

# HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE

A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish  
Mystical Movement at Colossae

IAN SMITH

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IAN K. SMITH



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## PREFACE

A heightened interest in Colossians began for me during several years of cross-cultural missionary work in an animistic culture in Vanuatu (a small nation in the Pacific) where many people live in the fear of the power of evil, and where such fear results in legalism and mystical practices. Living within such a culture forced me to question many of my theological presuppositions, but although the questions were different, the answer was still the same: it all hinges on a correct understanding of the person and work of Christ. The little letter to the Colossians is so rich in its Christological presentation and so logical in showing the resultant victory and lifestyle for those who are in Christ, that a better understanding of its background and message can only be of benefit for all who study it. It is hoped that this book will help facilitate this.

This book is an adaptation of a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Sydney. I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr Iain Gardner, and my associate supervisor, Dr Peter O'Brien, for their constant support, correction and encouragement. I was first introduced to the problem of identifying the Colossian errorists in a first-year New Testament class taught by Dr O'Brien in 1982. It was beyond my wildest imaginings that the study of this small letter would continue for so long.

I express my thanks to the Committee of the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, which granted me study leave to complete this monograph and to my colleagues who carried an extra load while I was on leave. Dr John Davies, Dr Gregory Goswell and the Revd Peter Hastie read an earlier draft of this work and made useful suggestions. In particular I am indebted to Dr Davies for his constant leadership, advice and encouragement.

I express my gratitude to the members of my family. My wife Jenni, and our children Fiona and Ryan, Kathryn, Jeremy and Bronwyn have shown great forbearance and love while I have been preoccupied with this study. They have shared it all, from searching for a topic to the final form. They have given me a practical example of the household code of Colossians 3.

Finally, my wife, Jenni, has shown enormous love and support in this project. She has encouraged, proof-read, supported and loved me through the whole process. Most of all, she believed that it could be done. This book is lovingly dedicated to her.

Ian K. Smith  
Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney  
November 2005

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### *General Abbreviations*

§	section
BCE	Before Common Era
c.	<i>circa</i> , about
CE	Common Era
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
ch., chs	chapter, chapters
col.	column
ed.	editor
edn.	edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
ET	English Translation
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> , and so on
f, ff	following (verse or verses, pages etc.)
frag.	fragment
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
n.	footnote/endnote
n.d.	no date
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p., pp.	page, pages
rec.	recension
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
v., vv.	verse, verses
viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
vol(s).	volume(s)



*Abbreviations of the Names of Biblical Books (with Apocrypha)**Old Testament*

Gen.	2 Chron.	Dan.
Exod.	Ezra	Hos.
Lev.	Neh.	Joel
Num.	Est.	Amos
Deut.	Job	Obad.
Josh.	Ps. (pl. Pss.)	Jon.
Judg.	Prov.	Mic.
Ruth	Eccl.	Nah.
1 Sam.	Song	Hab.
2 Sam.	Isa.	Zeph.
1 Kgs	Jer.	Hag.
2 Kgs	Lam.	Zech.
1 Chron.	Ezek.	Mal.

*Apocrypha or Deutero-Canonical Books*

1 Esd.	Ep. Jer.
2 Esd.	Song 3 Childr.
Tob.	Bel
Jdt.	Pr. Man.
Add. Est.	1 Macc.
Wis.	2 Macc.
Sir.	Bar.

*New Testament*

Mt.	Eph.	Heb.
Mk	Phil.	Jas
Lk.	Col.	1 Pet.
Jn	1 Thess.	2 Pet.
Acts	2 Thess.	1 Jn
Rom.	1 Tim.	2 Jn
1 Cor.	2 Tim.	3 Jn
2 Cor.	Tit.	Jude
Gal.	Phlm	Rev.

*Abbreviations of the Names of Pseudepigraphal and Early Patristic Books*

2 Bar. Syriac	<i>Apocalypse of Baruch</i>
3 Bar. Greek	<i>Apocalypse of Baruch</i>
<i>Apoc. Abr.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apoc. Zeph.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Zephaniah</i>
<i>Asc. Isa.</i>	<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>Ass. Mos.</i>	<i>Assumption of Moses</i>
Barn.	Barnabas
1-2 Clem.	1-2 Clement
Did.	Didache
1 En.	1 (Ethiopic) Enoch
2 En.	2 (Slavonic) Enoch
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
<i>Hermas, Sim.</i>	<i>Hermas, Similitude</i>
<i>Hermas, Vis.</i>	<i>Hermas, Vision</i>
<i>Ignatius, Pol.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to Polycarp</i>
<i>Ignatius, Smyrn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrneans</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
3 Macc.	3 Maccabees
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
<i>Odes</i>	<i>Odes of Solomon</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>T. Abr.</i>	<i>Testament of Abraham</i>
<i>T. Ash.</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>T. Isaac</i>	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>
<i>T. Job</i>	<i>Testament of Job</i>
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
<i>T. Sim.</i>	<i>Testament of Simeon</i>
<i>T. Sol.</i>	<i>Testament of Solomon</i>

*Abbreviations of Versions of the Bible*

LXX	Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
UBS4	The United Bible Societies' Greek Text (fourth edition)

*Abbreviations of Names of Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts*

1QH	<i>Hymns/Hodayot</i>
1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>
1QpHab	<i>Habakkuk Pesher</i>
1QS	<i>Community Rule / Manual of Discipline</i>
1QSa	<i>Community Rule</i>
1QSB	<i>Community Rule</i>
4QDb	<i>Damascus Document b</i>
4QShirShabb <sup>e</sup> (4Q 405)	<i>Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice</i>
11QMelch	<i>Melchizedek</i>
11QPSa	<i>Psalms Scroll</i>
11QT	<i>Temple Scroll</i>

*Abbreviations of Orders and Tractates in Mishnaic and Related Literature*

To distinguish same-named tractates in the Mishnah, Tosefta, Babylonian Talmud and Jerusalem Talmud, note respectively *m.*, *t.*, *b.* or *y.* before the title of the tractate.

<i>‘Abod. Zar.</i>	<i>‘Aboda Zarah</i>
<i>Hag.</i>	<i>Hagigah</i>
<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>

*Classical and Patristic Literature*

<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>CMC</i>	<i>The Cologne Mani Codex</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>The Jewish War</i>
<i>Leg. All.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>

*Abbreviations of Commonly Used Periodicals, Reference Works and Serials*

ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1972–)

APOT	R. H. Charles (ed.), <i>Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English</i> (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913)
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AusBR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, F. William Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn., 2000)
BDF	Frederick Blass, A. Debrunner and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961)
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BGU	<i>Ägyptische Urkunden aus den Koeniglichen Museen zu Berlin herausgegeben von der Generalverwaltung griechische Urkunden</i> (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912)
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BZNW	Beihefte zur ZNW
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
EBib	Etudes Bibliques
EDNT	Horst Balz and Gerhard Schreiner (eds), <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993)
EDSS	Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (eds), <i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
EFN	Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
EKKNT	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EncJud	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary

IDB	George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), <i>The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible</i> (4 vols; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962)
IDBSup	IDB, Supplementary Volume
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSJSup	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> , Supplement Series
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> , Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTC	<i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, Robert Scott and H. Stuart Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9th edn., 1968)
NCB	New Century Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	Colin Brown (ed.), <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> (3 vols; Exeter: Paternoster, 1975)
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> , Supplements
NTOA	<i>Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
Numen	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
OTP	James Charlesworth (ed.), <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
PVTG	<i>Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti graece</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RevScRel	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
RHPR	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de philosophie religieuse</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLSP	SBL Seminar Papers

SBM	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SD	Studies and Documents
SE	<i>Studia Evangelica</i> I, II, III (= TU 73 [1959], 87 [1964], 88 [1964], etc.)
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPAW	Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–)
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VS	Verbum salutis
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. *The Colossian Error*

Paul's aim in writing to the Colossians was to correct error in theology and practice, and to present the Christian gospel to a congregation he had not previously met. Although many have attempted to define the nature of this error and to determine the identity of the errorists, at present no consensus exists. R. DeMaris stated in his 1994 study of the Colossian controversy:

This division in opinion, while it could engender pessimism about ever solving the Colossian philosophy puzzle, has in fact stimulated a rich variety in reconstructions of the philosophy. Surprisingly, however, book-length studies of the Colossian controversy have been few. F. Francis's (*sic*) dissertation of 1965 and L. Congdon's of 1968 offered substantial treatments of the issue, but a generation passed until T. Sappington's study of 1991. The relative dearth of detailed studies and the still unresolved debate over the Colossian philosophy point to the value of additional investigations.<sup>1</sup>

Since DeMaris' monograph, two further extended works have been published on the Colossian error: C. Arnold's *The Colossian Syncretism: the Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae*<sup>2</sup> in 1995 and T. Martin's *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique*<sup>3</sup> in 1996. Although each of these recent works has enhanced our understanding of the Colossian situation and helped to define both the error and its antidote, at present no consensus exists. This book will seek to

1. R. E. DeMaris, *The Colossians Controversy: Wisdom and Dispute at Colossae* (JSNTSup, 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 12. The studies DeMaris refers to are: F. O. Francis, 'A Re-examination of the Colossian Controversy' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1965); L. M. Congdon, 'The False Teachers at Colossae: Affinities with Essene and Philonic Thought' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Drew University, 1968); T. J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSup, 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

2. C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: the Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (WUNT, 2.77; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995).

3. T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (JSNTSup, 118; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996).



further enlighten our understanding of the problem addressed by the Colossian letter.

It is not always possible to determine the nature of an error by the response that is given. The Colossian letter however gives us some indicators. It would appear that the references in Colossians to Sabbath (2.16), circumcision (2.11) and food laws (2.21) indicate that the error arose from within Judaism. Furthermore, with the references to the activity of angels (2.18), powers and authorities (2.15) and things above (3.2), it is evident that the error had something to do with the activity of 'other-worldly' beings. It is the thesis of this study that the Colossian error arose from within the milieu of Jewish mysticism. In particular, affinities can be found with *Merkabah* mysticism with its belief in heavenly ascents and 'other-worldly' activity.

This reconstruction of the nature of the Colossian error is not without its challenges. There is little archaeological evidence as the site of Colossae remains unexcavated. The nature of *Merkabah* mysticism is notoriously vague. Did such a movement exist in the first century? If so, did those who accepted the stories of heavenly ascent believe in the historical reality of these stories? Alternatively, if such a movement post-dates Paul, are there antecedents to it which help us to understand the background to the Colossian error?

In seeking to identify the nature of the Colossian error, three tasks will be undertaken. First, in order to benefit from those who have previously made similar studies, we shall survey their conclusions. Secondly, we will look at the nature of first-century Jewish mysticism in general and *Merkabah* mysticism (and its antecedents) in particular. We will also seek to ascertain the level to which first-century inhabitants of Colossae would have been affected by such movements. Finally, we will seek to understand from the text of Colossians itself both Paul's response to the error and, as far as can be determined, the situation that gave rise to this response.

Previous studies on the nature of the Colossian philosophy have normally only dealt with the sections in the first two chapters of the letter which refer directly to the error. Few scholars have investigated the relationship between Paul's teaching on the Colossian philosophy and the pastoral ramifications addressed within the letter. How does cosmic reconciliation, referred to in the first two chapters of the epistle, relate to reconciliation within the church as addressed in the final two chapters? How does an elitist claim of super-spirituality arising from a mystical experience undermine the teaching of the sufficiency of the work of Christ in reconciliation? How does theology relate to paraenesis? This work will seek to deal with the major themes of the entire epistle, which will give a greater appreciation of Paul's multifaceted response.

Before proceeding with our study, it is necessary to address three important introductory issues: the demography of first-century Colossae with particular reference to Jewish settlement; the authorship of the Colossian letter; and research methods to be undertaken. It is to these that we now turn our attention.

## 2. Jewish Settlement in the Lycus Valley

Colossae was in Phrygia in the southern part of the Roman province of Asia in the Lycus valley. In Paul's day it was overshadowed by the more prominent cities of Laodicea, the financial and administrative centre for the region in Roman times, and Hierapolis with its hot mineral spring which attracted many visitors.<sup>4</sup> These towns are mentioned in Col. 4.13. Of these three towns, Colossae was by far the oldest. Xerxes and his armies passed that way in 480 BCE. Herodotus states: '... he arrived at Colossae, a considerable city of Phrygia, in which the river Lycus, falling into a chasm of the earth disappears' (*Herodotus* 7.30). About a century later, Xenophon referred to Colossae being large and wealthy as he related how Cyrus marched εἰς Κολοσσᾶς πόλιν οἰκουμένην καὶ εὐδαίμονα καὶ μεγάλην (*Anabasis* 1.2,6). By New Testament times, however, Colossae was a city in decline. Lightfoot comments: 'Without doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St Paul is addressed'.<sup>5</sup>

An important feature of the Lycus valley was the presence of a substantial Jewish minority. The Jewish population can be traced back to the time of the prophet Obadiah who mentions the city of Sepharad, which is normally taken to be a reference to Sardis, the capital of Lydia in the west of Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup> Josephus tells how Seleucus Nicator (312-281/0 BCE), the founder of the Seleucid kingdom which included Asia Minor, granted full civic rights to the Jews in all the cities that he founded (*Ant.* 12.119) and how Antiochus II planted Jewish colonies in the cities of Ionia (*Ant.* 12.125). Jewish settlement on any significant scale, however, is to be dated from the late third century BCE when Antiochus III brought two thousand Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia and settled them in Lydia and Phrygia in order to stabilize the region (*Ant.* 12.147-153). They were granted land for homes, farming and viticulture and exemptions from taxation to ensure the settlement became permanent.<sup>7</sup> Once a Jewish settlement was established, the influx of other Jews

4. W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia : being an essay of the local history of Phrygia from the earliest times to the Turkish conquest* (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), I, pp. 1-121.

5. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 16.

6. Lipiński points out that Sepharad is identical with the Persian satrapy of Spardia in Asia Minor. An inscription which refers to ספֿרד in Aramaic was discovered at Sardis. It is dated in the tenth year of Artaxerxes. If Artaxerxes I is meant, it would indicate that there was a colony of Arameans or Jews as early as 455 BCE. Furthermore, an Aramaic inscription discovered at Daskyleion in North-West Anatolia, north of Sardis, normally dated at c.450 or c.400 BCE, gives evidence of a rich Jewish family there. E. Lipiński, 'Obadiah 20', VT 23 (1973), 368-70 (368). See F. M. Cross, 'An Aramaic Inscription from Daskyleion', BASOR 184 (1966), 7-9. See also L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 171.

7. P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS, 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 6.

would have continued.<sup>8</sup> In Hierapolis a number of Jewish epitaphs have been found showing that Jews had become part of Asian culture.<sup>9</sup>

In 62-61 BCE the Roman proconsul, Lucius Valerius Flaccus, prevented the Jews of Phrygia from sending twenty pounds of gold from the region of Laodicea as part of the Jerusalem Temple tax.<sup>10</sup> Calculated at the rate of a half shekel per man (Exod. 30.13-16), the sum represented a significant Jewish population.<sup>11</sup> Presumably Laodicea was the collecting point, and therefore this number could include Jews in surrounding areas. According to Philo, Jews were very numerous in every city of Asia Minor (Ἰουδαῖοι καθ' ἑκάστην πόλιν εἰσὶ παμπληθεῖς Ἀσίας (*De Legatione* 245)). It should be noted that on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.9-10), Jews were gathered in Jerusalem from Asia and Phrygia. The evidence would suggest, therefore, that Colossae was a cosmopolitan city at the time of Paul, populated by both Jews and Gentiles.

#### a. *The Form of Judaism Practised in Colossae*

The nature of Judaism practised in Colossae is significant for an understanding of the situation addressed in the Colossian letter. Although details on this are relatively scarce, few would deny the influence of Hellenism.

The mindset of Hellenism was that the 'universe suffered from some sort of irreparable rift. The two fundamental realms of reality which make up the universe, the celestial and the terrestrial, are set in opposition to one another

8. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 20.

9. E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (eds. G. Vermes and F. Miller; trans. T. A. Burkill *et al.*; 3 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), III pp. 27-28.

10. The Temple tax involved the annual payment of a half shekel (two drachmae or denarii) by every Jewish male between the ages of twenty and fifty, P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, p. 13. Flaccus was brought to court in 59 BCE on a charge of acting illegally in this matter. He was defended by Cicero whose speech has been preserved. Cicero states that at Apamea, gold amounting to just under 100 Roman pounds had been impounded; at Laodicea, just over 20 pounds (*Pro Flacco* 28.68).

11. Estimates concerning the size of the population vary. Lightfoot estimates a male population of more than 11,000: J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 20; F. F. Bruce over 9,000: F. F. Bruce, 'Colossian Problems I: Jews and Christians in the Lycus Valley', *BSac* 141 (1984), 3-15 (5); J. D. G. Dunn 14,000: J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 21. To estimate from the monetary value of half-shekels to a weight of twenty pounds and then to determine the Jewish population of the region is, at best, an approximation. Lightfoot's calculations suppose that the half-shekel weighs 110 grams, the Roman pound is 5050 grams and the relation of gold to silver at the time was 12:1. Bruce, however, has worked from the Pompeian standard of 36 *aurei* to the gold pound. The *aureus* was reckoned to be equivalent to 25 *drachmae*. Equating a half-shekel with a *didrachma*, the adult male population of Laodicea is estimated as 9,000 men.

on account of some cosmic crisis variously described'.<sup>12</sup> Human life was therefore understood as a reflection or shadow of the celestial reality. People lived in fear of invisible powers which they needed to appease in order to ensure positive outcomes in life. It is understandable, therefore, that movements arose that sought access to the celestial world by mystical experiences. There developed an 'industry' of those who claimed to be able to control celestial forces with practices such as astrology, divination, magic and initiation into mystery cults. Conversion to philosophic schools flourished.<sup>13</sup> Jews were not exempt from these activities. As H. D. Betz has pointed out, 'Jewish magic was famous in antiquity'.<sup>14</sup>

The practices of some of the Jews in Phrygia were syncretistic. An instance of this can be seen in an inscription in Akmonia. Julia Severa was honoured by the local synagogue<sup>15</sup> and was mentioned in local coins of Nero, Agrippina and Poppaea as having held municipal office together with her husband Servenius Capito.<sup>16</sup> Although it is unlikely that she was a proselyte or even a God-fearer, it appears that she served as a Gentile patron and benefactor of the Jews in Akmonia.<sup>17</sup>

### b. *The Composition of the Colossian Church*

It would appear that the Christian church in Colossae was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish influence within the congregation can be seen by references to circumcision (2.11) and to Sabbath (2.16). There are also allusions to a Gentile background for other members of the congregation. In 1.12, 21; 2.13 there are indications of outsiders being brought into the company of the people of God.<sup>18</sup> In particular in 2.13 Paul addresses his

12. Wilson refers to the widespread perception in Hellenistic society that the unrighteous conduct of humanity had corrupted the cosmos. W. T. Wilson, *The Hope of Glory: Education and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Colossians* (NovTSup, 88; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), p. 3. Betz concludes his study by arguing: 'One thing, however, must be kept clearly in mind: Jewish and, subsequently, Christian apocalypticism as well cannot be understood from themselves or from the Old Testament alone, but must be seen and presented as peculiar expressions within the entire development of Hellenistic syncretism.' Hans Dieter Betz, 'On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism', *JTC* 6 (1969), 134–56 (155).

13. See G. Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 8–15.

14. H. D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xlv.

15. 'Inscription 766', in J. B. Frey (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum: Recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du III<sup>e</sup> siècle avant Jésus-Christ au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère* (2 vols; Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Christiana, 1952), II, p. 27.

16. F. F. Bruce, 'Jews and Christians in the Lycus Valley', 7.

17. For information concerning Julia Severa, see: D. D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (SBLDS, 169; Atlanta: SBL, 1999), pp. 146, 287. See also L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 111, 350, 480–81.

18. C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGTC, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 29.