

NAME

The book gets its name from city it is addressed to. See below (Recipients) for a discussion of the recipients including the theory that Ephesians was intended as an encyclical epistle.

AUTHOR

TNLT - Introduction to Ephesians:

Ephesians is traditionally ascribed to Paul, as are the other prison letters. However, on the basis of vocabulary, style, form, setting, purpose, and theological emphases, some have thought that Ephesians was written instead by a later disciple of Paul. Others see it as an original letter from Paul that has been reworked by a later editor. However, the letter is not at all incompatible with Paul's thought and style (note the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians), and there is no compelling reason to deny that Paul authored it.

Prison Epistles:

Paul wrote 13 epistles (14 if one includes Hebrews). Four are called Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome (59-61/62 A.D.). With the exception of Philippians, they were written at the same time and carried by the same messengers (6:21; Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12). Actually there were two other epistles written from prison. One epistle was lost (Colossians 4:16). Second is Paul's second letter to Timothy which was written during his second imprisonment, shortly before his death. However, 2 Timothy is classified with the other pastoral epistles.

Traditionally it is thought that Paul was in Rome when he wrote this epistle. However, there is some discussion that he was in Ephesus.

DATE

Mitchell:

This epistle was probably written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (59-61/62 A.D.). This would put the time around 61-63 A.D. Through Paul's body is in prison, his heart is in the heavenlies.

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"Unity of the Church"*

Mitchell: *"To Establish Believers in the Truths of The Church"*

Key Word (Nelson's): Building the Body of Christ - Ephesians focuses on the believer's responsibility to walk in accordance with his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus and encouraging the body of Christ to maturity in Him.

Key Verses:

"And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23)

“For By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

“I Therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Key Chapter (Nelson’s): 6 - Even though the Christian is blessed *“with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* (1:3), spiritual warfare is still the daily experience of the Christian while in the world.

Ephesians focuses on the believer’s responsibility to walk in accordance with his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus and encouraging the body of Christ to maturity in Him.

Three lines of truth (Mitchell):

1. The believer’s exalted position in Jesus
2. The Body of Christ
3. The believer’s walk (daily life) in accord with his position.

TNLT - Introduction to Ephesians:

With a heart full of praise for all that God has done, Paul beautifully summarizes the Good News of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ - emphasizing that it is for Gentiles as well as for Jews. He also gives practical instructions on how believers are to live in response, turning away from their former lives to become truly good and like Christ. There are no major, urgent problems addressed in this letter; it is a general summary of Paul’s theological and moral teachings.

Significant Words (Mitchell):

1. The word *“in”* is found 90 times. It stresses union with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.
2. The word *“grace”* is found 13 times. This letter is an exposition of the grace of God.
3. The word *“spiritual”* (or spirit) is used 13 times. It pertains to the Holy Spirit, a sphere of truth (spiritual truth), or to a realm of life (spiritual life).
4. The word *“body”* is repeated 8 times. It is a metaphor describing our positional union with Jesus.
5. The word *“walk”* is used 8 times. It pertains to our practical behavior within the body.
6. The word *“heavenlies”* is found 5 times. It is a very complex word used in Ephesians. It refers to the exalted sphere of our position in Jesus and the realm of our walk and warfare.
7. The word *“mystery”* is used 5 times. It refers to truth that God had previously hidden from men and now reveals. Some call it an open secret. The Church is a mystery.

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1,2
- II. The Creation of The Church 1:3-3:21
 - A. Methods used in creating the Church 1:3-23 - the Trinity
 1. The Father planned the Church (election) 1:3-6 - meaning that He choose before the foundation of the world (eternity past) and so we are chosen, blessed, predestined, accepted.

2. The Son purchased the Church (redemption) 1:7-12 - meaning in time and space by His blood the Church is redeemed, by lifting our penalty He provides forgiveness, by making known God's will He provides wisdom to live as the Church, and as God's heritage we receive His reward.
3. The Spirit protects the Church (protection) 1:13,14 - meaning that the Spirit: 1) Seduces us - works within us enabling us to hear and believe; 2) Seals us - marks our ownership (brands us), guards us, protects us, pledges us for heaven; and 3) Sanctifies us - works within us according to our ultimate destination.
4. Paul's prayer in 1:15-23 is that we would understand these truths.

B. Materials used in creating the Church 2:1-22

C. Mystery of the Church's revelation 3:1-21

III. The Conduct of The Church 4:1-6:9

IV. The Conflict of The Church 6:10-20

V. Conclusion 6:21-24

RECIPIENTS

Adapted from Halley - Background on Ephesus (page 728) and TNLT - Introduction to Ephesians:

Ephesus was a proud, rich, busy port at the end of the caravan route from Asia. From Ephesus goods were shipped to other Mediterranean ports. This huge city contained a theater (seating about 25,000; Acts 19:29), and agora ("town square" that also served as the marketplace of goods and ideas), public baths, a library, and a number of temples. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia on the western coast of modern Turkey. In Paul's time, Ephesus was the fourth-largest city in the Roman Empire, with a population of perhaps 500,000.

Ephesus was built near the shrine of an old Anatolian fertility goddess and became the center of her cult; this deity was known to the Greeks as Artemis and to the Romans as Diana. The temple of Diana was discovered by J.T. Wood in 1870; it may have been the largest building in the Greek world. Grottesquely represented with turreted head and many breasts, the goddess and her cult found expression in the famous temple, served, like that of Aphrodite at Corinth, by a host of priestess courtesans.

The Diana cult generated much trade. Ephesus became a place of pilgrimage for worshippers, all eager to carry away talismans and souvenirs - hence the prosperous guild of silversmiths, whose livelihood was the manufacture of silver shrines and images of the meteoric stone that was said to be Diana's image "fallen from heaven." This trade became increasingly important as the harbor of Ephesus silted up and commerce declined. In 65 A.D. an attempt was made to improve the seaway, but the task proved too great. Ephesus in the 1st century was a dying city.

After an initial brief visit (Acts 18:19-21), during his third missionary journey (53-57 A.D.) Paul returned to spend between two and three years (53-56 A.D.) in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20:1). During that time Paul encountered much opposition and suffered much abuse (Acts 19:21-41; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8,9; 11:23-27). But it is probably that during Paul's two-year plus stay the Gospel spread to other cities in the province of Asia (e.g., to Colossae). Later, the apostle John lived in Ephesus, and it is the first of the churches addressed in Revelation (2:1-7).

Encyclical Epistle (Mitchell):

Many Biblical scholars feel that this epistle was not written for the Ephesian believers alone. They feel that it was intended to be a general letter to be circulated among the various churches in Asia; hence the term Encyclical Epistle or Circular Letter. Several reasons are set forth in support of such a position:

1. The two oldest and best Greek manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) omit the words, “*who are at Ephesus.*”
2. A number of church fathers contend that it was a circular letter to the province of Asia (Basil, Jerome, Tertullian, et. al.).
3. The impersonal nature of the letter: Paul spent three years at Ephesus and knew people there. Yet there are no personal greetings and no endearing terms. Even the benediction is in the third person.
4. There are several passages that indicate that Paul was unacquainted with readers: “having heard of the faith” (1:15); “if you have heard of the stewardship” (3:2); and “if indeed you have heard” (4:21). Such statements seem out of harmony with a letter addressed to Ephesus - a church that Paul founded and in which he ministered for three years.
5. The epistle reveals no particular occasion that prompted its writing. In Corinth there were disorders and divisions that prompted Paul to write that church. In Galatia there was the obvious problem of legalism that caused the apostle to take up his pen. But in this letter no local problem seems evident to prompt its writing. This of course would be the case in a circular letter intended for distribution among many churches.
6. The doctrinal emphasis fits this view. The letter contains the highest truth in the New Testament on the universal Church, the Body of Christ, but nothing about a local church at all. The Church is seen throughout as Christ’s body, not as local congregations.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Mitchell:

Ephesians is the first book to emphasize the universal Church. The universal Church is mentioned in previous books but not emphasized. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus announced its building. This letter develops that truth fully for the first time. Ephesians is the great Church epistle.

Regarding the Universal Church:

catholic = of interest or use to all people, including all, universal, comprehensive, all embracing < Latin *catholicus* < Greek *katholicos* universal / Catholic = of the Christian church governed by the People; Roman Catholic.

God graciously, without any basis in human merit (John 3:15; Ephesians 2:8,9), offers justification to those who will choose to repent of their sin and so to commit themselves by faith believing in God’s efficacious acquittal of personal sin through the completed work of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:25,26; 4:25; 5:16,18). Those believers so justified by God’s grace, and not by any work or association, God makes to be members of the true Church (Matthew 12:6,7; Acts 2:37-39; 4:12; Romans 3:20a; Galatians 5:5,6). Given birth at Pentecost (Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-4), the Church universal is the one timeless Body of all believers, called apart from the world by God, led through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, for the glorification of God through individual and corporate submission to the Lordship of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; John 15:8; Romans 15:5,6; Philippians 2:9-11).

The Epistle Compared and Contrasted (Mitchell):

1. There exists a sharp contrast between Galatians and Ephesians. Try reading both at one sitting and this will become evident. When one moves from Galatians into Ephesians, he moves from the noise of battle into a quiet church sanctuary. He moves from war to worship.
2. There is a very close relationship between Colossians and Ephesians. Many of their expressions are almost identical (compare Ephesians 1:7 with Colossians 1:14). Likewise there is a remarkable similarity in ideas. Both letters center around Christ and the church. In Colossians, Christ receives the emphasis with the church secondary. In Ephesians, the church is emphasized with Christ secondary. The similarities are so marked that in all probability the two letters were written in close proximity, perhaps even the same day. Yet they are dissimilar in that Colossians was clearly written with a single congregation in mind and, as noted previously, such is not the case with Ephesians.
3. Ephesians compares in many ways with the Old Testament book of Joshua. In Joshua the people of God were called to possess their material inheritance in the promised land. In Ephesians, the believers are called upon to possess their spiritual inheritance in the heavenlies. The Israelites found the possession of Palestine involved conflict, so today's Christian finds conflict in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). In the promised land Israel found possessions, rest, and victory, so today the believer finds these in possessing by faith his heavenly inheritance. Today's believer is now privileged to move in and occupy the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. They must be searched out with the spiritual Geiger counter (the Bible), and appropriated by faith.

Peculiarities (Mitchell):

1. Ephesians is an Epistle of broad outlook. This is because it deals with the Church universal. The word "all" is found 51 times.
2. Ephesians is an Epistle that emphasizes church unity. Such terms as "in Christ" indicating our union with Christ occur 36 times in Ephesians (out of 170 in the rest of the New Testament). The unity of believer with believer is stressed with the use of "one" throughout the epistle (16 times in this connection).

RESOURCES

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Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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