

*discover*

# COLOSSIANS



STUDY GUIDE

*discover*  
**COLOSSIANS**



*CoffeeBreak*





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# How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you “do it yourself” and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers’ thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

## **Step 1.**

**Read through each Bible passage several times.** Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

## **Step 2.**

**Answer the questions** in the “What does it say?” section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

### Step 3.

**Fill in the “Conversation” boxes** with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the “Conversation” boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- For what can I give thanks?

### Step 4.

**Have fun** talking with others about what you have discovered!

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

**1** **Isaiah 1**  
**Judgment and Justice**

**Getting Started**  
The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

**What Does It Say?**

**1. Isaiah 1:1**  
What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

**2. Isaiah 1:2-9**  
What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

**3. Isaiah 1:10-15**  
In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to atone for ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10; 9:26-28).

New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and

Let's talk about...

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# Glossary of Terms

**angels**—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God’s will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

**Archippus**—probably an evangelist working in Colossae; he may also have served in Laodicea or in nearby Hierapolis (see Col. 4:13, 17).

**apostle**—“one sent forth”; refers to a messenger sent on a special mission. The New Testament apostles were leaders in the early Christian church; they were specially chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21-26; 9:1-15; 1 Cor. 9:1-2).

**Aristarchus**—a Jewish follower of Christ and an associate and companion of Paul throughout Greece. He was imprisoned with Paul.

**baptism**—the act of applying water to a person to indicate a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. How the water is applied (the mode) varies in different church traditions: it can be through immersion (going completely underwater), sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. Many churches baptize infants, and many churches baptize older children and teens who express their faith in Christ. Both kinds of churches also baptize adult converts. Churches that baptize infants consider baptism as a covenant sign replacing circumcision. As they grow up, children baptized as infants must appropriate the promises made for them by their parents at their baptism by expressing faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The symbolism of baptism is that of the washing away of sin through Christ’s death, and of dying to sin through Christ’s death and rising with Christ to new life (Rom. 6:1-14). The symbol, also called a sacrament, has no saving effect but is a declaration of faith in Christ, a recognition of God’s claim on one’s life, and a sign of being welcomed into God’s family.

**Christ (Jesus)**—the second person of the Trinity; the name *Christ* means “Anointed One.” Jesus, the Son of God, came to save God’s people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. See also **Jesus (Christ)**.

**circumcision**—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

**Colossae**—an ancient city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), located in the Lycus River Valley.

**deity**—another word for “God.”

**Demas**—an associate and disciple of Paul who was with him when he wrote the letter to the Colossians (4:14). Demas later deserted Paul (2 Tim. 4:10).

**dominion of darkness**—anyplace outside of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-13). The ruler of this domain is Satan, an angel who rebelled against God and now seeks to promote evil, confusion, chaos, and destruction in God’s creation (see Rev. 12).

**earthly**—refers sometimes to things of the physical, material world but can also refer to our sinful nature.

**elemental spiritual forces of this world**—literally “elements of the cosmos”; can also mean “basic principles of this world” (Col. 2:8, 20). This term, according to the *NIV Study Bible*, may refer to “false, worldly, elementary, religious teachings” or “evil spiritual powers.”

**Epaphras**—On the basis of Paul’s comments in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12-13, it is likely that Epaphras was from the region around Colossae and that he founded not only the church there but also churches in the neighboring communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

**Father**—see **God the Father**.

**firstborn**—In the culture of Paul’s day the firstborn son held the place of supreme honor among his siblings and inherited the lordship (sovereignty) over the household or family estate. So this term used in reference to Christ as “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15) indicates that he has the power and is Lord (sovereign) over all creation.

**flesh**—When Paul refers to “the flesh” (as Col. 2:11, 13), he is talking about the sinful state of human beings, or the sinful human nature. (See also Eph. 2:3.)

**Gentiles**—all peoples who are not of the Jewish people.

**grace**—God’s kindness, undeserved favor, and forgiving love; won for believers through Christ’s death in their place.

**God the Father**—the first person of the Trinity (the second person is Jesus the Son, and the third person is the Holy Spirit). The Father sent Jesus into the world to save us from the curse of sin and death and to give us new life. The Father and Son also send the Spirit to live in us and guide us in Christlike living, making us “God’s holy people” (Col. 1:2).



**gospel**—from the Greek word that means “good news.” The gospel is the good news that God’s Son, Jesus Christ, took the punishment for our sins by dying on the cross and brought us new life by rising from death. He ascended into heaven, where he rules over all things, and he will someday return to earth. All who believe in Christ are promised eternal life.

**holy**—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

**Holy Spirit**—the third person of the Trinity, equal to and one with God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit makes people aware of their sin, brings true faith into their hearts, and enables them to live in obedience to God.

**hope**—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

**idolatry**—worshiping something other than God. It can mean bowing down to a physical image of a god, but Paul uses it in Colossians to mean allowing one’s own desires to become more important than God.

**inheritance of the saints**—eternal life with Christ, which is a gift of God to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

**Jesus (Christ)**—the second person of the Trinity; his name means “Savior.” See also **Christ (Jesus)**.

**Jews**—the people of Israel, descendants of Abraham; God’s special people chosen to be a blessing to all other nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

**kingdom of light**—another term for the kingdom of God, God’s rule over all creation, especially evident in the lives of his people, who follow Jesus and believe in him as Savior. Jesus’ central message is the good news that “the kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15).

**Luke**—a historian and physician. He was a companion of Paul and wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts in the New Testament.

**Laodicea**—a city about 12 miles (19.3 km) from Colossae.

**Mark**—also called John (see Acts 12:12, 25) and most likely the writer of the gospel of Mark. He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and a companion of Paul. Mark was not one of Christ’s twelve disciples, but he was an eyewitness to many of the events of Jesus’ life.

**new self**—the new nature that comes into a person by faith in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit’s power working in that person.

**Nympha**—a Christian woman who served as host for the house church that met in Laodicea.

**old self**—the part of our human nature that still lives in disobedience to God.

**Onesimus**—a slave who was part of the Christian community of Colossae. His master was Philemon. He had run away and had later met up with Paul and had become his companion. Along with the letter to the Colossians, Paul sent a letter to Philemon urging him to receive Onesimus back “as a brother in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

**peace**—a result of being reconciled to God through Christ, yielding an assurance of well-being and freedom (guided by the Spirit) to live in relationship with God and others (see Col. 3:15; see also Rom. 5:1-11).

**psalms**—prayers of ancient Israel that were written down and set to music, with subjects ranging from praise and thanks to lament and trust. Most psalms emphasize God’s power, love, and holiness as contrasted with human weakness. See the book of Psalms in the Old Testament.

**redemption**—the act of buying something back that has been held in debt. In ancient times it was common for people to sell themselves into servitude or slavery (often temporarily) because they had no other way to pay a debt. If someone else redeemed (ransomed) them by paying the debt for them, the debt was forgiven (see Lev. 25:35-55). In Colossians 1:14 the apostle Paul refers to the redemption payment that Christ gave to free us from our debt of sin. Because he paid this debt with his own life by dying in our place, our sins are forgiven.

**Scythian**—the name of a tribal people from around the Black and Caspian Seas who were considered brutally barbaric; they were often described as little more than wild beasts.

**Spirit**—see **Holy Spirit**.

**Timothy**—a spiritual “son” who was a companion of Paul and is included in the greeting in the opening verses of Paul’s letter to the Colossians. (See also Acts 16:1-3; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy.)

**Tychicus**—a companion and fellow worker with Paul who carried Paul’s letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7).

# 1 Colossians 1:1-14

## Thanksgiving and Prayer

### Getting Started

The book of Colossians is a letter written by the apostle Paul in the first century A.D. to a church in the small city of Colossae, located in present-day Turkey. It is likely that Paul wrote this letter and several others while he was in prison in Rome, awaiting trial for preaching the message of salvation in Christ. The church in Colossae had been started by Epaphras, a “minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7) from the local area who had worked with Paul. In this study we will look at what Paul wrote to this church and what God is saying to us today through this letter to the Colossians.

### What Does It Say?

Let's talk about ...

#### 1. Colossians 1:1-2

- a. How does Paul describe himself and the people to whom he is writing? Who else is included in his greeting to them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What does Paul want for the Christians in Colossae?

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#### 2. Colossians 1:3-6

- a. For what is Paul thankful? What has he heard about the people in Colossae?

b. What does Paul say about the gospel?

For conversation ...

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### 3. Colossians 1:7-8

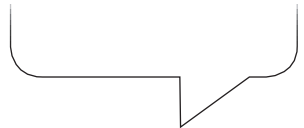
On the basis of Paul's comments in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12-13, it is likely that Epaphras was from the region around Colossae and that he founded not only the church there but also churches in the neighboring communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

How does Paul describe Epaphras and what he has done for the people in Colossae?

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### 4. Colossians 1:9

Why has Paul prayed for the people in Colossae, and what is the content of his prayer?



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**5. Colossians 1:10-12**

- a. If God granted Paul's requests, how would this be evident in the lives of the Colossians?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What does being strengthened by God's power enable us to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. For what should the Father receive joyful thanks?

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**6. Colossians 1:13-14**

- a. From what have we been rescued?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Review how redemption and the forgiveness of our sins has been accomplished for us.

I wonder about ...

## **Taking It Home**

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Looking back over this lesson, what did you learn? How were you encouraged? How were you challenged?

## **For Further Study**

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Matthew 28:18-20

Ephesians 2:8-10

John 14:1-3

Revelation 21:1-7

Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-14

Colossians 4:12-13

Philippians 1:6

2 Timothy 3:14-17

John 14:6-11

Romans 1:20

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Philippians 4:11-13

Romans 8:19-23

Leviticus 25:35-55

In the book of Colossians, a letter written by the apostle Paul in the first century A.D., we discover the wonders of a “mystery that was hidden for ages.” That mystery is Jesus Christ, now revealed for all people to see as the Savior who transforms us and makes us new. He makes it possible for us to have new life forever, the way God intended from the beginning.

In this study we explore with Paul and the Colossians the amazing depths of God’s love for us in Christ, in whom “all things hold together,” so that we can live by that love too, in all our relationships.

*Discover Colossians* features 7 lessons from the letter of Paul to the church in Colossae. Lessons 1-6 focus on the full text of Colossians; lesson 7 (optional) focuses on the gospel message in Colossians. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God’s Word.

For a complete list of titles in the Discover Your Bible series, call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org).

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