

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE BOOK
OF EPHESIANS

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To my wife and daughters who have been supportive and a source of encouragement in the ministry of the gospel

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith..." Ephesians 2:8

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EPHESIANS

I. Background Information on Ephesians

A. Authorship – Written by the Apostle Paul

1. Support for Pauline Authorship

a. External Evidence - The 1st Century Church Fathers -Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Polycarp- all acknowledged not only the book of Ephesians as scripture, but also Paul as the author of the book. Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna (69-135), is also the first church father to call Ephesians scripture.

b. The Gnostic writings - two primary works from the secular side acknowledge Paul as the author. "Exegesis of the Soul" written around 200 A.D., quotes from Ephesians 6:12 and attributes authorship to the Apostle Paul. The "Hypostasis of the Archons," written sometime in the third century, cites the same verse and attributes the book of Ephesians to Paul.

c. Internal Evidence - perhaps the greatest evidence for Pauline authorship comes from the letter of Ephesians. Two times in the letter the apostle makes reference to himself (Eph. 1:1; 3:1). The third reference is found in Ephesians 4:1. The reference found here is in the first person tense and is an indirect reference to the apostle.

2. Conclusion – The above information leads to the unanimous conclusion that the Apostle Paul wrote the letter known as Ephesians. While some more liberal scholars reject Pauline authorship, I find that there are no solid arguments that can be made to support their claim.

B. The Historical Setting of Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

1. Paul's First Visit to Ephesus (Autumn 52) - this visit took place on Paul's second missionary journey.

a. (Acts 18:1-18) Paul arrives in Corinth. Upon his arrival at Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla. Paul's ministry at Corinth lasted for about one and half years. While at Corinth, Paul devoted most of his time to preaching in the synagogue and trying to win his fellow Jews to faith in Christ.

b. (Acts 18:19) Paul arrives in Ephesus accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. Not much is known about Paul's time in Ephesus on this visit. The only thing known for sure is that he spent time in the Synagogue trying to reason with his Jewish countrymen. Paul left Ephesus and headed to Antioch, but he left Aquila and Priscilla behind. When Paul

had left, Apollos arrived in Ephesus (Acts 18:24). Apollos, a highly educated man, was taught the way of God by Aquila and Priscilla.

2. Paul's Second Visit to Ephesus (autumn 53-Spring 56) - this visit took place on Paul's third missionary journey.

a. (Acts 18:23) in the spring of 53, Paul departed Antioch and headed toward the churches in Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the believers. After a brief stay in Galatia and Phrygia, Paul left for Ephesus for a second visit (Acts 19:1).

b. (Acts 19:1-20) Paul arrives in Ephesus (Acts 19:1). For two years Paul had a powerful ministry in Ephesus. Upon his arrival, 12 men received Christ and were baptized. These men immediately began speaking in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:2-7). Paul preached the gospel and God performed many miracles while in the city. Demons were cast out of people and the people burned \$35,000 (50,000 pieces of silver) worth of magic books (Acts 19:8-20).

c. (Acts 19:23-41) Unfortunately, Paul's ministry was not completely smooth. Opposition to Paul's ministry led to a riot in Ephesus. Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines to god's, called together local business men in order to lead a riot against Christianity in hopes of recovering some of their business. With a record number of people turning to Christ, the pagan god market saw a significant decline in sales. 1Corinthians 16:8 makes clear that Paul planned on staying in Ephesus until Pentecost (June 11, 56), but the riots in Ephesus forced the apostle to leave and head for Macedonia.

3. Paul meets with the Ephesians Elders at Miletus (fall of 56)

a. (Acts 20:2-3) Paul arrived in Greece in the fall of 56 and spent 3 winter months there.

b. (Acts 20:3-5) However, while in Greece, the Jews began to plot against him and he decided to abandon the trip to Syria. Instead, Paul chose to head back through Macedonia.

c. (Acts 20:5-6) While Paul's companions set sail for Troas, he traveled to Philippi and attended the Feast of the Unleavened Bread festival (April 9-16, 57). After five full days in Philippi, Paul set sail to join his fellow workers in Troas.

d. (Acts 20:7-12) While at Troas, Paul spoke with the people late into the night. During

the evening conversation, Eutychus fell from a third story window and died on impact. However, Paul raised him from the dead.

e. (Acts 20:13-16) After this event, Paul set sail for Assos and then on to Mitylene. After spending one day in Mitylene, Paul traveled through Kios, Samos and finally arrived at Miletus.

f. (Acts 20:17-18a) At this point, the apostle sent for the leaders at Ephesus and they came to meet with him. At the meeting, Paul tells these leaders that he will not see them again and challenges the leaders to watch over the flock (Acts 20:28).

4. Paul's Correspondence with Ephesus from Prison

a. (Acts 21:27-23:22) After Paul left Miletus, he journeyed to Jerusalem. Paul caused a stir in Jerusalem and was thrown into prison for a brief period. Shortly after his Jerusalem imprisonment, Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years (57-59). While in prison at Caesarea, Paul made an appeal to Caesar (Acts 23:23-26:32). Consequently, Paul was transferred to Rome at this point and was imprisoned for 2 years (Acts 27:1-28:16).

b. Conclusion – It is my belief that it was from this Roman imprisonment (60-62) that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesian church. However, some conservative scholars believe that Paul wrote the letter from Caesarea. However, the events and time frame just discussed fit better with the Roman writing than with a Caesarean writing. In either case, Paul wrote the letter from prison.

C. The Literary Relationship between Ephesians and Colossians

1. The Connection- there is a close connection between Ephesians and Colossians.

a. The books of Colossians and Ephesians have been referred to by many theologians as the "Twin Epistles."

b. But why? The literary similarities between the two books are remarkable. There are 1,570 words in Colossians and 2,411 words in Ephesians. 34% of the words found in Colossians are found in Ephesians. 26.5% of the words used in Ephesians are found in Colossians. This would further seem to suggest, as I have believed, that not only did Paul write the book of Colossians, but that he wrote Colossians before writing the book of Ephesians. The below chart will help underline and point out these similarities.

2. Comparison of the Two Epistles – no other New Testament books have so many words in common.

<u>Colossians</u>	<u>Parallel Material</u>	<u>Ephesians</u>
1:1-2	Salutation/Greeting	1:1-2
1:21-23	Alienation to reconciliation	2:11-22
1:24-2:3	Paul's suffering and ministry of the mystery	3:1-13
3:5-11	Old and New life contrasted	4:17-32
3:12-15	Exhortation to love	5:1-6
3:16-17	Exhortation to walk wisely	5:15-21
3:18-4:1	Household	5:22-6:9
4:2-4	Exhortation to prayer	6:18-20
4:7-9	Commendation of Tychicus	6:21-22

II. The City of Ephesus

A. The Location of Ephesus

1. Ephesus is located about four miles inland from the Aegean Sea on the west coast of modern day Turkey.

a. The city was originally located on the edge of the Aegean Sea as far back as 1000 B.C.

b. But, years of silting moved its location further inland. By the Apostle Paul's time, the city was no longer a major trade port. The reason for this was that bigger ship could no longer make it through the narrow opening of the Cayster River.

c. The map below is the location of Ephesus at the time Paul traveled through the region.

2. Map of Ephesus (See a map of Paul's travel on page 11)

B. A Brief History (A Mystical History) - Read Ephesians 6:10-12 before reading the below.

1. The Founding of the City

a. According to legend, the founders consulted an oracle to help decide the location of the city.

b. The Oracle told the men that the city should be built where a fish and a wild boar directed them to build.

c. As legend has it, the men came across some fishermen who were cooking fish on an

open fire. All of a sudden, a live fish jumped out of the fire with a hot coal in its mouth. The hot coal landed on some straw which ignited some brush that housed a wild boar. The boar became frightened and ran.

d. The fishermen pursued and killed the boar where the temple of Athena would later be built. An effigy of a wild boar stood beside the main street as late as A.D. 400.

2. Mythological Wars

a. Around 1000 B.C., Ephesus was inhabited by Amazon women who were great warriors.

b. However, a fierce battle took place and the Amazons were driven from the area by the Ionians. The Ionians were led by the great King Androclus. Upon winning the battle, King Androclus made an arrangement with the local inhabitants at the temple of the great Anatolian (Mother-goddess).

c. Thus, a new city was founded and the Greeks adopted the goddess under the name of their own goddess Artemis.

d. Conclusion – there are many other stories throughout the history of Ephesus. I simply wanted to give you a taste for the history and the mythology of the city. Read the following passages and you will see how Paul played on the mythology of the culture (Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 6, 9, 5:32; 6:19).

C. Archeology

1. General – Ephesus had many of the normal type of structures that were associated with the region. Archeologists have unearthed Roman bath houses, several gymnasiums, a sports complex for gladiators and wild animals, civic and commercial agoras.

2. The Theater

a. Ephesus had a large amphitheater. The theater could hold up to 24,000 people. The theater was first built in the 2nd century B.C.

b. The theater was enlarged during the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54). Under the reign of Nero (A.D. 56-68) a two story stage was built. Nero was the emperor at the time of Paul and was the most feared emperor among the Christian community. Nero executed more Christians than any other emperor in history. The theater was finally completed under the reign of Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117).

c. The theater measured 475ft wide by 98ft high. The orchestra had its own section

which measured 37ft by 80ft. The stage where the actors performed was 82ft by 131ft.

d. Demetrius, the silversmith, lead a protest against Paul in this theater

(Acts 19:23-41).

3. The Temple of Artemis

a. The temple was nearly destroyed by fire around 356 B.C. Much like our Statue of Liberty, the temple had many renovations and additions.

b. The temple measured 225ft by 425ft and had 127 columns each at 60ft high by 6ft in diameter. The actual temple was slightly larger than our pro football field today.

c. The temple was constructed of marble, Cyprus wood and had cedar roof beams. The temple was the largest structure in the region and was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

d. The entire culture and trade of Ephesus revolved around the temple and the worship of Artemis. Given the historical influence of god and goddess worship, I am surprised that Christianity even took root in the region at all. This was obviously the hand of God!

D. Religion

1. Magic – There is no doubt that the city of Ephesus attracted large number of magicians.

a. Acts 19:18-19 makes it clear that magic and the mystical element was deeply rooted in the culture. Some scholars have suggested that Ephesus was home of the school of magic.

b. However, there is no solid evidence to support that theory.

Regardless, magic did have a grip on society in Ephesus.

2. Emperor Worship- The Caesar was considered to be God during the first century.

a. In A.D. 26, eleven cities throughout Asia Minor competed to become the Temple Warden for the worship of Caesar. However, Ephesus was passed over because of the temple of Artemis.

b. While emperor worship was in Ephesus, it was the smallest of the religious orders.

3. The Cult of Artemis - The worship of Artemis was the largest religious group in Ephesus.

a. Artemis was considered to be a goddess and supposedly fell from heaven (Acts 19:35). An inscription dated around A.D. 60 states that "The goddess Artemis rules our city." Archeologists have unearthed numerous statues of her. The lower half of the statue mostly depicted animals such as bulls, lions and sphinxes. The upper half of the statue normally had three rows of breast, grapes and nuts. These figures represented creation and life.

b. Artemis was considered the wife of Ephesus and the people believed she protected them like a mother. There were two festivals that were dedicated to her – Artemision in March, Thargelion in May. There would be athletic contests and theatrical performances held at the amphitheater in honor of the goddess Artemis.

E. Political and Commercial Influences

1. Political – The Proconsul

a. This powerful legal group resided in Ephesus (Acts 19:38). The Proconsul had ultimate control over all legal aspects of the law and local regulations.

b. Members of the Proconsul were elected by the citizens yearly. There is even the mention of the town clerk/mayor in Acts 19:35. The town clerk was responsible to copy, register, preserve and publish all official documents. However, from the above mentioned text, it is clear that the town clerk/mayor was also invested with authority.

2. Commercial

a. It is a known fact that Ephesus was one of the largest trade centers in Asia Minor. Although larger ships could not pass through the Cayster River, smaller ships could make it through.

b. Also, commerce thrived in the city because of the "Royal Road." This road was built by the Persians under the reign of Darius (522-486 B.C.). This road was the central link between east and west Asia Minor. It was similar to our interstate system today.

III. The Designation and Theology of Ephesians

A. The Designation of Ephesians

1. Circular Letter

a. Some biblical scholars believe that the letter was intended to be a circular letter. By circular I mean that it was intended for all the churches throughout Asia Minor.

b. Their argument falls along two major fronts. First, these scholars argue that the

words "in Ephesus" are missing from the original manuscripts. Second, they argue that if Paul would have meant it for an Ephesian audience, then he would have written the letter in a more personal manner.

2. An Ephesian Audience

a. I would like to share three reasons why I believe the letter was intended for an Ephesian audience. First, Paul met with the Ephesian leadership in Miletus shortly before his arrest. I believe shortly after this meeting that Paul wrote the letter. Paul's desire was to give the leadership and the church a solid theological foundation to combat the culture in which the church existed.

b. Second, some early manuscripts do contain the words ἐν Ἐφεσῶς ("in Ephesus"). Not only this, but many of the 151 Century church fathers supported the view that the letter was written to the church in Ephesus. This view is further supported by many biblical translations: NIV, NRSV, NEB, NASB, ASV, AN, NLT.

c. Third, the impersonal nature of the letter is not solid grounds for dismissing an Ephesian designation. So which view is correct? I believe that the Ephesian designation is the most obvious. However, we must keep in mind that the letter is certainly circular for us today. This powerful letter has been preached and taught throughout the centuries to thousands of churches and people of God.

B. Theology of Ephesians – This book has been called the "Crown" of Paul's teaching. The reason for this is that every major theological theme/doctrine found in Ephesians is also found in Paul's other writings.

1. The Trinity

a. The "Three in one person" language is found in eight different passages (1:4-14, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:4-5, 14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20) and takes up a total of twenty-six verses.

b. The Trinity is the foundation for all spiritual blessings. In Paul's theology, the Trinity is actively engaged in our salvation, redemption and our Christian life.

c. Each person of the Trinity is represented: God the Father provides salvation to all, God the Son redeems believers and God the Holy Spirit provides the power for Christian living.

2. The Fatherhood of God

a. Paul's speaks of the fatherhood of God in eight passages in the book (1:2-3, 17; 2:18;

3:14-15; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23). For the most part, Paul uses this term in connection with the Trinitarian language found above.

b. Paul describes God in three distinct ways - God is the Father of glory, the Father of our Lord and Savior and the Father of all revelation.

c. Thus, one cannot help but notice the supremacy of God over all creation and salvation. I believe Paul established this point to refute the belief that Artemis was the god of creation and giver of life.

3. Christology

a. With the exception of the book of Romans, "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus" is a combination used more times in Ephesians than all of Paul's other letters.

b. Unlike the goddess Artemis, Jesus Christ is the Son that came from the Father in heaven. I believe Paul was attempting to establish the Sonship and divinity of Christ in light of the pagan culture in which the church found itself.

c. Furthermore, God has subjected everything under the Lordship of Christ, both in the future (1:10) and the present life (1:22) which includes the church (1:23).

4. The Holy Spirit

a. The teaching about the activity of the Holy Spirit is called Pneumatology. The word πνεῦμα means "spirit breathed" and thus, refers to the living presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people.

b. As part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is a fulfillment of the Prophet Joel (Joel 2:28). The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and is the deposit guaranteeing our future glory (1:14).

c. The Holy Spirit, like God the Father, has emotions (4:30). Lastly, the Holy Spirit provides spiritual wisdom to understand God (1:17-18) and reveals to the believer the dangers of the spiritual realm (6:10-12).

d. Therefore, when taken as a whole, we see that the role of the Trinity is prominent throughout the letter.

5. The Church

a. The Greek word ἐκκλησία (or "Church") is mentioned nine times throughout the letter and refers to the universal church (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-25, 29, and 32).

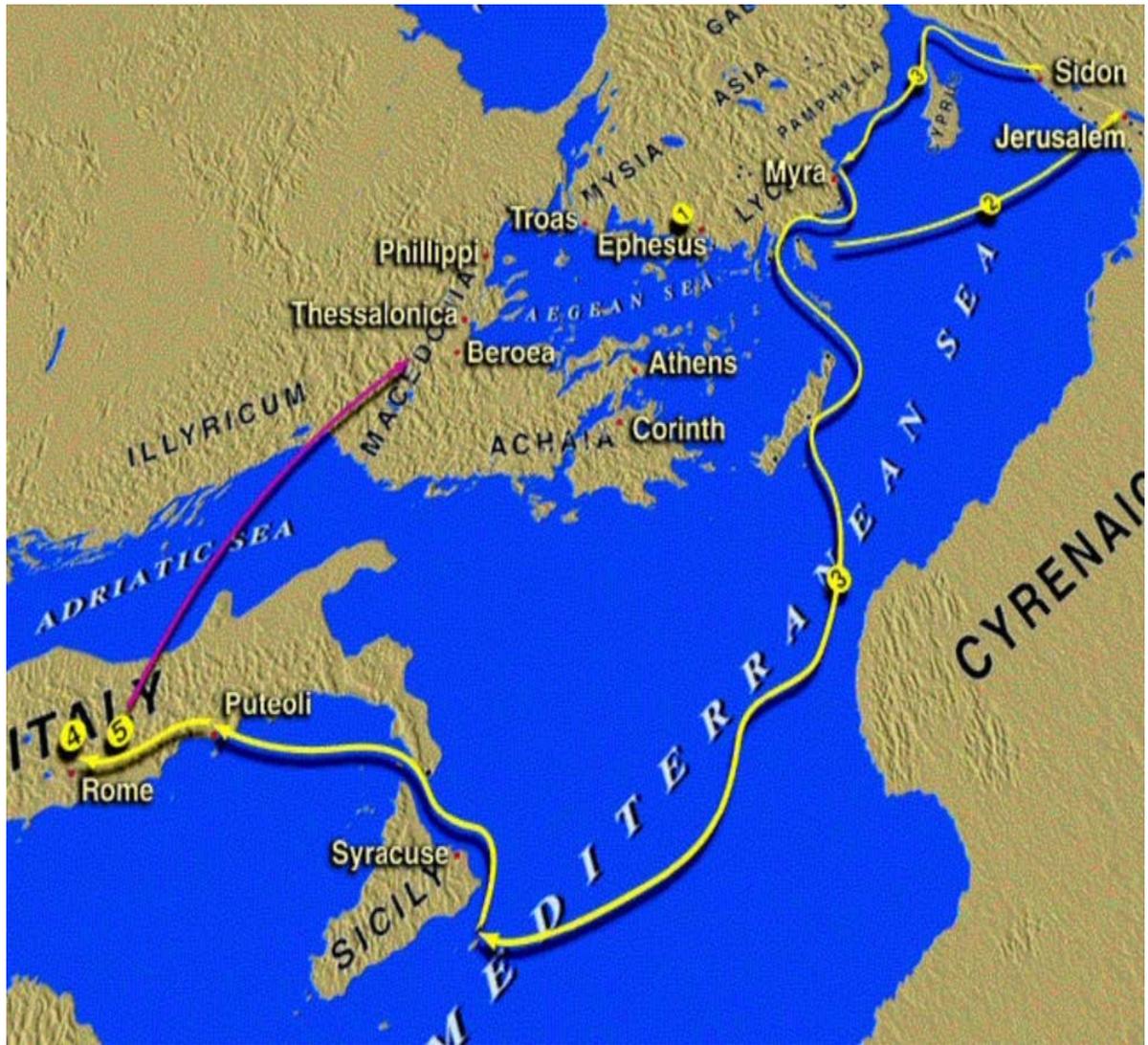
b. However, the church is described by Paul in various terms:

- i. *Biologically*, Christ is the head of the church (1:22). The Church is a living body which is capable of growing (4:16). The Church is the bride of Christ (5:23-32) and must submit to the husbandship of Christ (5:24). Christ loves and cares for the church (5:29).
- ii. *Architecturally*, the church is the holy temple of God and Christ is the chief cornerstone (2:20-22). This refers not to a physical building, but to a spiritual building. Therefore, all believers from every tribe and nation represent the holy temple of God. And of course, the church is founded and built upon the Christ the cornerstone.
- iii. *Socially*, the church accepts all races, social classes and nationalities (2:11-22). The dividing wall that once existed between Jew and Gentile has been torn down by Christ. Thus, all are welcome into God's family and all believers, regardless of ethnicity, have access to the Father by his Son.

Conclusion

In summary, I hope this brief introduction will give you a better understanding of the book of Ephesians. The study of God's word can never be complete or the end all of all studies. I have preached through the book of Ephesians on two other occasions, yet I have personally learned much more about this letter than ever before. My goal in writing this introduction was simple, I just wanted to give you a basic understanding of the book and hopefully ignite a fire in you to study the book on your own. May the Lord bless you and challenge your faith as we go through the book together.

In Christ,
Pastor Mike



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