

Book of Ephesians

Title:

The letter is addressed to the church in the city of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor, modern Turkey).

Because the name Ephesus is not mentioned in every early manuscript, some scholars believe the letter was an encyclical, intended to be circulated and read among all the churches in Asia Minor and was simply sent first to believers in Ephesus.

Background and Setting:

Paul, whose original name was Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin and probably was named after Israel's first king and her most prominent Benjamite.

Saul was well educated in what today are called the humanities, but his most extensive training was in rabbinic studies under the famous Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

He became an outstanding rabbi in his own right and was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council at Jerusalem.

He also became probably the most ardent anti-Christian leader in Judaism (Acts 22:4-5).

He passionately hated the followers of Jesus Christ and was on his way to arrest some of them in Damascus when the Lord miraculously and dramatically stopped him in his tracks and drew him to Himself (Acts 9:1-8).

On one of his visits many received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

He fought against great odds here.

The silversmith fought him over the false goddess Diana.

The Jews fought him, and he even speaks of fighting wild beasts.

On one of Paul's visits to Ephesus, he stayed 2 years and 3 months.

Aquila and Priscilla helped Paul here at Ephesus.

In Revelation 1:11, we see that Ephesus was one of the 7 churches mentioned.

Ephesus was visited several times by Paul.

He was very interested in Ephesus.

It is likely that the gospel was first brought to Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila, an exceptionally gifted couple (see Acts 18:26), who were left there by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-19).

Located at the mouth of the Cayster River, on the east side of the Aegean Sea, the city of Ephesus was perhaps best known for its magnificent temple of Artemis, or Diana, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

It was also an important political, educational, and commercial center, ranking with Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch of Pisidia, in southern Asia Minor.

The fledgling church begun by Priscilla and Aquila was later firmly established by Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19), and was pastored by him for some 3 years.

After Paul left, Timothy pastored the congregation for perhaps a year and a half, primarily to counter the false teaching of a few influential men (such as Hymenaeus and Alexander), who were probably elders in the congregation there (1 Tim. 1:3, 20).

Because of those men, the church at Ephesus was plagued by “myths and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4), and by such ascetic and unscriptural ideas as the forbidding of marriage and abstaining from certain foods (1 Tim. 4:3).

Although those false teachers did not rightly understand Scripture, they propounded their ungodly interpretations with confidence (1 Tim. 1:7), which produced in the church harmful “speculation rather than ... the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:4).

Thirty years or so later, Christ gave to the Apostle John a letter for this church indicating its people had left their first love for Him. (Rev. 2:1-7).

After spending three years in the desert of Nabataean Arabia, Paul jointly pastored a church in Antioch of Syria with Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen (Acts 13:1).

During this earlier ministry, Saul came to be known as Paul (Acts 13:9).

The new man took on a new name.

From Antioch the Holy Spirit sent him out with Barnabas to begin the greatest missionary enterprise in the history of the church.

At that point Paul began his work as God’s unique apostle to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:15; and Romans 11:13).

Author and Date:

There is no indication that the authorship of Paul should be in question.

He is indicated as author in the opening salutation (1:1; 3:1).

The letter was written from prison in Rome (see Acts 28:16-31), and then sometime between A.D. 60-62 it is therefore, often referred to as a prison epistle (along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).

It may have been composed almost contemporaneously with Colossians and initially sent with the epistle and Philemon by Tychicus (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8).

Historical:

The first 3 chapters are theological, emphasizing New Testament doctrine, whereas the last 3 chapters are practical and focus on Christian behavior.

Perhaps, above all, this is a letter of encouragement and admonition, written to remind believers of their immeasurable blessings in Jesus Christ; and not only to be thankful for those blessings, but also to live in a manner worthy of them.

Despite, and partly even because of, a Christians' great blessings in Jesus Christ, he is sure to be tempted by Satan to self-satisfaction and complacency.

It was for that reason that, in the last chapter, Paul reminds believers of the full and sufficient spiritual armor supplied to them through God's Word and by His Spirit (6:10-17), and of their need for vigilant and persistent prayer (6:18).

A key theme of the letter is the mystery (meaning a heretofore unrevealed truth), of the church, which is "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body.

And fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6).

A truth completely hidden from the Old Testament saints (compare 3:5, 9).

All believers in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, are equal before the Lord as His children and as citizens of His eternal kingdom, a marvelous truth that only believers of this present age possess.

Paul also speaks of the mystery of the church as the bride of Christ (5:32; compare Rev. 21:9).

A major truth emphasized is that of the church as Christ's present spiritual earthly body.

Also a distinct and formerly unrevealed truth about God's people.

This metaphor depicts the church, not as an organization, but as a living organism composed of mutually related and interdependent parts.

Christ is Head of the body, and the Holy Spirit is its lifeblood, as it were.

The body functions through the faithful use of its members' various spiritual gifts, sovereignly and uniquely bestowed by the Holy Spirit on each believer.

Other major themes include the riches and fullness of blessing to believers.

Paul writes of "the riches of His [God's] grace" (1:7), "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (3:8), and "the riches of His glory" (3:16).

Paul admonishes believers to "be filled up to all the fullness of God" (3:19).

To "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (4:13).

And to "be filled with the Spirit" (5:18).

Their riches in Christ are based on His grace (1:2, 6, 7; 2:7), His peace (1:2), His will (1:5), His pleasure and purpose (1:9), His glory (1:12, 14), His calling and inheritance (1:18), His power and strength (1:19; 6:10), His love (2:4), His workmanship (2:10), His Holy Spirit (3:16), His offering and sacrifice (5:2), and His armor (6:11, 13).

The word "riches" is used 5 times in this letter; "grace" is used 12 times; "glory" 9 times; "fullness" or "filled" 6 times; and the key phrase "in Christ" (or "in Him"), some 11 times.

Ephesus was a thriving city.

It was on the coast of Asia Minor.

The people were a mixture of Greek and Asiatic.

Diana, a false goddess, was worshipped here.

The temple built for Diana had been 220 years in the building, and was thought of as one of the wonders of the world.

All sorts of sorcery were practiced here.

There were many Jews here, as well.

Theme:

A twin theme runs through the letter.

First, believers compose the body of Christ.

Second, they both, Jewish and Gentile Christians, share the same intimacy in God's family.

Both stand before Him on the same common ground of grace.

Jesus has made the Jewish and Gentile believers into "one new man" (2:15).

This letter is a call for the Jewish converts to Christianity and the Christians to be united.

The key to the whole letter is unity in Christ.

Each church had its own little peculiarities.

Paul's special thrust here, is the unity of the believers in Christ, both Jew and Gentile.