

Ephesians

Authorship: This epistle was written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison (Perhaps while he was under house arrest in Rome).

Date: If the letter to the Ephesians was written from Rome a likely date would fall in the early AD 60's.

Genre: Letter (Prison Epistle)

Unique Features:

1. Most generic of Paul's letters. No concrete situation addressed. It was a circular letter with a general tone.
2. The early manuscripts do not have the words, "In Ephesus." This leads us to believe that though the letter was most likely sent to Ephesus it was meant to be circulated and read to the churches.
3. It's style is very complex. Paul uses a very lofty style of writing (unlike any of his other letters). Perhaps because of the liturgical language which would not be commonly used in normal correspondence.
4. There is a large amount of HAPAX LEGONEMA (Words said only once).
5. There are many verbal parallels between Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians we see an elevated view of the church and in Colossians we see an elevated view of Christ.

Background & Historical Situation: Ephesus was a port city along the coast of the Aegean Sea. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It was well populated in the first century and it consisted of wealthy men and women civic leaders. Although it was known for its political and commercial activity it was best known as a center for worship of the pagan goddess Artemis (Diana). The temple dedicated to Artemis was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a thoroughly pagan city. Research into the cultural background of Ephesus suggest that the occult (belief in and worship of unseen beings and powers) flourished.

Purpose: Paul wrote this letter probably from prison in Rome, to affirm Christian unity "in Christ" as part of God's plan for the ages, and to warn against false doctrine and immorality.

Key Passage: "God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace" (Ephesians 2:6-7). It is an elevated picture of the church as God intended it to be.

Outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1-2)
- II. The Exalted Unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ or Re-creating the Human Family: What God Has Done (1:3-3:21)
 - A. Three Spiritual Blessings in Christ (1:3-14)
 - B. The Importance of Knowing about it All (1:15-23)
 - C. Redemption: Clearing the Ground (2:1-10)
 - D. Re-creation: Removing the Barriers (2:11-22)
 - E. Digression: Paul, Outsiders, and God's Glory (3:1-13)
 - F. Empowerment: Realizing the Future (3:14-19)
 - G. Doxology (3:20-21)
- III. The Responsibility of those United in Christ or Re-creating the Human Family: What God is Doing (4:1-6:20)
 - A. Creating Unity: The Body Forged (4:1-16)
 - B. Mind Control: The Inward Change (4:17-24)
 - C. Becoming Christian: The "little" Things (4:25-5:5)
 - D. Light and Wisdom: Living Undeceived (5:6-21)
 - E. The Circle of Responsibility: Mutual Submission (5:22-6:9)
 - F. The Christian's armor (6:10-20)
- IV. Concluding Greetings (6:21-24)

Structure: Apart from the Introduction and the Closing Remarks there appears to be a natural two-fold division seen in the letter to the Ephesians. In the first part of the letter (1-3) we see the church as God intended it to be. How God has made the church (a new humanity) central to His purpose of reconciling human beings to Himself. In the second part of the letter (4-6) we see what this new humanity looks like in a hostile world. This second part of the letter is largely ethical instruction.

Sources:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).
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Willmington, Harold L. *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997).