

# New Testament Survey

## The Book of Ephesians

### I. Attestation and Authorship<sup>1</sup>

A. Lewis writes, “None of the epistles which are ascribed to St. Paul have a stronger chain of evidence to their early and continued use than that which we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians.

#### B. External

1. Polycarp refers to 4:26 in his *Epistle to the Philippians* (chapter 12).
2. Hermas uses 4:30 in his *Commandment Tenth* (chapters 1 and 2).
3. Clement of Alexandria quotes from 5:21-25 in *Stromata* (IV.viii).
4. Tertullian writes, “we have it on the true tradition of the Church, that the epistle was sent to the Ephesians, not to the Laodiceans.”
5. Irenaeus quotes 5:30 in his work *Against Heresies* (V.22.3).
6. Ephesians is recognized both by the heretic Marcion, and the Muratorian canon.

#### C. Internal

1. The writer twice calls himself Paul (1:1, 3:1).
2. The language and structure of the book is Pauline.
3. Ephesians and Colossians are very much alike. In fact, of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 78 are also found in Colossians. This is most likely true because Paul wrote both Ephesians and Colossians at nearly the same time.

#### D. Critical Objections

1. Ephesians has 42 words unique to itself alone.
2. Usual Pauline words are omitted.
3. Words like mystery, stewardship, and possession are used with new meanings.
4. A personal greeting is absent in the last chapter.
5. The book is similar to Colossians and 1 Peter.

### II. Background and Destination

A. Written to the church at Ephesus - Ephesians 1:1.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 239-240.

1. Historical Support
    - a. The Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen speak of this epistle as the Epistle to the Ephesians.
    - b. All uncial and miniscule manuscripts with the exception of three include the phrase “in Ephesus”.
    - c. All ancient translations include “in Ephesus.”
  2. Problems
    - a. The three manuscripts that omit “in Ephesus” are Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and 67<sup>2</sup>.
    - b. Many say that when these three manuscripts agree, we are almost certain to have the original text.
    - c. Internal evidence suggests that this was a circular letter:
      - 1). There are no personal greetings to a church in which Paul spent three years of ministry.
      - 2). There are no words of familiarity or endearment in the letter.
      - 3). It would be unlikely for Paul to have heard of the Ephesians only by report (1:15, 4:21) or for them to have known him only by hearsay (3:2) if he had spent three years with them.
      - 4). The benediction (6:23-24) is given in the third person, not second person as all of Paul’s other Epistles.
      - 5). The letter is very formal and impersonal. This is unlikely if it was a letter sent to Ephesus where Paul no doubt had many personal and close friends.
  3. Conclusion
    - a. It is highly possible that this was originally a circular letter, sent to the churches of Asia Minor.
    - b. The copy that we have is the one found for Ephesus.
    - c. In any case, whether it was originally sent to Ephesus or whether it is just a circular letter, the content and interpretation of the letter remains unchanged.
- B. The Church at Ephesus.
1. Paul started the church at Ephesus during his second missionary journey on the way back to Palestine - Acts 18:19-21.
  2. After Paul’s departure, Priscilla and Aquila carried on the work - Acts 18:20-19:1.

---

<sup>2</sup> Thiessen, pp. 242-244.

3. On Paul's third missionary journey, he spent three years in Ephesus, the longest of any stay - Acts 19:1-20:1.
4. Paul had a significant ministry in the city, causing many to give up their magical arts (Acts 19:11-19), and impacting the temple of Diana (Acts 19:23-41).
5. After visiting Macedonia, Paul returns to Miletus where he meets the Ephesian elders before returning to Jerusalem - Acts 20:17-38.
6. Later, after Paul is released from his first Roman imprisonment, he leaves Timothy in Ephesus in order to straighten out some problems - 1 Timothy 1:3.
7. Around A.D. 90, the Apostle John writes to the church at Ephesus warning them not to forsake their first love - Revelation 2:1-7.

### III. Occasion and Date

- A. Written approximately A.D. 60 from Rome during Paul's first imprisonment.
  1. Paul is in bonds (3:1, 4:1, 6:20).
  2. Tychicus is the bearer of this letter (6:21-22) and also of the letters of Colossians (Colossians 4:7-9) and Philemon.
  3. The doctrinal content of Ephesians and Colossians is very similar.
- B. Paul wanted to clearly define the doctrine of the Church in order to prevent dangerous heresies from creeping in. He therefore writes Colossians and Ephesians to do this.

### IV. Purpose and Plan<sup>3</sup>

- A. To present the church as the body of Christ.
- B. To explain the fact that in the church both Jew and Gentile are one.
- C. To explain the mystery of the Church.

### V. A Basic Outline

- A. Salutation - 1:1-2.
- B. The Doctrinal Section
  1. The Believers Blessings in Christ - 1:3-14.
  2. The Prayer for Illumination - 1:15-23.
  3. The Power of God Manifested in our Salvation - 2:1-10.
  4. The Unification of Jew and Gentile in Christ - 2:11-22.
  5. The Revelation and Proclamation of this Union of Jew and Gentile - 3:1-9.

---

<sup>3</sup> Thiessen, pp. 245-246.

6. The Meaning of the Church to the Principalities in the Heavens - 3:10-13.
7. The Prayer for the Realization of all this in his Readers - 3:14-21.

C. The Practical Section

1. Admonitions to Unity in Life and Doctrine - 4:1-6.
2. Instructions Concerning the Nature and Purpose of Christ's Gifts to the Church - 4:7-16.
3. Exhortations to Forsake the Old Life and Turn to the New - 4:17-5:21.
4. Application of these Principles to Various Special Relationships - 5:22-6:9.
5. Admonitions to Put on the Whole Armor of God - 6:10-20.
6. Explanation of the Mission of Tychicus - 6:21-22.

D. Benediction - 6:23-24.

VI. Chapters To Remember

Ephesians 1	Chosen By God
Ephesians 2	The Unity of the Church
Ephesians 3	The Mystery of the Church Revealed
Ephesians 4	The Worthy Walk
Ephesians 5	Christian Economics
Ephesians 6	Spiritual Warfare

VII. Points and Peculiarities

1. The longest sentence in the Bible is Ephesians 1:3-11.
2. Ephesians deals with the Church, the Body of Christ, Colossians deals with Christ, the Head of the Church.
3. Ephesians gives us a clear picture of spiritual warfare.
4. Ephesians gives us a fuller understanding of the unity of the Church.

VIII. A Closer Look

A. Ephesians 1

1. Chosen by God - Ephesians 1:3-11.
2. Paul's Prayer for Illumination - Ephesians 1:15-23.

B. Ephesians 2

1. Spiritual Regeneration - Ephesians 2:1-10.
  2. The Unity of the Church - Ephesians 2:11-22.
- C. Ephesians 3
1. Paul's Commission - Ephesians 3:1-7.
  2. Prayer for Inner Growth - Ephesians 3:14-21.
- D. Ephesians 4
1. Walk Worthy - Ephesians 4:1-2.
  2. The Unity of the Body - Ephesians 4:3-13.
  3. Grow Up - Ephesians 4:14-32.
- E. Ephesians 5
1. Walk in Love and Light - Ephesians 5:1-21.
  2. Christian Economics - Ephesians 5:22-33.
- F. Ephesians 6
1. Christians Economics Continued - Ephesians 6:1-9.
  2. Spiritual Warfare - Ephesians 6:10-20.