

Introduction to Ephesians

NIV Study Bible

AUTHOR, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The author identifies himself as Paul (1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:7,13; 4:1; 6:19–20). Some have taken the absence of the usual personal greetings and the verbal similarity of many parts to Colossians, among other reasons, as grounds for doubting authorship by the apostle Paul. However, this was probably a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the one in Ephesus (see notes on 1:1,15; 6:21–23). Paul may have written it about the same time as Colossians, c. a.d. 60, while he was in prison at Rome (see 3:1;4:1; 6:20; see also chart, p. 2261).

THE CITY OF EPHEBUS

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor that at that time opened into the Cayster River (see map, p. 2429), which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea (see map, p. 2599). Because it was also at an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center. It boasted a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana (Greek *Artemis*); cf. Ac 19:23–31. Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for about three years (see note on Ac 19:10), and the church there apparently flourished for some time, but later needed the warning of Rev 2:1–7.

THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE

Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and grace and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church.

The letter opens with a sequence of statements about God's blessings, which are interspersed with a remarkable variety of expressions drawing attention to God's wisdom, forethought and purpose. Paul emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. The climax of God's purpose, "when the times will have reached their fulfillment," is to bring all things in the universe together under Christ (1:10). It is crucially important that Christians realize this, so in 1:15–23 Paul prays for their understanding (a second prayer occurs in 3:14–21).

Having explained God's great goals for the church, Paul proceeds to show the steps toward their fulfillment. First, God has reconciled individuals to himself as an act of grace (2:1–10). Second, God has reconciled these saved individuals to each other, Christ having broken down the barriers through his own death (2:11–22). But God has done something even beyond this: He has united these reconciled individuals in one body, the church. This is a "mystery" not fully known until it was revealed to Paul (3:1–6). Now Paul is able to state even more clearly what God has intended for the church, namely, that it be the means by which he displays his "manifold wisdom" to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (3:7–13). It is clear through the repetition of "heavenly realms" (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) that Christian existence is not merely on an earthly plane. It receives its meaning and significance from heaven, where Christ is exalted at the right hand of God (1:20).

Nevertheless, that life is lived out on earth, where the practical daily life of the believer continues to work out the purposes of God. The ascended Lord gave “gifts” to the members of his church to enable them to minister to one another and so promote unity and maturity (4:1–16). The unity of the church under the headship of Christ foreshadows the uniting of “all things in heaven and on earth” under Christ (1:10). The new life of purity and mutual deference stands in contrast to the old way of life without Christ (4:17—6:9). Those who are “strong in the Lord” have victory over the evil one in the great spiritual conflict, especially through the power of prayer (6:10–20; see note on 1:3).

OUTLINE

- Greetings (1:1–2)
- The Divine Purpose: The Glory and Headship of Christ (1:3–14)
- Prayer That Christians May Realize God’s Purpose and Power (1:15–23)
- Steps Toward the Fulfillment of God’s Purpose (chs. 2–3)
 - Salvation of Individuals by Grace (2:1–10)
 - Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through the Cross (2:11–18)
 - Uniting of Jew and Gentile in One Household (2:19–22)
 - Revelation of God’s Wisdom through the Church (3:1–13)
 - Prayer for Deeper Experience of God’s Fullness (3:14–21)
- Practical Ways to Fulfill God’s Purpose in the Church (4:1—6:20)
 - Unity (4:1–6)
 - Maturity (4:7–16)
 - Renewal of Personal Life (4:17—5:20)
 - Deference in Personal Relationships (5:21—6:9)
 - 1. Principle (5:21)
 - 2. Husbands and wives (5:22–33)
 - 3. Children and parents (6:1–4)
 - 4. Slaves and masters (6:5–9)
 - Strength in the Spiritual Conflict (6:10–20)
- Conclusion, Final Greetings and Benediction (6:21–24)

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