis on which lives begin a process of reconstruction. (p.38)

It would have been brave and conscious choice to identify with the proclamation about Christ.

The confession they made then was evidently not a one-off statement but a life stance and one which would require the convert to undergo closer and closer identification with the Christian community and greater and greater re-education in the way of living as a Christian, in contrast to living as others who owed allegiance to other gods or religions. (p.41)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ■ *Lessons for Today;*

Tidball; In a post-modern world our identities are particularly open. We are continuously constructing and reconstructing who we are.

Individualism wins hands down when it comes to determining who we perceive ourselves to be. This unprecedented openness, which has come about because of our devotion to freedom of choice, has also meant a loss of community.

Contemporary society shows itself to be schizophrenic in wanting individual choice and yet longing at the same time for the old experience of 'community' and 'belonging' to be rediscovered.

This enduring quest suggests that connecting with others is still quintessentially human and therefore of great significance when we ask who we are. (p.48-49)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

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## ➤ *Social Identity in the Greco-Roman World*

Tidball; The collectivist personality had implications for the practice of religion.

Conversions essentially took place collectively, through a household deciding to become Christian, rather than being an individual experience.

The role of authority figures was accepted and, with that, the truth they taught was accepted too.

While the dominant component is undoubtedly the 'we' or the 'us', it is not so dominant that the 'I' and the 'me' are annihilated. (p.56-57)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

23

## ➤ *Social Identity in the Greco-Roman World*

Tidball; We adopt a more consumerist approach even to groups to which we are committed than people of an earlier age did.

Clearly people took independent lines and disputed what the apostles taught in New Testament times, otherwise there would have been no need for most of the New Testament letters. (When they did this they were, of course, reflecting the other or out-groups to which they belonged).

Yet, the sense of collective identity comes through the letters strongly and the appeal to 'this is what it means to be a Christian, now live it out' was much stronger than today ... (p.57-58)



# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ➤ *New Identity “in Christ”*

Tidball; The phrase ‘in Christ’ first appears in the opening greeting of Colossians (1:2) where it is used in a subjective sense to distinguish the readers of the letter from the rest of the population of Colossae.

Paul uses it more to describe the position of the Christian community than individual Christian experience.

Because of our humanity, all people are ‘in Adam’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22) but because of their faith, the Colossian Christians may now be said to be ‘in Christ’.

To be ‘in Christ’ is to be ‘within his sphere and power of influence’ and to submit to his rule.

Schweizer put it well when he wrote ‘Christ is the place in which the community lives, the atmosphere in which it thrives, and which does indeed permeate it’. (p.63)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ➤ *New Identity “in Christ”*

Tidball; So, the defining mark of the Colossian believers is that they are ‘in Christ’ and live therefore simultaneously in the natural realm of the city of Colossae and in an equally real but different realm of being ‘in Christ’.

Being in Christ or ‘in him’ equally imposes privileges obligations on them as much as being ‘in Colossae’ does. (p.63)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

## ➤ *New Identity “in Christ”*

Tidball; The obligation, since they are living in his kingdom (1:13), is to live appropriately. That does not mean submission unaided to a new set of rules. If that were so, it would put them in the same category as the regulators whom Paul is opposing (2:20-23).

On the contrary, it means living out the new life which they derived from their joining with the risen Christ through baptism (2:11-12; 20;3:1-4).

Sharing in the resurrection of Christ inevitably results in the living of a distinctive lifestyle. It is spelled out in detail in 3:5-4:6

Their identity should be externally observable by the way in which they live. (p. 64)

# The World and Life of the Colossians

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## ➤ *New Identity “in Christ”*

Tidball; his concern is indisputably to reveal the outworking of being ‘in Christ’ in the ethical, moral and attitudinal aspects of life.

...it involves a radical change from one’s previous way of life and a radical demarcation from those who live in Colossae, but not in Christ.

‘It is the sort of change’, Dunn writes, ‘which follows from the complete identification with another person or cause, when the service of that person or cause becomes all consuming, the basic determiner of all priorities, the bubbling spring of motivation, resolution, and application which perseveres despite setbacks’. (p. 64)

# Colossians: *Christology*

## **Christology/Soteriology, Eschatology, Missiology**

Tidball; Once the mission activity of the early apostles moved beyond Jewish circles and they began preaching to the Gentiles, explaining the person and work of Jesus had to be reconstructed. (p.73)

This clearly seen in the preaching of Paul, as recorded in...Acts... His explanation of the gospel takes on a very different starting point in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18) and Athens (Acts 17:16-34) than it did in a Jewish synagogue.

Central to his gospel was the death and resurrection of Jesus, but what did those events mean?

The central emphasis of Paul's missionary preaching, was the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah of the Jewish people and the Kyrios (Lord) of the world. (p.74)



# Colossians: *Christology*

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## ➤ Summary:

Tidball; So, Christ is presented in a weighty and wide-ranging way as the clue to the two-fold mystery of the cosmos,

that is, the mystery of its creation and the mystery of its re-creation subsequent to the fracturing it has undergone through sin and the activity of hostile powers.

Reality - ultimate substance and meaning - is to be found in him (2:7).



# Colossians: *Christology*

30

- Tidball; Referring to Christ's supremacy (Colossians 1 etc.)

Since Christ is Lord over all, the Colossians can rest assured that their salvation and that of the world is already accomplished by the crucified Christ. He, in himself, and through his death and resurrection, gives them an assured hope of glory (1:27).

And they have access to him not through laws and rituals but by standing firm in their faith in Christ (1:4) and the tradition of the gospel they have received (2:6). (p.84-85)

# Encouragement

## ► Colossians 2:1-5

2 I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. <sup>2</sup> I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself.

<sup>4</sup> I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

Sumney; The goal of Paul's struggles for those who have never met him is that "their hearts might be encouraged."

This "encouragement" includes both comfort and exhortation. They need to be comforted in their perplexity at the visionaries' teaching, and they need to be exhorted to hold to the apostolic teaching and reject any other teaching. (p.114)

# Colossians: Mission

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- Colossians 4: <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive [Gk: *and seasoned with salt.*] so that you will have the right response for everyone.

Dunn; ...Here, evidently, was a church not on the defensive against powerful forces organized against it, but expected to hold its own in the social setting of marketplace, baths, and meal table and to win attention by the attractiveness of its life and speech.

...When asked about the distinctiveness of their faith and its lifestyle expression, the Christians should be ready to give an answer in each case. (p. 267)

...Again it should be noted how integrated their faith was expected to be with their workaday lives in the city and how rounded the religion that could both charm a conversation partner by its quality and give testimony of faith as part of the same conversation.

NJB adds a further dimension by translating "Be sensitive to the kind of answer each one requires.: (p.267-8)

# Colossians: Summary and Lessons

33

- N.T. Wright;

Within the life of the church ...the letter to the Colossians will always have an important part to play. We, too, need to become mature as Christians and as human beings. We need to grow in our knowledge of who God is, of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ, and of how we can express our gratitude in worship and life.

We, too, need the warning that true maturity, whether Christian or human, is not to be had by any other road. (p.43)

# Colossians: Conclusion

34

## ➤ *New Identity “in Christ”*

Tidball; The obligation, since they are living in his kingdom (1:13), is to live appropriately.

That does not mean submission unaided to a new set of rules. If that were so, it would put them in the same category as the regulators whom Paul is opposing (2:20-23).

On the contrary, it means living out the new life which they derived from their joining with the risen Christ through baptism (2:11-12; 20;3:1-4).

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Their identity should be externally observable by the way in which they live. (p. 64)



# Colossians: Conclusion

35

Wright; For Paul, the church is the Body of Christ, already seated with her Lord in the heavenly places, as well as being called to suffer and work and witness in the world.

To realize one is complete in Christ is sure proof against the dangers of immature Christianity—the constant search for spiritual novelties, the unnecessary anxieties and fears over status or requirements, the pride over small ‘achievements’—which threaten Christians in the modern world no less than in the ancient world. (p.42)



# Colossians: Themes and Lessons

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- Share your thoughts and lessons from Colossians

# Colossians: Conclusion

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- Wright; Faced with a young church in a small town in up-country Asia Minor, ... Paul has written a letter in which he has distilled his understanding of some of the greatest themes in theology.

...in Colossians Paul is drawing upon his overall theological understanding to help his readers find that genuine human and spiritual maturity which God wills for his people.

God has done what the law, and “Wisdom”, could not do; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, to achieve reconciliation; he dealt with sin on the cross, so that the life which the law had sought to give, the true life of God’s people, might be brought to expression in those who, through faith and baptism, belong to Jesus Christ.

The church need look—must look—nowhere else for forgiveness for the past, maturity in the present, or for future hope. p.39-43

# Colossians: Conclusion

38

Wright; Within the life of the church, then, the letter to the Colossians will always have an important part to play.

We, too, need to become mature as Christians and as human beings.

We need to grow in our knowledge of who God is, of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ, and how we can express our gratitude in worship and live.

We, too, need the warning that true maturity, whether Christian or human, is not to be had by any other road. (p.43)