

Ephesians

Introductory Thoughts

Introduction

The New Testament is comprised of four gospels, one history book (Luke wrote Acts and his gospel), 14 epistles from Paul (nine letters to churches, four to individuals and one to the Jews at large), one letter from James, two letters from Peter, three letters from John (he also wrote a gospel and the book of Revelation), one from Jude (the half-brother of Jesus) and the book of Revelation.

Paul's epistles (letters) went to the church in the city of Rome, Corinth (2), Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica (2). There was also a letter to the churches in the area of Galatia.

His individual letters went to Timothy (2), Titus, and Philemon. And the book of Hebrews is devoted to the Jews at large.

Who: Paul (Saul)

Born in c. 4/5 BC in Turkey (Cilicia), died in Rome in c. 66/67 AD.

He first appears in the book of Acts (8:3) as he supports the persecution of the Jews (the stoning of Stephen).

He gives some facts associated with his life in Phil. 3:5-6.

The details regarding his ministry are found in Acts 9-28.

His own autobiographical comments are found in Galatians 1-2.

An approximate timeline to consider:

5 AD Born an Israelite, in Tarsus of Cilicia. A Roman citizen by birthright (Acts 22:25)

15-20 AD A student at the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3)

31 AD Becomes a Pharisee (Phil 3:5)

32 AD Present at Stephens' stoning (Acts 7, 8)

34 AD Converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3)

Travels to Arabia and remains there (Gal. 1:17)

Returns to Damascus and exits the city for safety (Acts 9)

Goes up to Jerusalem (Acts 9, Gal. 1:18)

Returns to Tarsus for safety (Acts 9:30)

47 AD Goes to Antioch with Barnabas and is sent out on their first missionary journey

49 AD Goes up to Jerusalem for the Council

50-53 AD Second Missionary Journey

54-58 AD Third Missionary Journey

58-60 AD Imprisoned in Judea

61-63 AD Imprisoned in Rome

63-67 AD Post Imprisonment Journeys

This letter was carried from the prison in Rome to Asia Minor by Tychicus (called a “faithful minister in the Lord”-see Eph. 6:21-22. He went with Paul to Jerusalem in Acts 20:4 and likely on to Rome.) He is sent by Paul to carry the three prison letters (Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians).

Onesimus (see the book of Philemon) may also have traveled with Tychicus and helped carry this epistle.

Paul was in prison for about 5 years. He spent 2 years in prison in Caesarea without a trial. He appealed to Caesar and was transported to Rome where he spent 2 years in house arrest (See Acts 28:30 and Phil. 4:22). After he was released, he likely visited some churches before being arrested again. This last imprisonment was spent in the Mamertine prison in Rome.

When:

Written in approx. 62 AD. It was written about the same time as the book of Colossians and Philemon.

Where:

Ephesus: A Center of travel and commerce. It is located on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of a major river (Cayster River). It was an amazing seaport that was “considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.” It also contained the famous Temple of Artemis (Diana, her Roman name). She was the fertility god.

Paul visited this city for a very brief period while on his second missionary journey. He later returned to Ephesus on his third missionary trip and stayed about three years.

Priscilla and Aquila were with Paul in Ephesus (they had travelled there from Corinth). Paul calls them his “co-workers” in preaching the gospel. They too were tentmakers. Her name is mentioned before her husband’s four times in the NT. Perhaps she was wealthy. They both were instrumental in leading early churches.

Apollos was an early convert in Ephesus who was discipled by Priscilla and Aquila. Apparently, he was a very intelligent man whom some believe may have written the book of Hebrews.



Why:

Most of the NT epistles were written in response to a specific issue. In I Corinthians, Paul’s letter addresses the church at Corinth’s sin of immorality. The letter to the Galatians was penned to address the problem of the Judaizers who were infiltrating the churches in Galatia. I and II Timothy and Titus were personal, pastoral letters to young pastors from their mentor, Paul. And so on.

Ephesians was not written as a response to any problem or specific issue. Instead, Paul has profound theological truths that he wants to pass along. The church members were young in the Lord and needed solid teaching on a wide range of spiritual topics. He is emphasizing what it means to be a believer. It is not a warm personal letter, nor is it a scathing rebuke. Rather, it is a more formal presentation of truth.

Paul’s style is different in this book. Unlike the quick, short and to the point style he uses in many of his other letters, in this letter he moves more slowly. Some of the thoughts are a bit disjointed, less like a letter and more like a hymn of praise. He is revealing the “riches of divine mysteries” as he discusses the grander themes of salvation.

What to expect:

The book is divided into two major sections:

Chapters 1-3 deal with the lofty theological truths like grace, spiritual adoption, the sovereignty of God, how God has made us alive and so on.

Chapters 4-6 deal with a more practical approach, instructing believers how-to walk-in accordance with their calling (4:1).

The overall theme is focused on the community of believers and their UNITY.

So what?

Notice to whom Paul addresses this letter: "To the SAINTS in Ephesus, the FAITHFUL (or the believers) in Christ Jesus." (1:1)

Saints: A term that comes from a Greek word that mean to be "set aside." It refers to any living person who is consecrated to God. These are holy because He is holy.

The Faithful: These are the believers who have chosen to remain firm and consistent in their faith. What they purport to believe makes a difference in their daily life.

Consecrated, set aside, firm in our beliefs, consistent in our walk. That is the preferred position of a Christian.

So how are you doing?

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