**PRISON EPISTLES: Colossians**

**Dr. Thomas M. Strouse**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Prison Epistles**

1. Traditional names Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon as the Prison (incarceration) Epistles.

2. Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 23-26), at Rome (Acts 28), and again at Rome (II Tim. 1-4).

3. He also had frequent imprisonments (II Cor. 11:23). All four Epistles indicate Paul’s imprisonment (Eph. 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 16; Col. 4:10, 18; and Phile. 1:1, 9).

4. These four Epistles are inter-related: Ephesians and Colossians have similar content as well as the same bearer, Tychichus (Eph. 6:21 and Col. 4:7); Colossians and Philemon have familiar final greetings; Philippians is also a Prison Epistle.

**B. The Place of Incarceration**

1. Rome—the traditional view.

a. This view was unchallenged for 18 centuries.

b. Paul was placed under house arrest (Acts 28:30) which gave him freedom to preach (cf. Acts 28:23; Eph. 6:20, Phil. 1:13; Col. 4:3).

c. Luke and Aristarchus’ presence suggest Rome (Col. 4:10; cf. Acts 27:2 and Col. 4:14; cf. Acts 28:14-16).

2. Ephesus—the Deissmann view.

a. The *Marcionite Prologue to Colossians* states: “Therefore the Apostle already in bonds writes to them from Ephesus.” (However, it also says that Paul wrote Philemon from Rome, confusing the issue since Colossians and Philemon must have the same origin according to internal evidence).

b. although Paul says he was in prison often, Acts is silent concerning an Ephesian imprisonment.

3. Caesarea—the H. E. G. Paulus view.

 a. Acts 23-26 record Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment.

b. Would not Onesimus escape from Colosse to Caesarea (500 miles away) rather than the much further Rome or the much nearer Ephesus.

c. But Paul’s contacts with others were severely limited to his friends (Acts 24:23), and he did not expect to be freed soon (Phile. 1:22).

**C. The Dating of the Prison Epistles**

1. Assuming a Pauline authorship and a Roman imprisonment, one of two dates is possible.

2. If Paul was imprisoned only once in Rome then he wrote many of his letters including the Pastorals at that time.

3. However, it seems evident that Paul had at least two imprisonments to square with all his activities.

4. This would give a date of AD 59-61 at the end of Acts, allowing for a release to write I Timothy and Titus and a re-capture about AD 63-65.

**II. PRISON EPISTLES**

**C. Colossians**

1. The Authorship of Colossians

a. External Evidence—since it is similar to Ephesians, it has many of the same patristics supporting it as Pauline.

b. Internal Evidence—Paul claims authorship thrice (1:1, 23; 4:18).

2. The Date of Colossians—Epaphras consulted with Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome, about the Judaistic-Gnostic heresy (AD 59-61).

3. The Origin and Destination of Colossians (Acts 19:10)—Paul wrote from Rome to the Colossians through Tychicus.

4. The Purpose of Colossians—to warn against theological and practical errors, and to stress the importance of the Body of Christ.

5. The Characteristics of Colossians

a. The great Christological passage shows that local churches are built upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

b. The heresy was a mixture of proto-Gnosticism and Judaistic legalism. Its characteristics were the following:

1) Philosophy—2:8

2) Jewish—2:11, 14-17

3) Gnosticism—2:15-19

4) Asceticism—2:20-23

5) Pseudo-Christian—2:3-10

***6. The Outline of Colossians***

**a. Introduction 1:1-14**

**b. The Supremacy of Christ 1:15-23**

 1) Over Creation 1:15-17

 2) Over Church 1:18-19

3) Over Christian 1:20-23

**c. The Service of Paul 1:24-2:7**

1) By Suffering 1:24

2) By Teaching 1:25-27

3) By Preaching 1:28

4) By Laboring 1:29-2:7

**d. The Subtlety of the Heretics 2:8-23**

1) They are subtle by their Philosophy 2:8-10

2) They are subtle by their Judaism 2:1-14

3) They are subtle by their Gnosticism 2:15-19

4) They are subtle by their Asceticism 2:20-23

**e. The Sanctification of the Believer 3:1-4:1**

1) Positional 3:1-4

2) Practical 3:5-17

3) Personal 3:18-4:1

**f. The Solicitation of Prayer 4:2-6**

**g. The Salutation of the Apostle 4:7-18**

 1) Paul’s State 4:7-8

 2) God’s Saints 4:9-18