

Ephesians

Ephesians along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are sometimes referred to as the prison epistles because they were each written while Paul was confined or in chains. Each of these letters contains references to this situation (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13; Col. 4:10, 18; Philemon 1, 9, 10).

Whether he was imprisoned once or twice in Rome is debated, though two imprisonments seem to fit the facts better. During the first, Paul was kept in or near the barracks of the Praetorian Guard or in rental quarters at his own expense for two years (Acts 28:30), during which these epistles were written. He anticipated being released (Philem. 22), and following his release he made several trips, wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, was rearrested, wrote 2 Timothy, and was martyred.

Author and Title

As clearly stated in the opening verse of each of the prison epistles, Paul is declared to be the author. That the apostle is the author of Ephesians is strongly supported by both internal and external evidence. Twice, the writer calls himself Paul (1:1; 3:1). Also this epistle is written after Paul's usual manner or pattern with greetings and thanksgiving, a doctrinal section followed by the practical application of that doctrine with concluding personal remarks. As to external evidence, several church fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement of Alexander, and others) either quote from or use language closely resembling that found in Ephesians.

There is some debate as to the title and destination of this epistle. The traditional title is *Pros Ephesious*, "To the Ephesians." Many ancient manuscripts, however omit en Epheso and for this and other reasons, many scholars believe this was an encyclical letter (intended for circulation among several churches).

Several things indicate that Ephesians was a circular letter, a doctrinal treatise in the form of a letter, to the churches in Asia Minor. Some good Greek scribe omit the words "at Ephesus" in 1:1. There is an absence of controversy in this epistle, and it does not deal with problems of particular churches. Since Paul had worked at Ephesus for about three years and since he normally mentioned many friends in the churches to whom he wrote, the absence of personal names in this letter strongly supports the idea of its encyclical character. It was likely sent first to Ephesus by Tychicus (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8) and is probably the same letter that is called "my letter ... from Laodicea" in Col. 4:16.

Date: A.D. 60-61

As previously mentioned, the apostle was a prisoner when he wrote this epistle (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Though scholars differ on whether Paul wrote Ephesians while he was imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 24:27) in A.D. 57-59, or in Rome (28:30) in A.D. 60-62, the evidence favors the Roman imprisonment. As also mentioned, it is believed that

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were also written during the same time period (cf. Phil. 1:7; Col. 4:10; Philemon 9). Because Ephesians gives no hint of Paul's release from prison, as in Philippians (1:19-26) and Philemon (v. 22), many believe that Ephesians was written in the early part of his imprisonment about A.D. 60, while Paul was kept under house guard in his rented quarters (Acts 28:30). After he was released he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, was arrested again, wrote 2 Timothy, and was martyred in Rome.

Theme and Purpose

Theme: Christ has reconciled the whole of creation to himself and to God the Father.

Purpose: No specific purpose is stated and no particular problem or heresy is addressed. Rather, in Ephesians, Paul sets forth the glorious mystery, "the church which is Christ's body," Christ as the head of the Church (1:22, 23), and believers as co-members of one another and blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3; 2:11-22). Clearly, Paul's purpose is to broaden the believer's horizons regarding the limitless *wealth* of his blessings in Christ who is the head of the church, the body of Christ. Out of this, two great purposes emerge in the epistle. The *first* is to set forth something of the wealth of blessings that believers have in Christ, and how, through them, the eternal purposes of God are summed up in the person of Christ, the things in heaven and on earth (1:3-12). The *second* theme flows out of the first, namely, the believer's responsibility to know, grasp, and walk in a manner that is fitting with his heavenly position and calling in Christ (1:18-23; 3:14-21; 4:1).

While not written to be remedial or to correct any specific errors, Paul designed this epistle as a prevention against those problems that so often occur because of a lack of maturity or a failure in grasping and applying what believers have in Christ. Closely associated with this is a short section on the believer's warfare with the onslaughts of Satan (6:10-18). Thus, Paul writes about the believer's *wealth*, *walk*, and *warfare*.

Key Words

In view of the theme or purpose, the key words are "wealth," "walk," and "warfare."

Key Verses

- **1:3.** Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.
- **2:8-10.** For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 2:9 it is not of works, so that no one can boast. 2:10 For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.
- **4:11-13.** It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, 4:13 until we all attain

to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.

- **5:17-18.** For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the will of the Lord is. 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit,

Key Chapters

As with many of Paul’s epistles, picking a key chapter is difficult, but perhaps chapter 6 stands out because of its very important revelation regarding the nature of our warfare with Satan (6:10-18). While we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3), we are nevertheless faced with a formidable enemy for which we need the armor of God. Thus, we must seriously take the exhortation “to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (6:10).

Summary

In chapters 1-3, Paul begins with the joyful truth that every believer has been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will”* (1:4-5). Paul then teaches about the unity of believers. These are the truths and blessings that all believers have in common. He wrote that all Christians are *“adopted as sons through Jesus Christ”* (1:5). All believers are, *“redeemed through His blood”* (1:7), and *“sealed by the Holy Spirit”* (1:13). Paul continues on to clear up one of the most misconceived and/or often ignored subjects even to this day, *“Salvation by Grace”*. He wrote that salvation is by the *“Grace”* of God and that it is through *“Faith”*, and that no one can contribute to salvation, in any way, even with good deeds: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (2:8-9).

In chapters 4-5, Paul encourages the believer to *“walk in a manner worthy of the calling”*. Every believer has a responsibility to live as servants of Jesus Christ. In these chapters, Paul teaches that it takes hard work to be in unity with others, and that we are to be *“imitators of God”* (5:1). He mentions imperative truths and advice for well functioning families, including husbands and wives who upon the oath of marriage become as *“one flesh”* (5:31). Paul explains the concept of a biblical marriage. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (body of believers) and the way that Jesus Christ loved the church is the way that the husband must love his treasured wife, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her”* (5:25). Paul doesn’t end there, he goes on to reinforce that husbands are to love their wives, *“as their own bodies”* and also to love their wives, *“even as himself (vss 28;33)”*.

When a husband learns to love his wife in this way, his wife usually has no issues fulfilling her role and even enjoys it, *“the wife must see to it that she respects her husband”* (vs 33).

In chapter 6, Paul instructs believers how to prepare for spiritual battle by dressing in the “*full armor of God*” (6:11). Prayer is the key weapon of the Christian soldier. He emphasizes his principle with the repeated statement “*stand firm*”.

Commentary

Paul wrote the letter to encourage the personal *faith of the Christians. It gives teaching, prayers and great *praises to God. It is about God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He came to our world in order to put right all the things that had gone wrong. Paul makes clear that Christ is the head of the *church. He will work out his purposes in and by the *church.

It is possible that Paul sent this letter to other *churches in Asia. Then they too could read it.

The letter is in two parts. First is the teaching part. It mainly teaches us about God’s plan for the world. This plan is for all time. It is about the gathering together of all things to Jesus Christ as head. God created men and women. He created them to be his friends. But now they are apart from him. They are his enemies.

There is no unity in a world without Christ. One person is against another person. Nations fight each other. *Jews and *Gentiles are against each other. There is a battle between evil *angels and good *angels. There is a battle between God and *Satan. Most people in the world do not know Christ. This is the reason for all that is wrong. But this is not God’s purpose for the world. There can be unity only when all things come together with Christ as head. Unity should first be inside the *church. Then it should be for all people everywhere. Then it should be with everything that God has made. This unity is for the entire world and for all ages. This is what Paul teaches in the first three chapters.

God’s plan is to fix the unity that is spoiled. The last three chapters teach about how God will use Christians in this plan. Paul teaches that the *church is like the body of Christ. Christians must be like Christ’s hands to do Christ’s work. Christians must be like his mouth to speak for him. They must be like his feet to take his *gospel to all the people in the world. God wants to deal with all the things that divide people. God will do this in and by the *church. Paul speaks about the different ways in which his message will apply. Change will come by the good behaviour of God’s people in the home and in the world.

Next month Philipians