

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

- I. **Title and authorship:** "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus"
 - A. Most modern translations note that many early manuscripts omit "in Ephesus"
 - i. Many scholars assume this letter was a circuit letter, likely circulated between the Seven Churches in Asia featured in Revelation (as well as Colossae)
 - B. Prison Epistle –Ephesians is one of the 'Prison Epistles', assumed to be written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome
 - i. Epistle –transliteration from the Greek *epistole*, which simply means 'letter'
 - C. The authorship of Paul is disputed based on its doctrinal and structural similarities to Colossians (which is also disputed)
 - i. Fundamental theology (e.g. emphasis of grace, over-arching attitude of humility, desire for unity amongst believers) and tone are consistent with Paul's other letters
 - a. However, many words and phrases are unique to Ephesians (or are copied from Colossians)
 - ii. Many scholars believe Paul dictated most of his letters to a 'scribe' (Romans 16:2, c.f. 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:18, Philemon 19, 2 Thessalonians 3:17)
 - a. This may have been due to Paul's imprisonment or due to either difficulty writing or poor eyesight (many assume this was the "thorn in the flesh" Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 12:7, note his comment in Galatians 6:11)
- II. **Date and circumstances:**
 - A. The consensus of most scholars is that Ephesians was written about 60 AD (later if alternate authorship is accepted)
 - B. Unlike most of Paul's other letters, Ephesians is not written to address any specific issue; rather it addresses the role/purpose of believers in the church relative to the culture around them
 - C. Paul "started" the church in Ephesus around 53 AD and stayed there almost three years preaching and training up leaders/elders (see notes on Acts below)
 - D. Ephesus was the largest city in Asia (now Turkey) and a major cultural center
 - i. Host of the Pan-Ionian games, second in size to the Greek Olympics
 - ii. Center of worship to Artemis; temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
 - iii. Had an active Synagogue and an early 'Christian' group (see notes on Acts below)
 - E. Ephesus is the only church that is described in Acts, received Pauline Epistles (including 1 & 2 Timothy), and addressed in Revelation
 - i. Spans approximately 40 years and multiple leaders: Priscilla & Aquila, Apollos, Paul, unnamed elders, Timothy... John...
 - ii. Also referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and 16:7-9; it is likely 1 Corinthians was written while Paul was in Ephesus
- III. **Ephesus in Acts**
 - A. Paul first visited Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:19 on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth

- i. Apollos began teaching about Jesus –“he had been instructed in the way of the Lord” but he “knew only the baptism of John” (18:25)
 - ii. Apollos then studied under Priscilla and Aquila
 - B. Paul returned in Acts 19:1 and stayed through 20:1
 - i. Encountered a group of “disciples” who only knew the baptism of John for repentance (19:3-4)
 - ii. First taught in the synagogue for three months, later moved to a lecture hall where he continued teaching for two years (19:8-10)
 - C. The Holy Spirit was active in Ephesus
 - i. The first disciples, after being rebaptized, spoke in tongues and prophesied (19:6)
 - ii. There was healing of the sick and evil spirits driven out (19:11-12)
 - iii. Seven sons of Sceva tried to capitalize on Paul’s (and Jesus’) popularity (19:13-16)
 - D. The “Way” was opposed
 - i. Believers gave up their idol worship and their guilds, impacting local businesses (19:19, 23-41)
 - ii. Yet Paul had some influence with local officials (19:31)
 - E. Paul didn’t return but met with the Ephesian elders in 20:17-38
 - i. Ministry is to both Jews and Greeks and is hands-on
 - ii. Holy Spirit is the guide
 - iii. Paul only wants to “finish the race”
 - iv. Instructed leadership
 - v. Warned against false teaching
 - vi. Emphasized grace

IV. Theological themes:

- A. Ecclesiology –study of the church
 - i. Church = *ekklēsia*, gathering of people for a public purpose
- B. Missiology –study of missionary efforts
 - i. Mission = ‘sent’; apostles = *apóstolos*, ‘sent ones’
 - ii. Both foreign ‘missions’ and local ‘missional’
 - iii. *Missio Dei* –“the mission of God”
- C. Identity of believers
 - i. Saints, the church, adopted, chosen, called
 - ii. “in Christ”, “in him” –repeated 10 times in first 13 verses
- D. The church as a continuation of Israel
 - i. Identification as saints, discussion of inheritance
- E. Election
 - i. “chose us...before the creation of the word” (1:4)
 - ii. “a plan for the fullness of time” (1:10, ESV)
- F. Calling
 - i. Holiness, blameless, hope, glory