

A Survey of the Book of Ephesians

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Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Ephesians 1:1, 3:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul. However, there are critics of his authorship because of the likeness to Colossians, but we should consider the similarities between Romans and Galatians. It wasn't unlike Paul to do this. In fact, both Ephesians and Colossians share similar outlines, outlook, and theme. Also, both letters were delivered by Tychicus (**Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-8**).

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, 6:20**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles. Paul wrote it after he wrote the letter to Colosse (see Colossians notes).

Theme:

This letter is about Christian unity and reconciliation in Christ. For this reason some consider Ephesians to be one of Paul's most moving letters. No book in the Bible exalts Christ and the church more than the book of Ephesians (**Ephesians 3:21**). This is important because religiously speaking the city was more diverse in religion than any other city in the Empire (emperor worship, Greek and Roman temples, etc.). The Jews that lived in Ephesus maintained a large synagogue, but were heavily influenced by pagans. In his letter, Paul calls them "Jewish exorcists."

Paul may have helped in the establishment of the church in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:20-21**). He spent three months there (**Acts 19:8-9**), but Aquila and Pricilla stayed a while longer and converted Apollos (**Acts 18:24-26**), a young man from Alexandria (Egypt). Paul returned to Ephesus (**Acts 19:1-7**) to find 12 other God-fearers like Apollos. He teaches them and they are baptized. Paul decided to stay an additional three months to teach in the synagogue (**Acts 19:8-9**). There is little doubt that Paul's work brought hardship upon himself and the church in that community. Eventually he not was welcome in the synagogue. He preformed many miracles and conducted himself admirably, but the people in this area were critical of those of "the Way" and persecuted the entire community of believers.

Paul probably rented a lecture hall named after Tyrannus (Tyrant - students gave the nickname) or was a part of the university lifestyle while in Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**). Early writings tell us he lectured daily from 11 AM to 4 PM (for two years). It was also at this time that Paul supervised many other missionaries, works, and ministries from this location. He worked with Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphras. He was overseeing the work in Laodicea and Colosse. **Acts 19:10** says, "*All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord*" (Jews/Greeks). He hopes his letter will keep the church together and united.

Audience:

The title and the first verse show us that the intended audience is the church in Ephesus. However, this has been the source of some debate as it may have been intended for a universal audience. There is a close connection between Ephesians and Colossians as we have already noted. Any good reference Bible will show the close relationship between these two books. It is interesting to note that the words “in Ephesus” (**Ephesians 1:1**) are missing in our three oldest existing copies of this letter (Chester Beatty papyrus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus). This accounts for the different ways the first verse is translated (KJV and RSV). This omission allows scholars to speculate on “to whom” the letter was written. The title, “to the Ephesians” may not have been part of the original letter, as is true of many of the titles of New Testament books, but it is clear who was intended to read the book.

The audience, whether general or specific, need to know God’s seven-fold plan for unity that is found in this book (**Ephesians 4:1-7**). Ephesus may have been a very successful and thriving congregation, with many significant leaders (Paul, John, Timothy, etc.) but it is not enough for them to be without criticism. There is no “perfect” church.

No doubt Paul faced some adversity during the latter years of his ministry in Ephesus which led them to respect him even more. One significant event was when he became embroiled in a dispute with artisans, whose livelihood depended on selling the statuettes of Artemis in the Temple of Artemis (**Acts 19:23-41**). This story would have been one of the famous tales of the apostle Paul. During his time in this city he also wrote I Corinthians (see I Corinthians notes) which helped to keep the church on the spiritual map.

There may be no other church with so much emphasis in the New Testament, with maybe the exception of Antioch and Jerusalem. John's ministry in Ephesus was also successful. In fact, it was associated with John more than Paul (see John, I-III John, and Revelation notes). Timothy also served the congregation as a minister and a bishop/elder (traditionally Onesimus too). Church history tells us that Timothy served as a shepherd in Ephesus for about 15 years along with John (see Philemon, I & II Timothy notes).

There are also several women had successful ministries in the city of Ephesus. Pricilla and her husband Aquila are well-known for their work in this city. Jesus' mother Mary lived here and worshipped with this congregation. History also tells us that Mary Magedlene was a teacher here in Ephesus.

Key Verses:

Ephesians 1:3, 2:19-22, 3:5, 3:20-21, 4:1-6, 4:11-16, 4:30, 5:15, 5:22-23, 6:10-20

Outline:

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| I. Our Will in Christ (1) | III. Our Walk in Christ (4) |
| II. Our Wealth in Christ (2) | IV. Our Ways in Christ (5) |
| III. Our Work in Christ (3) | V. Our Warfare in Christ (6) |

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