

Ephesians

Ephesus was a large and important city in the region of Asia. The apostle Paul spent two or three years in the city of Ephesus teaching and proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Paul made disciples who made other disciples who then made other disciples “so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Ac 19:10). Then, Paul went to the next region to continue teaching and making disciples but continued to write and visit the churches in Ephesus.

Writer: The Apostle Paul

Date of writing: Around 60 AD

Original Audience: The first verse of this letter says, “To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” However, the oldest copies of this letter don’t have the words “in Ephesus.” So, it might be that the letter we call Ephesians was a letter to all the churches in the region called Asia. Probably this letter was meant to be passed from church to church. The churches in Asia were mainly Gentile, although there were probably a few Jewish people. The area called “Asia” in the Bible is called Turkey today.

The Reason for the Letter: Paul is in prison at the time of writing, and he is sending a coworker named Tychicus (6:21) with three letters: one for a man named Philemon, one for the churches in Colossae, and one for the churches in Ephesus. Since Paul probably intended this letter to be read by many different churches in Asia, he is not addressing specific problems in a church or group of churches. Instead, Paul writes this letter to teach important lessons for all churches.

The Main Message of the Letter: Paul says that God is fulfilling His plan to gather all things in Christ: both Jews and Gentiles. He says they were once dead in their sins, but God has saved them by grace. Now, God has exalted them with Christ to be God’s people created for a life of good works (2:1–10). Because God is providing a way for all people to be free from their sins and join the Kingdom of God, he has created a new humanity. There is now no difference between Jews and Gentiles (2:11–22). He calls this new humanity “the mystery of Christ” (3:1-13).

Paul starts the second half of the letter by saying, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (4:1). In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul has taught the important truths that the church must know and believe. In the following three chapters, Paul teaches followers of Jesus how to behave because God has brought us into His family by His grace.



The Outline of Ephesians:

1. Greetings, praise, and thanksgiving (1:1–23)
2. Salvation by grace through faith (2:1–10)
3. The unity of Jews and Gentiles (2:11–3:13)
4. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (3:14–21)
5. Unity and maturity in the church (4:1–16)
6. Put off the old and put on the new (4:17–5:20)
7. Christian families (5:21–6:9)
8. Put on the armor of God (6:10–20)
9. Letter closing (6:21–24)

The Mysterious Plan of God

Paul uses the word “mystery” six times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). He uses the word “mystery” to talk about a truth that someone outside can’t figure out. Someone who already knows the mystery must reveal it to someone who doesn’t know. God has revealed this mystery to Paul, and he is now revealing God’s plan to the church. The mystery God reveals is His plan to unite all things in Christ (1:9-10). God is now making a “new humanity” (2:15), and that “new humanity” is the church. All different kinds of people are in the church, and they are all one in Christ Jesus - that is God’s mysterious plan!

The Armor of God

At the end of the letter, Paul tells believers to “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (6:11–12). All the people in the church would have seen Roman soldiers wearing their armor. Paul uses this common sight to encourage them to put on truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation just like armor. He tells them to carry the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God that can destroy the attacks of the evil one (6:13-17).

Take time to read Ephesians all the way through. Then, go back and study each section in detail, considering and discussing these questions:

1. What do we learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
2. What do we learn about the Church?
3. What do I, as a follower of Christ, need to do?
4. Is there a belief or action I need to change?
5. Who can I share these verse with?

The Church

Paul uses the word “church” many times in Ephesians. In this letter, he is not talking about one specific church but the whole church. God is building the whole church of all believers from all places to become a holy temple in the Lord (2:21). Paul refers to the church in many different ways. He calls the church the Body of Christ (1:23), the new humanity (2:15), and God’s household or family (2:19).

