

# INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

## 1.0 Why Study Ephesians?

- To better understand what the church is
- To promote love and unity among God's people
- To understand how the gospel should affect the way we live
- To understand how the church fits into the redemptive plan of God

## 2.0 Authorship of the Letter?

- "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus" (1:1; cf. 3:1)
- Formerly named Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11)
- A Jew and former Pharisee (Phil. 3:5)
- Highly educated in the law and disciple of the famed Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14)
- Persecuted the church, including overseeing the execution of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 9:1–3; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13).
- Was converted on the Damascus road by a divine revelation of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1–9)
- Received a divine commission to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:2)
- Counted among the apostles, though he considered himself the least of the apostles (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:9)
- Maintained a distinct heart for Israel's salvation despite the nation's widespread rejection of the gospel (Rom. 9:1–5; 10:1)

### **\*\*The authorship debate\*\***

Most liberal scholars reject Pauline authorship and propose that Ephesians was composed by a Pauline disciple who wrote pseudonymously under Paul's name. They base their position on the following reasons:

- Impersonal nature of the letter
- Language & vocabulary
- Greek style
- Similarities to Colossians
- Theology

Most conservative scholars still hold to Pauline authorship. The following are strong evidences in support of the traditional view:

- The author identifies himself as the apostle Paul (Eph. 1:1; 3:1)
- Style and language differences evidence creative flexibility and contextual necessity. It is unreasonable to assume Paul must write in one inflexible style on every occasion.
- Pauline authorship went uncontested for the first 17 centuries of church history

- Ephesians is the earliest-attested book in the NT (attested by Clement of Rome as early as A.D. 96).
- Pseudonymity poses serious issues for inerrancy, despite the insistence that it was a common practice at the time and not associated with any ethical problems.

### 3.0 Recipients of Ephesians

- “to the saints who are in Ephesus and [who are] faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1)
- Composed predominantly of Gentile believers with a smaller cohort of Jewish believers

**\*\*Was Ephesians really written to the Ephesians?\***

However, one of the major textual issues of the letter is the absence of the phrase “in Ephesus” in numerous Greek manuscripts, including some of the earliest and most important textual witnesses (e.g.,  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ ,  $\aleph^*$ , B\*). This has led to debate over the intended destination of the letter.

Alternate theories for the destination of the letter:

1. Letter to the Ephesians = the letter to the Laodiceans (cf. Col. 4:16)
2. Circular letter with blank space for reader to insert current city name

Neither theory is particularly compelling

- No manuscript evidence
- Lacks conformity to other patterns for letters to multiple recipients (cf. Gal. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; Rev. 1:4, 11).
- The attestation for Ephesians destination is early and broad despite textual variants

### 4.0 Historical and Cultural Setting

- Ephesus was a major port city in Asia Minor
- One of the most preserved and researched sites in archaeology
- Had massive cultural and political influence – the largest trading center in Asia Minor west of Taurus
- Roman signage listed travel distances from Ephesus to other cities in the region
- Population ~200,000 at the time of the early church
- Its influence and location made it an important site for the exchange of ideas
- Played a prominent role in Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journeys
- Location of two important cultural and architectural sites:

### Ephesus Theater

- Dates back to 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. B.C.
- Built into slope of Mt. Pion
- Seating capacity of 24,000
- Site where Demetrius protested Paul's ministry and subsequent riot (Acts 19:23–41)



### Temple of Artemis

- Largest building known in antiquity
- One of the seven wonders of the ancient world
- Center of religious and cultural life in Ephesus
- Artemis worship most prominent religion of region
- May have been a center of the study of magic (cf. Acts 19:18–29)



## 5.0 **Setting of the Letter**

The letter to the Ephesians is generally understood to be a product of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (c. A.D. 60–62). Paul's history and interactions with the church in Ephesus forms an important part of understanding the background of the letter and its recipients.

### Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> visit (Autumn A.D. 52)

- Paul initially desired to go to Asia but directed elsewhere by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6)
- Ministered in Philippi (16:11–40), Thessalonica (17:1–9), Barea (17:10–13), and Athens (17:16–34) before finally landing in Corinth (18:1–18)
- Spent 1 ½ years in Corinth
- Arrived in Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila (18:19–21)
- He was well received and asked to stay longer but declined, leaving for Antioch
- Initial ministry in city was reasoning with Jews in the synagogue
- Apollos arrived after Paul left and was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila in the faith before later departing for Corinth (18:24–19:1)

### Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> visit (Autumn A.D. 53–Spring A.D. 56)

- Left Antioch on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, visiting Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)
- Arrived in Ephesus (19:1)
- Encountered disciples of John the Baptist who had not yet received the Holy Spirit; after preaching to them, he baptized them and they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (19:2–7)
- Taught in the synagogues for 3 months (19:8) but withdrew after some unbelievers spoke against the faith (19:9)
- Began teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for 2 years where many Jews and Greeks heard the gospel (19:8–10)
- Performed miracles and exorcisms leading to great fear and faith (19:11–20)
- Ephesian believers were repenting of their sorcery and burning their magic books (19:18–20)
- Demetrius (leader of the silversmith union) incited a mob in the theater, convincing the city that Paul and the Christians were a threat to their business (19:23–41)
- Paul then left Ephesus (perhaps sooner than desired) and traveled to Macedonia and Achaia (19:21; 20:1–2) where he reached both Jews and Gentiles (20:21)

### Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders (Spring A.D. 57)

- Spent the winter of A.D. 56–57 in Corinth where he writes the letter to the Romans (20:3; Rom. 16:23)
- Began his journey to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (May 29, A.D. 57; cf. 19:21; 20:16, 22)
- Traveled to Macedonia, visiting Philippi during Feast of Unleavened Bread (April 9–15, A.D. 57), then to Asia Minor, arriving at Miletus (20:3–16)
- Sent for Ephesian elders where he reviewed his ministry and his intentions and warned them of false teachers before commending them to God (20:17–38)

### Paul's prison correspondence (A.D. 60–62)

- Left Miletus and traveled to Jerusalem where he was briefly imprisoned (21:27–23:22)
- Taken to Caesarea and imprisoned for 2 years (A.D. 57–59)
- Tried and appealed to Caesar and subsequently traveled to Rome (27:1–28:16)
- Imprisoned in Rome for 2 years (A.D. 60–62; Acts 28:30)
- From prison, he writes letters to the churches in Philippi, Colossae, and Ephesus, as well as his letter to Philemon (note the frequent references to his imprisonment: Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 16, 17; Col. 4:3, 10; Phlm. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23).
- Received frequent visitors while in prison including Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), Timothy (Phil. 1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:11; 4:7; Phlm. 1), Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12), Epaphraditus (Phil. 2:19, 25; 4:18; Phlm. 23), Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Phlm. 10), Justus (Col. 4:11), Mark and Aristarchus (Col. 4:10; Phlm. 24), Luke and Demus (Col. 4:14; Phlm. 24)

**\*\*Ephesians was most likely written near the end of Paul's imprisonment in Rome\*\***

- He told Philemon to prepare a guest room for him . . . he anticipated his imminent release from prison (Phlm. 22; cf. Phil. 2:19, 24)
- Tychicus was to report on Paul's situation to both the Ephesian and Colossian churches. Since he was the deliverer of the letter to the Colossians, he most likely delivered the Ephesian letter at that time as well.

## **6.0 Major Themes of the Letter**

- Unity\*
- Love
- The church\*
- The divine plan
- Gentiles
- The Christian walk
- The Trinity

## **7.0 Purpose of the Letter**

Identifying a specific occasion or purpose for the letter to the Ephesians has remained elusive. Paul doesn't appear to be dealing with any specific ethical or doctrinal issues as he does in other letters (e.g., 1 Corinthians, Galatians, etc.). Some notable suggestions for the purpose include:

- To foster love in the church for God and for each other<sup>1</sup>
- To pastor the Ephesian church to understand their position in Christ and how it should affect their conduct<sup>2</sup>
- To show Gentile Christians their place in the plan of God for the church and how they should live in light of it
- To promote unity between Jewish and Gentile believers

## **8.0 Basic Outline of the Letter**

- I. Introduction (1:1–2)
- II. The Calling of the Church (1:3–3:21)
  - A. Praise for God's Spiritual Blessing (1:3–14)
  - B. Prayer for Wisdom and Revelation (1:15–23)
  - C. Past and Present (2:1–22)
    1. The Individual Christian (2:1–10)

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<sup>1</sup> “. . . to promote love for one another that has the love of God and Christ as its basis. . . . Possibly realizing that the Ephesians were starting to forsake their first love, Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to love both God and their fellow saints more deeply” (Hoehner, 106).

<sup>2</sup> “Having addressed a specific problem in Colossians, Paul has remodeled his letter for a more general Christian readership. He writes Ephesians to his mainly Gentile Christian readers . . . with the intention of informing, strengthening, and encouraging them by assuring them of their place within the gracious, saving purpose of God, and urging them to bring their lives into conformity with this divine plan of summing up all things in Christ” (O'Brien, 57).

- 2. The Corporate Church (2:11–22)
- D. Paul’s Ministry (3:1–21)
  - 1. The Mystery (3:1–6)
  - 2. The Ministry (3:7–13)
  - 3. The Request (3:14–21)
- III. The Conduct of the Church (4:1–6:20)
  - A. Walk in Unity (4:1–16)
  - B. Walk in Holiness (4:17–32)
  - C. Walk in Love (5:1–6)
  - D. Walk in Light (5:7–14)
  - E. Walk in Wisdom (5:15–6:9)
  - F. Stand in Strength (6:10–20)
- IV. Conclusion (6:21–24)

## 9.0 Recommended Commentaries on the Book of Ephesians

Boice, James Montgomery. *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997.

Bock, Darrell L. *Ephesians*. TNTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Kent, Homer A., Jr. *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971.

MacArthur, John F. *Ephesians*. MNTC. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

O’Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.