

Ephesians: Queen of the Epistles

The Mystical Body of Christ

Ephesians carries largely among the heavenlies. It is characterized by dignity and serenity which is in harmony with the elevation of its thoughts. There is scarcely even an echo of the great controversies which ring so loudly in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians.

It is "the divinest composition of man," wrote Coleridge. It has been called "the crown of St. Paul's writings," "the Queen of the Epistles," and the "greatest and most relevant of his works." W. O. Carver said, "Ephesians is the greatest piece of writing in all of history." It may well be the "most influential document ever written."

"Paul has written nothing more profound than chapters 1 to 3 of Ephesians," writes A. T. Robertson. Stalker termed them the profoundest thing ever written. He sounds the depths of truth and reaches the heights. It is a letter written in the atmosphere of prayer. Most Christians have never prayed for some of the things which Paul prayed for in these two prayers.

Expositors observes: "It is the grandest of all the Pauline letters. There is a peculiar and sustained loftiness in its teaching which has deeply impressed the greatest minds and has earned for it the title of the Epistle of the Ascension. "'

THE AUTHOR is Paul of Tarsus an apostle of Jesus (1:1).

THE PRISON EPISTLES are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. All four were probably written during Paul's Roman imprisonment, between the beginning of A.D. 60 and the end of A.D. 61 (Eph. 3:1; Phil. 1:7; Col. 4:30; Philemon 9). F. F. Bruce observes: "If any orderly progress at all is to be traced in Paul's thinking, then Ephesians must be dated last of all his letters to churches, and immediately after Colossians." Some scholars see Paul having served two Roman imprisonments. During the first imprisonment in Rome Paul lived for two years near the Praetorian Guard barracks in rental quarters at his own expense (Acts 28:30). At that time these prison epistles were written. Paul anticipated his release in Philemon 22, and following his release he made mission trips, wrote First Timothy and Titus. He was then rearrested and taken to Rome where he wrote Second Timothy, and was beheaded by the Roman authorities. Ephesians is part of the first Roman letters, while II Timothy is the second Roman imprisonment letter. The theory of two Roman imprisonments seems to fit the facts better. There are also scholars who hold to a one imprisonment theory.

PLACE OF WRITING is Rome, which is the same as for Philemon, Colossians and Philippians (Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:20; Philemon 9). It was written while the author was in prison (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Tychicus is the bearer of this letter (6:21f), and the one to Colossae (Col. 4:7f), and to Philemon (10-12).

THE DATE of Ephesians is the same as for Philemon and Colossians, i.e. about A. D. 60 or 61. This would be after Paul's arrival in Rome from Jerusalem in A.D. 60 (Acts 28:3ff), and before the burning of Rome by Nero in A. D. 64. If Philippians was already sent from Rome, then A. D. 62 marks the last probable year for the writing of this group of letters. Paul was probably released after this imprisonment (A.D. 63-65 or 66),

the writing of this group of letters. Paul was probably released after this imprisonment (A.D. 63 65 or 66), and later imprisoned a second time at Rome (A.D.

65). He was martyred in Rome about May or early June 66 A. D.

DESTINATION: The oldest manuscripts of Ephesians do not have the words *en Ephesoi* in 1:1. "At Ephesus" was inserted by a later hand. Origen did not have them in his copy. Marcion calls it the Epistle to the Laodiceans. Put Col. 4:16 "the letter from Laodicea" here and the problem is solved. After writing the Epistle to the Colossians Paul dictated this epistle to the Ephesians as a general or circular letter for the churches in the Roman province of Asia. Perhaps the original copy had no name in 1:1 as seen in Aleph and B and Origen, but only a blank space for the recipients to fill in the name, or the person who made the copy for the church at Ephesus to fill in the name of the church. The original letter may have been this way: "To all the saints that are at _____," leaving a blank for the insertion of the name of the church to which a copy would be sent. We do know that the early churches made copies of their letters and passed them on to other churches in the area. Most manuscripts were copies from the one in Ephesus, therefore, it came to be called the Epistle to the Ephesians. This would also explain the general nature of the letter even though Paul lived in Ephesus for three years (cf. Acts 19:1-4).

The letter does not refer to any specific controversy, or particular problems in a local church. Paul normally mentions friends and personal acquaintances when writing to local churches, however, there is an absence of personal names in this letter even though he had worked there for three years on a previous occasion. There is a good likelihood that Paul sent the letter first to Ephesus by Tychicus (Eph. 6:21 22; Col. 4:7 8), and then it was copied and sent to neighboring churches. This is probably the same letter that is called "my letter. . . from Laodicea" in (Col. 4:16). There is an absence of personal greetings and any local tone in the letter.

THE CITY OF EPHEBUS was the capital of the Roman proconsular Asia. It was situated on a plain near the mouth of the River Cayster. It was originally a Greek colony. Ephesus was a free city and enjoyed to a great extent the right of self-government under the Romans. It had essentially a democratic constitution. The municipal authority was vested in a senate, and in the assembly of the people. The Town Clerk, or Recorder, was an officer in charge of the archives of the city, the promulgator of the laws, and had great authority (cf. Acts 19:24-40).

Ephesus was a commercial city, political, and religious center. As a major trading center, Ephesus ranked with Alexandria and Antioch.

The pagan temple of Diana was located in Ephesus. Her image was a many-breasted, mummy like figure of oriental symbolism. Her famous temple was a Greek building of the Ionic order. It was considered one of the wonders of the world because of its vast dimensions, costly materials, extended colonnades, numerous statues and paintings, and accumulated wealth. The city of Ephesus considered itself the "Temple sweeper," the servant of the great goddess. One of the most lucrative occupations of the people was the manufacture of miniature silver representations of the temple which brought extensive trade at home and abroad.

The practice of sorcery was from the earliest times connected with the worship of Diana. It was the center of all forms of magic arts for all Asia.

PAUL S' MINISTRY AT EPHEBUS is recorded in Acts 18:18-21; 19:1-41; 20:17-38. Aquila and Priscilla were probably the founders of the church when they came to Ephesus with Paul (Acts 18:18-19). Paul had just finished eighteen months in Corinth, at the end of his second missionary journey.

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Introduction to Ephesians: Mystical Body of Christ

He sailed to Ephesus in company with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul went to the Jewish synagogue in Ephesus and preached (Acts 18:18-26). He then left and returned to give a report to his sending church.

Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:3-6). He found some followers of John the Baptist there (Acts 19:8-12).

Paul had considerable results in Ephesus.

1. A great number of Jews and Greeks were converted.
2. The Gospel spread throughout the proconsular Asia.
3. Certain exorcists attempted to work miracles in the name of Jesus whom Paul was preaching, made public confessions and burned their magical books.
4. The marked reduction of sales of silver temple of Diana excited a general alarm by the silversmiths.
5. The establishment of a large and flourishing church at Ephesus (Acts 20).

Paul warned the church to guard against heresy and false teachers.

On his third missionary journey Paul stayed in the city for about three years. At this time the Gospel spread throughout Asia Minor with Ephesus as the base of operations (Acts 19:10). Timothy was pastor of the church in Ephesus for some time (I Tim. 1:3), and was there when Paul wrote him (I and II Timothy).

In later years the Apostle John made the city his headquarters. Ephesians is one of the seven churches of Asia Minor addressed in Rev. 2:1-7.

THE THEME is God's eternal purpose to establish and complete His body, which is the church of Christ.

STYLE OF WRITING is meditative, with poetical quality which is most apparent, and a long prayer culminating in a great doxology in chapters 1-3. There is nothing like this in Paul's other letters. It is the language of a lyrical prayer.

RELATIONSHIP TO COLOSSIANS: The same Gnostic heresy is met in Colossians, but with a different emphasis. Paul's emphasis in Colossians is on the Dignity of Christ as the head of the Church, while in Ephesians chief stress is placed upon Dignity of the Church as the Body of Christ the Head.

"The two epistles were sent at the same time, but clearly Colossians was composed first. Ephesians bears much the same relation to Colossians that Romans does to Galatians, a fuller treatment of the same general theme in more detached and impersonal manner" (A. T. Robertson).

COMPARISON OF THE EMPHASIS in Colossians, Ephesians & Philippians: The theme that dominates Colossians is the "all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ." In Jesus Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). "It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness of God dwelt in Him" (Col. 1:19). In Christ Jesus "all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete . . ." (Col. 2:9-10). Christ is our all sufficient Savior because in Him "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). The whole letter is based on the absolute sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

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The mystical Body of Christ, the church, is the theme of Ephesians. The believer is "a man in Christ." Every believer is placed "in Christ." The Body of Christ is built upon the all-sufficiency of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Everything in and about the church is dependent upon Christ. Everything is summed up in Christ who redeemed us, and the "administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Eph. 1:10). The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. The universe is "dead in trespasses and sins," radically depraved, and can only reach its eternal destiny when every thing bows in submission to Christ "who fills all in all." Mankind is restored to its original purpose when it is reconciled to God in Christ.

This concept of the unity of all things in Jesus Christ is the outcome of his conviction in Colossians that Christ is all sufficient. For Paul all things must center in Christ.

OUTLINE OF EPHESIANS

- I. Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. The Position of Believers (1:3-3:21)
 - A. Chosen and Sealed (1:3-23)
 - B. Saved By Grace (2:1-10)
 - C. United in One Body (2:11-22)
 - D. Equal in the Body (the Mystery) (3:1-21)
- III. The Practice of Believers (4:1-6:9)
 - A. In Relation to Other Believers (4:1-6)
 - B. In Relation to Spiritual Gifts (4:7-16)
 - C. In Relation to the Former Life (4:17-32)
 - D. In Relation to Evil (5:1-17)
 - E. In Relation to the Holy Spirit (5:18-21)
 - F. In Relation to Home Life (5:22-6:4)
 - G. In Relation to Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)
- IV. The Protection for Believers (6:10-20)
 - A. Against Whom? (6:10-12)
 - B. With What? (6:13-20)
- V. Concluding Words (6:21-24)

Title: Introduction to Ephesians

Series: A Look at the Book

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