

Himself the form of a bond servant in PHILIPPIANS 2:7, also referenced above. To show that Jesus was bond servant unto His Father note what is said in JOHN 8:29 *And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.* Again in PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 we find those seven humbling steps downward that Jesus took down from heaven to be our redeemer. PHILIPPIANS 2:5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant (bond servant in the Greek) and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* In giving His ear unto God the Father, Jesus demonstrates what it takes to be a full overcomer. All full overcomers too will, like the bond servant, give their ear unto Christ. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Brother Copley also notes that “great prominence is given to a listening ear. If we put our ears up to God’s will and let Him bore them thru with the awl of truth, we will learn the deep secrets of the Lord.” Are you willing to give your ear to Him? Onesimus was, and was sent back to his master Philemon way above the rank of a servant, for Paul called him a profitable brother beloved who ministered even to Paul in the gospel! Do you want to see what a New Testament full overcomer looks like? Study again Onesimus, whose name again means: “profitable or useful.” Certainly Philemon found Onesimus both “profitable” and “useful” as Onesimus encouraged Philemon to finish his race course with joy and rejoicing in the Lord, always looking up to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, *...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God...* HEBREWS 12:2. Thus in the end we find both Onesimus and Philemon encouraged to be in perpetual service to their Master in heaven.

Here is an interesting tidbit I came across in my research written by John McRay in his book *Archaeology And The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, 1991, page 247). “An inscription erected by a freed slave from Laodicea was dedicated to Marcus Sestius Philemon. It will be recalled that a Philemon who owned the slave Onesimus (PHILEMON 1:10) was a leader in the church of Colossae. We cannot identify this Philemon with the slaveholder to whom Paul wrote, but the coincidence of the inscription from the same area is intriguing, especially since it refers to the manumission of a slave.”

Epaphras

In our discussion of Onesimus we briefly introduced Philemon’s pastor, Epaphras who is noted in PHILEMON 1:23 to be Paul’s *...fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus...* right there with Paul as he wrote Philemon concerning Onesimus. {Review page 1167 of these notes.} Epaphras was also there when Paul wrote these statements found in COLOSSIANS. COLOSSIANS 1:7 & 8 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.* . COLOSSIANS 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* We also noted above some hints of the character of Epaphras noted in these verses; a prayer warrior as well as a devoted pastor. As Paul continued to expound his gospel message everyday from his Roman prison, men like Epaphras and Onesimus were like sponges taking in *...the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified...* ACTS 20:32. The beneficiaries of this teaching included those in the church that was in the house of Philemon there at Colosse. Again imagine the day, if it came to pass, when Epaphras and Onesimus were later once again in Philemon’s church, both now ministering in this assembly, and how their very presence blessed this congregation.

Epaphras means “foam covered” expressing figuratively the labour and travail of this traveling teacher and pastor as he was *...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God... ...that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis...* COLOSSIANS 4:12 & 13. Sister Bodie notes that “he was covered with foam, labouring in their behalf,

travailing in Spirit for them that they might measure up to the standard -- *perfect and complete in all the will of God*. Some standard! we say. And yet there are Saints so foolish as to imagine that there is no such overcoming possible. Why such language then? The Spirit does not deal in vain and foolish statements. He does not put before us an attainment if there is no such possibility of reaching it. He does not show us a beautiful prospect and as we reach for it draw it away and leave us discouraged and daunted. No indeed. He does not. Epaphras prayed until he was covered with foam, as it were, that these Colossians might really be corrected and grow up into Christ in all things, thus attaining in their state to the perfection of their standing." {End of quoting Sister Bodie, for now.}

Epaphras is given another distinction in PHILEMON 1:23 as Paul writes: *...Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;...* . The Greek word used here for "fellowprisoner" is sunaichmalotos {soon-aheekh-mal'-o-tos}, (number 4869 in The Strong's Greek Concordance), a cousin in meaning to the Greek word sugkleronomos, which we previous learned to mean "fellowheir" in EPHESIANS 3:6, or "joint-heir" in ROMANS 8:17. {Review page 932 of these notes.} Sunaichmalotos {soon-aheekh-mal'-o-tos} is really two Greek words put together. The Greek word sun {soon} (4862 in the Strong's Greek Concordance) is a primary preposition denoting close union, and in simplest terms means: with or together. Here in PHILEMON 1:23 it is added to the Greek word aichmalotos {aheekh-mal-o-tos'} (number 164 in The Strong's Greek Concordance), meaning: captive. Thus we find sunaichmalotos {soon-aheekh-mal'-o-tos} to mean: together a captive, or fellow captive, thus translated "fellowprisoner" here in PHILEMON 1:23, as well in ROMANS 16:7 and COLOSSIANS 4:10.

Epaphras is further noted to be a "fellowservant" in COLOSSIANS 1:7, and not just a "fellowservant," but "our dear fellowservant." High compliments for sure. The Greek word used here for "fellowservant" is sundoulos {soon'-doo-los}, (number 4889 in The Strong's Greek Concordance). Here the Greek word sun {soon} (with or together) is added to doulos {doo'-los}, (number 1401 in The Strong's Greek Concordance), meaning: servants of the same Divine Lord. Essentially Paul and Epaphras are bond servants already in perpetual service to their Master in heaven as they carry the titles of fellowservants, and fellowprisoners of Jesus Christ.

If Onesimus was a big part of Paul's inspiration to write his epistle to Philemon, then perhaps Epaphras, as well as Onesimus, were both used of God as the Holy Spirit encouraged Paul to write his epistle unto the COLOSSIANS. No doubt they had hours of discussion on what took place in the Colossian assembly, with the majority of the input coming from Epaphras their pastor. There is no indication that Epaphras was set free from being Paul's fellowprisoner when the epistle to the COLOSSIANS was penned, nor is there any mention of Epaphras being more than a fellowservant in COLOSSIANS. We would think that if Epaphras was set free from his Roman imprisonment that Paul would have sent the epistle written unto the COLOSSIANS with him. Yet another fellowservant named Tychicus, along with Onesimus were sent bearing this epistle according to COLOSSIANS 4:7-9, which reads: *All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; 9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.* So the assumption we make is that Epaphras was still a prisoner with Paul when the COLOSSIANS epistle was sent. We are not told any where in scripture why Epaphras was being held prisoner in Rome at this time, or if he ever was released. The Lord knows the answers to these kinds of questions, so we must leave it there. If the Lord tarries we will attempt to show how, when, and why Paul was released from this Roman prison, and perhaps Epaphras too was set free.

Here is some more of what we do know concerning Epaphras. Paul wrote the most about Epaphras in COLOSSIANS. COLOSSIANS 1:7 & 8 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.* . COLOSSIANS 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.*

...16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. A better translation of this last portion of verse 16 reads: "And read the letter I wrote to them." So we see that Paul also wrote an epistle to the Laodicean assembly about which we will comment more shortly.

Here in COLOSSIANS 4:13 and 16 we find that not only was Epaphras a faithful minister, and pastor of Colosse, but also preached to those in Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Many authors, including Sister Bodie note that Epaphras probably founded all three churches of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, called by some the "tri-city" area of the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor. Here is what Sister Bodie wrote concerning their connection with Epaphras. "There is further instruction here in the fact of these other assemblies being mentioned in connection with Epaphras and his labors and zeal. He probably founded them all. The zealous servant of Jehovah is a representative character. He figures such Saints of the end who are of like caliber. They labor and pray for all the people of Jehovah, represented by these three gatherings in these three cities. They were close together. Colossian Saints, "corrected ones," answer to the full overcomers., The church of Laodicea, "just people," represent the lukewarm believers of the end, the worldly minded folk, who, tho' saved, seek their own things and walk in the flesh. The church at Hierapolis figures a third rank in the body of Christ, the 144,000 maybe, who are a mighty people of the end time. Their name signifies "sacred city." It is said that there were some hot springs at Hierapolis, and cold springs at Laodicea, which seems quite a coincidence." {End of quoting Sister Bodie.} (If you have done much studying of Sister Bodie's writings you know that she loved to point out the different types she saw as the Holy Ghost opened her eyes to view them, and some of what we have just read further brings out this gift of hers.)

What we just read of Epaphras in COLOSSIANS 4 causes us to focus a little more attention to the spiritual conditions Sister Bodie just noted in Hierapolis, and especially Laodicea. Obviously Epaphras spent his efforts in prayer remembering these "tri-cities" Saints, which as Paul wrote: *...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis...* COLOSSIANS 4:12 & 13. Obviously also Epaphras was used of the Lord to encourage Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost to write an epistle unto *...them that are in Laodicea,...* which we find that he did in COLOSSIANS 4:16 *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.* Obviously this epistle to the Laodiceans was written about 30 years before the Apostle John's book on REVELATION, where we find more information about them, so why is it that we have no other record of what Paul wrote the church of Laodicea? Let's find out.

Perhaps a brief history of Laodicea is in order. Laodicea is now in ruins, but was located east of Ephesus some forty plus miles, perhaps a few more, and was eighteen miles west of Colosse, and six miles south of Hierapolis, the "tri-cities" referenced above. The physical location of Laodicea was on a flat-topped hill approximately one-half mile square. Laodicea was located at the junction of several important well traveled highway routes. Laodicea was most famous for its black wool industry, and manufactured garments from raven-black wool produced by the sheep of the surrounding area. From this extremely lucrative industry great wealth was achieved by the citizens of Laodicea. They also manufactured Phrygian powder for the eyes, a product which also increased their wealth. (No wonder then that Jesus mentions for them to *"anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see"* in REVELATION 3:18, for they were familiar with such a product). About 60-62 AD (the same time frame Paul was writing them from his Roman prison) Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake, and was rebuilt without the aid of Rome, who offered assistance, which was refused by the Laodiceans who used their own wealth to rebuild the city. History records that the annual contribution of just the Jews of Laodicea for Jerusalem was 20 pounds of gold, which in today's dollars would be around \$448,000.00, (gold being at \$1,400/ounce). Not bad for a small town one-half mile square! Jesus also took notice of the riches of Laodicea in REVELATION 3:17, and their attitude because of their riches was a dangerous one, that attitude being: *...I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.* The Apostle Paul also wrote a warning

to the rich in 1 TIMOTHY 6. In 1 TIMOTHY 6:9 Paul wrote: *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* A few verses later Paul writes again; 1 TIMOTHY 6:17 *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy....* . A wall also was built around the town of Laodicea. An aqueduct was also built through the town bringing the hot water of Hierapolis to Laodicea, however by the time the water got to Laodicea it was lukewarm, just like the conditions described of Laodicea by Jesus in REVELATION 3:16. Because of information received from Epaphras, Paul wrote the COLOSSIANS an epistle, and he wrote the Laodiceans a personal epistle, which we noted above in COLOSSIANS 4:16. We have in New Testament scripture 14 epistles written by the Apostle Paul. Each of these epistles were addressed unto certain churches, or certain individuals. Each of these fourteen epistles were so treasured by these churches, or people, that they had them read by those they came in contact with, and copied them and spread them around to the point that these epistles have become a part of the New Testament scripture; words inspired by the Holy Ghost. Here in COLOSSIANS 4:16 we see that the Apostle Paul intended these epistles of his to be read by different Saints, for he wrote: *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans...* . In Paul's first epistle that we have record of written to the Thessalonians Paul wrote in 1 THESSALONIANS 5:27 --*I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.* So what happened to the epistle written of Paul to the Laodiceans? We don't have a record of it. Why? They had a flippant attitude toward the things of God. They weren't "needy." They were rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, as we just noted in REVELATION 3:17 above: *...I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing...* . Their attitude pictures the church at the end of this church age in which we are still living. Rich in worldly goods, and poverty stricken spiritually speaking. How do you think the Laodiceans received Paul's words of COLOSSIANS 3:1-4, which they were told to read? COLOSSIANS 3:1 *If (Since) ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.* The Laodicean's didn't set their affections on things above, thus they had no desire to treasure Paul's epistles. They didn't even treasure the one letter he specifically wrote to them. How sad. Thus the epistle to those of Laodicea written by Paul has been lost. We see here then in Laodicea a lack of interest in the deeper things of God, for they treated lightly the epistle of the Apostle Paul. Like Jesus says of them twice in REVELATION 3, they were *"...neither cold nor hot..."* to the important things of God. {Study REVELATION 3:15 & 16.} Yet this Laodicean attitude doesn't have to be prominent in your heart. We find the word "Laodicea" exactly five times in scripture. God's infinite GRACE still reaches out to those of Laodicea.

Again Epaphras spent his efforts in prayer remembering these "tri-cities" Saints, which as Paul wrote: *...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis...* COLOSSIANS 4:12 & 13. Epaphras thus displays qualities found in all full overcomers. Certainly he was part of the inspiration for Paul writing his epistle to the COLOSSIANS in the first place. Thank God for devoted men like Epaphras.

We have now examined a little about four of the ten Saints we know Paul had eye to eye contact with during his two years of imprisonment here at Rome. These men already discussed included two fellow Church Apostles, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and two men from Colosse, Onesimus and Epaphras; one an escaped servant, the other a pastor preaching Paul's gospel who is now a fellowprisoner of Paul's here in Rome. All of these men displayed qualities found in a full overcomer, thus we should expect to find them in the Bridal rank of church age Saints.