

# Through the Bible — Ephesians

## Introduction

- **[SLIDE]** Location
  - western end of Asia Minor
  - principal city in the Roman province of Asia
  - under Roman control since 133 BCE, but still a free city, not a Roman colony.
  - port city - trade from the Aegean (West), Bosphorus and Dardanelles (North), Syria and Israel (East), and Egypt (south)
  - Two major roads
- Population 200,000 — third largest city behind Rome and Alexandria
- **[SLIDE]** Mythology
  - Greek mythology associated the origins of the city with the legendary Amazon warriors and a localized version of the Greek goddess Artemis (equated with the Roman goddess Diana).
  - The Amazons were mythological female warriors and hunters described in the Iliad and other ancient Greek texts, known for their physical agility, strength, archery, riding skills, and the arts of combat.
  - Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, nature, and childbirth, among others. She was one of the most popular goddesses in Ancient Greece.
- **[SLIDE]** Worship
  - Artemis was the most widely worshipped and revered goddess in the ancient world.
  - The temple of Artemis in Ephesus was considered to be the greatest of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
  - Her cult followers took vows of chastity, and it was common for young girls to be sent to the temple to serve Artemis for one year before being allowed to marry.
  - At the same time, Artemis was a fertility goddess and was considered to be a “mother goddess,” due to the *interpretatio graeca*, the Hellenistic approach of reinterpreting local gods and goddesses (like the original Ephesian goddess) with the common Greek gods and goddesses.

## Paul’s Connection to Ephesus

- Acts 19 tells us how the Apostle Paul became connected to the city of Ephesus.
- He traveled there in 52 CE toward the beginning of his third journey, and he lived in Ephesus for over 2 years.
- When he first arrived, he found about 12 men, apparently Jews, who were following the teachings of John the Baptist. However, they had not heard about Jesus, and had only been immersed in the immersion/baptism of John.
  - What was the baptism of John?
- After telling these men about the Messiah and about the giving of the Spirit, they were filled with the Spirit.
- Paul then spent the next three months teaching in the local synagogue, “having discussions and persuading them about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 19:8)
- After about three months, some of the members of the synagogue started opposing his teaching.
  - This may have had something to do with the fact that Paul opened up his teaching to Gentiles, usually God-Fearers who were already connected to the Jewish community in some way.
  - In Acts 21, when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his time in Ephesus, we are told that some “Jews from Asia” recognized Paul in Jerusalem with a man called “Trophimus the Ephesian,” who was a Gentile, and “they thought that Paul had brought him into the temple” (Acts 21:29).

- These concerns about Jewish/Gentile relationships are a key element in all of Paul's ministry and his teaching.
- Because of the opposition, Paul moved his discipleship activities next door to an academy, a school, that was owned by a man named Tyrannus.
  - Schools like this were common in the ancient world. The translation "school" is misleading: *scholē* (σχολή) means "leisure." In the Greco-Roman world, a leisure hall was an auditorium for hearing oratory. So, Tyrannus owned a leisure hall.
  - Some scholars consider the hall of Tyrannus a "private synagogue" or local *beit midrash* ("house of study," בית מדרש ) where Jewish scholars could gather to discuss Torah and access scrolls. Paul used the hall to reach "both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).
  - For at least two years, Paul taught and discipled the believers in Ephesus in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. In Acts 20:31, Paul says to the Ephesians, "Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."
  - The Western Text (a set of New Testament manuscripts in Old Latin and Syriac that tend to include lots of paraphrases) says that Paul had the use of the hall for five hours a day: "He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus from the fifth to the tenth hour," i.e., from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.
- Paul and his main disciple Timothy lived with Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish believers who had escaped from Rome when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from the city in 49 CE.
  - Paul's letters to the Corinthians were written while he lived in Ephesus, and 1 Corinthians 16:19 tells us that Aquila and Priscilla also hosted a congregation of believers in their home.
- Acts 19 gives us some additional information about why Paul ended up leaving Ephesus. We talked about that in last week's lesson.
- Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians sometime around the year 61 CE, while he was in prison in Rome during the reign of Nero.

## Outline

- **[SLIDE]** Biblical scholar Yoder Neufeld, in his *Ephesians* volume of the *Believers Church Bible Commentary*, proposes a chiasmic structure for Ephesians 1-3.
  - A** Blessing of God (1:3-14)
  - B** Prayer for Wisdom and Power (1:15-23)
  - C** Gentiles and Jews Raised to Life (2:1-10)
  - D** Christ is our Peace (2:11-22)
  - C'** Gentiles and Jews reconciled in Christ (3:1-13)
  - B'** Prayer Resumed (3:14-19)
  - A'** Doxology (3:20-21)
- In a chiasm, the contents of the writing all point to a central point, an important lesson or argument that the writer is trying to get you to see.
- This is a very common writing style in Jewish writing, so it's not surprising to see Paul use it in Ephesians.
- The central argument in Ephesians, according to Neufeld and other scholars over the last few decades, is that the enmity between Jews and Gentiles has been overcome in the work of the Messiah, but the distinction between the two groups remains.

## Audience: Who is Paul Writing To?

- This brings us to an important question about Ephesians: Who are the "us" and "we" vs the "you" in Ephesians?
  - Most interpreters over the years just say that the "we" is referring to believers, the church, the ecclesia.
- However, that does not jibe with the structure of the book, or with the main argument Paul is making.

- We see this most clearly in Ephesians 1:11-13 (blue = Jews, orange = Gentiles)  
things on the earth. <sup>11</sup> In Him <sup>a</sup>we also <sup>a</sup>have <sup>a</sup>obtained an inheritance, having been <sup>b</sup>predestined <sup>c</sup>according to the purpose of Him who works all things <sup>d</sup>in accordance with the plan of His will, <sup>12</sup> to the end that <sup>1</sup>we who were the first to hope in the <sup>2</sup>Christ would be <sup>a</sup>to the praise of His glory. <sup>13</sup> In <sup>1</sup>Him, <sup>2</sup>you also, after listening to <sup>a</sup>the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also <sup>3</sup>believed, <sup>a</sup>you were <sup>b</sup>sealed in <sup>1</sup>Him with <sup>c</sup>the Holy Spirit of the promise, <sup>14</sup> who is a <sup>a</sup>first installment of <sup>b</sup>our inheritance, in regard to <sup>c</sup>the redemption of <sup>a</sup>God's own possession, <sup>e</sup>to the praise of His glory.
- We'll see this more as we go through the text.

## Blessing of God (1:3-14)

- 1:2 — Paul's standard greeting. See Romans 1:7
- 1:4 — The adoption of the Jewish people is not just an Old Testament thing, it is a Jesus thing. Also, Paul sees messianic Jews specifically as representing all of Israel, the remnant, so he is connecting them to the redemption that is coming.
- 1:5 — Why did God choose Israel? "... according to the good pleasure of his will..." Because he wanted to.
- 1:6 - ἐν (en): prep.; = Str 1722; TDNT 2.537—1. in, inside, within, a marker of a location
  - "in" could mean "within". Translators often capitalize "Beloved" to make you think it is referring to Jesus. However, "Beloved" is used within the Epistles almost exclusively to refer to the church. Therefore, this phrase could just as easily (and I think more appropriately) be translated, "He favored us [Jewish believers] within the [church]."
- 1:8 — the mystery of Gentile inclusion
  - "plan of the fullness of the times" — This was his plan from the beginning!
- 1:11 — What inheritance did the believing Jews obtain? See verse 14, "the redemption of God's own possession," i.e. the future redemption of Israel! The most often-repeated prophecy in the scriptures.

## Prayer for Wisdom and Power (1:15-23)

- 1:17 — Franz Delitzsch translates this as: אֶת־רוּחַ הַחֵכְמָה וְהַדָּעוֹן לְדַעַת אֹתוֹ
  - note the use of *chokmah* and *da'at*
- 1:18 — "hope of his calling" = The hope of future resurrection and redemption!
  - "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" = Paul hopes that the Gentiles come to understand the riches of the glory of the inheritance that the Jewish people are predestined to receive (see verse 11).
- 1:19 — us who believe = All of us!
- 1:21 — See Ephesians 6!

## Gentiles and Jews Raised to Life (2:1-10)

- 2:1 — Notice the Death vs. Life comparison below
- 2:3 — just as the rest = Just like the rest of mankind
- 2:9 — Remember from our Galatians study what Paul's gospel is, and his opposition to the idea that you need to become Jewish in order to be saved.
  - "good works" — Just to be clear, good deeds are not the problem!

## Christ is our Peace (2:11-22)

- 2:12 — the people of Israel == citizenship in Israel, aka the commonwealth of Israel

- strangers — this is a specific term within Torah terminology. “The stranger who lives among you.” (see Leviticus 19:33)
- 2:14 — This notion of Gentile inclusion is not just about salvation for Gentiles. God is making Jew and Gentile one, not a new people, but a unified commonwealth of Israel.
- 2:15 — Matthew 5:17 says that he did not come to abolish the Law. So, which is it? The Torah’s commandments and regulations have caused enmity between Jew and Gentile, but it is **the hostility** that has been abolished, not the Torah! KJV says he has “broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity...”
- 2:20 — We will come back to this when we look at Ephesians 4:11, “And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets...”

## Gentiles and Jews reconciled in Christ (3:1-13)

- 3:3 — He is about to explain this, but what is the mystery? The mystery is the fact that Gentiles don’t have to become Jewish in order to participate in the kingdom
- 3:11 — eternal purpose == This was not an afterthought!

## Prayer Resumed (3:14-19)

No specific notes

## Doxology (3:20-21)

- Some scholars (e.g., Markus Barth, Andrew Lincoln) suggest this and similar passages may reflect early church worship formulas that Paul adopted into his letters. It resembles synagogue doxologies that closed sections of prayer (like in the Amidah or in Qumran hymns).

## Unity of the Spirit

- Now we are moving on to the second section of Paul’s letter.
- 4:1 — “the prisoner of the Lord” — In Rome under Nero
- 4:7 — “to each one of us” == To the Messianic Jewish believers, the “we who were the first to hope in the Christ” (Eph. 1:12). The Body of Messiah, the community of faith is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20).
  - “grace” == The favor that Paul and the other Apostles enjoyed as official emissaries of the risen Messiah.
- 4:11 — Yes, there is a division of labor among the believing community, as seen in [Romans 12](#) and [1 Corinthians 12](#). However, this passage is not referring to the same thing. This is talking about a unique calling of specific Jewish believers who are, according to Paul, the foundation upon which the church of God rests.
  - This list in Greek has the definite article τοῦς (“the”) in front of each item in the list.
  - **The Apostles:** Those who saw the Master alive and testify to his resurrection.
  - **The Prophets:** Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were invested with the gift of prophecy (e.g. [Acts 11:27](#))
  - **The Evangelists:** The proclaimers of the good news (*mevasrot*) from the original disciples ([Acts 11:19-21](#)). The deacons were also Evangelists (see [Acts 21:8](#)). Timothy was told to “do the work of an evangelist” ([2 Timothy 4:5](#)) — notice Paul does not tell Timothy that he IS an evangelist.
  - **The Shepherds and The Teachers:** Original disciples who were commissioned to teach (“feed my sheep”)
  - None of these categories are mutually exclusive. [See Lionel Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism* for more details]

- 4:14 — Look at the picture Paul paints here of **every** believer. We are all supposed to be pursuing maturity, the fullness of the Messiah, not swayed by doctrine/teaching. We need to grow up!
- 4:16 — Our own spiritual growth will have a cascading effect on the Body of Messiah. When you gain maturity, it helps others do the same.

## The Believer's Walk

- The concept of walking is well developed in Jewish thought. As a matter of fact, the practice of the commandments of God, the actual way things are interpreted and followed, Jewish law itself, is called *halacha*, the way we walk.
- 4:17 — Paul is encouraging us to pursue knowledge, understanding, and wisdom
- 4:18 — Hardness of heart opens us up to sin
- 4:22 — The old life of pagan worship has been put off, and the new life of holiness has been put on.
- 4:27 — “the devil” = The Adversary
- 4:30 — “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” — Corrupt talk grieves the Holy Spirit

## Imitating God

- 5:3 — “saints” in this context = Holy people
- Paul now explains how to imitate God in the different roles we play in life.

## Armor of God

- 6:10 — We are not strong in our own strength.
- 6:13 — This is literally the armor that God Himself wears!
  - Isaiah 11:5 — Also righteousness will be the belt around His hips, and faithfulness the belt around His waist.
  - Isaiah 52:7 — How delightful on the mountains Are the feet of one who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”
  - Isaiah 59:17 — He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing And wrapped Himself with zeal as a cloak.