

# COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

## 1

### WRITER, OCCASION AND DATE, THEME, AND STRUCTURE

**WRITER.** The Book of Ephesians so distinctively resembles everything that is known about the apostle Paul that few have doubted that he was the writer. Five factors strongly argue in favor of Paul as the writer of Ephesians.

(1) The book begins with a heading that announces Paul as the writer (Eph. 1:1). The Book of Ephesians has been recognized by believers as an inspired infallible message from God from the day of its writing until today. If the book is inspired by God, its statement about who wrote it should be considered to be as trustworthy as the message it contains. The book was produced by a three-fold cooperation. God was the author, because the book declares that its contents were revealed by God to the writer through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:1-5). Paul was the writer, because he was chosen to receive the contents from God and to proclaim them first to the Ephesians but also to all believers (Eph. 1:1; 3:18). Tychicus was the recorder, because he wrote down the message as Paul spoke it and then delivered the resulting document to the Ephesian believers (Eph. 6:21-22).

(2) The book uses terms and expressions for which Paul is well known. Ephesians speaks repeatedly of unity, oneness, harmony, togetherness, reconciliation, peace, love, giving, sharing, breaking down barriers, ending hostility, and exalting others. All of those emphases were prominent emphases in Paul's ministry, according to the Book of Acts and according to his other writings. No one else in the first century had such an obvious special interest in the topics discussed in this book.

(3) The description the writer of Ephesians gives of himself in Ephesians 3:1-13 fits Paul more perfectly than any other known Christian leader. In those verses he said he received the gospel message by revelation from God and that God sent him to deliver that message to the Gentiles, which is exactly the way the Book of Acts describes him (Acts 9:1-24).

(4) The book was written to a church with which Paul had extensive contacts. He first visited Ephesus briefly at the end of his second missionary journey. He spoke in the synagogue for a brief period and then continued on his goal of returning to Antioch to report on the success of the mission. He left Priscilla and Aquila there to continue the witness, and he promised to return if it was the Lord's will (Acts 18:18-21). On his third missionary journey, Paul revisited churches he had started in Anatolia and then came to Ephesus (Acts 18:23-19:1). His first converts were followers of John the Baptist who had never heard of the Holy Spirit. They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit fell on them, and they spoke in tongues (Acts 19:2-8). Paul preached and led discussions in the synagogue for three months. When some in the synagogue raised opposition to his message, he led those who had accepted Jesus to meet separately in Tyrannus's lecture hall, where he held discussions every day for two years (Acts 19:9-10). His ministry in Ephesus grew until the Lord was working astonishing miracles through him and many turned away from pagan magic, even burning their magic books in public (Acts 19:11-20). A silversmith incited a riot against Paul because so many pagans had turned to Jesus that his sales of silver idols had been greatly damaged. To calm the turmoil that was directed primarily toward him, Paul moved on to Macedonia and Greece (Acts 19:21-20:3). His total ministry in Ephesus lasted nearly three years (Acts 20:31), longer than his ministry with any other church he started. After preaching and witnessing in Greece for three months, he decided to return to Jerusalem for Pentecost. On that return voyage, his ship docked in Miletus, and he sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. They came to meet him, and he instructed and encouraged them with emotion and tears until time for

them to put him on the ship to sail on toward Jerusalem (Acts. 20:1-38). In Jerusalem, some Jews from the province of Asia stirred up a riot against, which resulted in his arrest. His confinement continued for at least three years in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. After Paul had so many contacts with the Ephesians and then was prevented from returning to them, it was natural for him to write to them to share a message that was growing increasingly significant to his heart.

(5) The occasion for the writing of Ephesians fits Paul's schedule perfectly. The writer of Ephesians says he was a prisoner when he wrote the book (Eph. 3:1,13; 4:1; 6:20). Paul became a prisoner soon after his return to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16-38). He went into the temple to fulfill a vow he had made, and some Jews from the province of Asia falsely accused him of defiling the temple by taking Greeks in with him. A riot started, and Paul was rescued by the commander of the Roman armies in the city (Acts 21:17-22:29). The next day, the commander sought to understand the reason for the people's fierce anger at Paul, so he had him examined by the Jewish Sanhedrin. A near riot broke out among them (Acts 23:1-10). The following day, the commander learned of a plot to kill Paul, so he had him taken to Caesarea by a Roman military guard unit to protect him in (Acts 23:11-35).. Paul was kept in prison in Caesarea for two years, without a decision's being rendered. The unfairness of his long detention without a just cause forced him to appeal his case to Caesar (Acts 24:1-25:12). He was escorted to Rome by Roman soldiers on a ship, which wrecked at sea along the way without the loss of a single person on board (Acts 25:13-26:32). When he arrived in Rome, he was placed on house arrest awaiting his trial before Caesar (Acts 27:1-16). Paul could have written a letter to Ephesus during his imprisonment in Caesarea, but he was most free to write during his house arrest in Rome. If he wrote from Rome, it had been three or four years since he left Ephesus to relieve stress on the church that that was caused by opposition to him. No doubt, the Ephesians had heard of his imprisonment and perhaps even of his shipwreck. It was natural for him to send them word about his safety and successes in Rome through a trusted messenger and also to send along a letter in which he shared with them insights that he had gained since he left them and that he wanted them to know.

(6) The theme of the book is a topic that Paul was uniquely qualified to understand and to proclaim. That theme is the ultimate unity of all things in Christ, a theme that was especially meaningful to Paul because of his background and personal experiences. Formerly he had been named Saul, and he had been trained as a Pharisee. He was the most zealous of all of his contemporaries in promoting and defending the Mosaic law. He hated Christians, because they accepted Gentiles, and his concept of the Mosaic law was that Gentiles were so vile that Jews should not associate with them. He persecuted Christians in Jerusalem so fiercely that he drove most of them out of the city (Acts 8:1-3; Gal. 1:11-14). His opposition to Christians was so fierce that he wished to continue oppressing them, so he sought and obtained permission to travel to Damascus to carry on the same persecution of Christians there (Acts 9:1-2). When he and his traveling party drew near to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in a brilliant light, struck him blind, informed him that his persecutions were primarily against Him, and told him to go into Damascus and wait for a message about what he should do (Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-25). After three days, Jesus appeared to a disciple named Ananias and sent him to Saul to tell Saul he was a chosen instrument to carry Jesus' name "to Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel." Saul's sight was restored; and he rose up, was baptized, and began to preach about Jesus. Soon he became an object of persecution by those who wanted to continue oppressing Christians. Quickly he changed from persecutor to one who was persecuted (Acts 9:10-25). Saul spent three years in Arabia, restudying the Scriptures and completely reversing his understanding of the Mosaic law. He did not lose his respect for the law. He learned to see the law in a totally different light. He came to understand it taught that God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved. It was like he was released from a trap, and he wanted to spend the rest of his life spreading the good news he discovered in the very Scriptures he formerly had understood to teach hatred toward everyone except the Jews (Gal. 1:11-24). By the time he wrote the book of Ephesians, Paul's efforts to spread that message had led him to ministries in Cilicia and Antioch and then to conduct three missionary journeys over much of the Roman world. On the third of those journeys he had firmly established the church in Ephesus and had ministered among them for three years (Acts 13:1-21:25; Gal. 1:15-24). Because of all of those experiences, no

person other than Paul was in such an ideal position to understand the wonder of God's love for all people and his intention to bring all things into harmonious union in the end. Paul, more than anyone else in the first century, was ready-made to write this book about unity in Jesus.

All of those factors clearly point to Paul as the writer of the Book.

**OCCASION AND DATE.** The Book of Ephesians actually is a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus. In it, he states three times that he was a prisoner when he wrote the letter (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). The Book of Acts describes two lengthy imprisonments that Paul endured. The first was in Caesarea, where he was imprisoned for two years (Acts 23:11-26:32). From there, he was sent to Rome for trial before Caesar, where he remained under house arrest for two years (Acts. 28:14-31). Since he was under house arrest in Rome, of the two imprisonments Paul was freer to write and send correspondence while he was in Rome than he was in Caesarea. Most likely Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians during his imprisonment in Rome. In many ways, the Book of Colossians is similar to Ephesians; and Paul mentions in both letters that he was entrusting the letters to Tychicus to deliver them and to report more fully on his conditions. (Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7). Almost surely both letters were written at the same time from Rome. If so, the date was in the early 60's.

While imprisoned, Paul received the encouraging word that the believers in Ephesus were strong in their faith in the Lord Jesus and in their love for all the saints (Eph. 1:15). Their commitment extended upward to Jesus and outward to other believers. Since he had left Ephesus because of a riot, the news that the church there was faithful and prospering spiritually was extremely encouraging to him. That good news indicated to Paul that they perhaps had the strongest faith and the purest lives of all the churches he had founded. He seems to have felt that they had matured enough in their faith to understand the great insights God had given him into His plan to ultimately unite all believers into one fellowship, living in a world without conflict of any kind. He seems to have considered the Ephesian believers to be better prepared to embrace that truth than any other church he founded. The result was that he wrote to them what is the most mature and far-sighted of all of his letters.

**THEME.** The theme that runs throughout the Book of Ephesians is Unity in Christ. Like many of Paul's letters, Ephesians is divided into two main sections. The first section is doctrinal, and the second is practical. The two sections are firmly linked together, because the practical section deals with moral standards that are based on the doctrine Paul expounded in the first section. In the first section, Paul explained the doctrine of Unity in Christ and prayed for the Ephesians to understand it. In the second section, he described what believers should do to live in unity and challenged them to do it. He presented unity as the ultimate goal of the gospel for the future and the ideal way of life for the present.

Paul had great concern for Christians to live in unity. He had been sent to take the gospel to Jews and to Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Jesus' call to him on the road to Damascus to undertake that mission was the watershed of his life. Before Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, he was the major Jewish persecutor of Christians for one reason. That reason was their acceptance of Gentiles as God's people without requiring them to become Jews. After Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, he was the foremost proclaimer of the great truth that when it comes to salvation God makes no difference between Jews and Gentiles. After spending three years in Arabia restudying the Scriptures and readjusting his understanding of them, He participated in the first great experiment of combining Jews and Gentiles together in one dynamic church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30). Then the Holy Spirit called him and Barnabas to leave Antioch and to conduct the first deliberate Christian mission to the Gentile world. They received the blessing of the Antioch church for that mission and set out immediately (Acts 13:1-3). They completed that journey successfully. Upon returning to Antioch, Paul was the major instigator of the Jerusalem Conference, at which leaders of the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem agreed that circumcision was not required for salvation and that salvation is available to everyone on the same

basis of faith in Jesus Christ alone (Acts. 15:1-29). Paul then conducted two other missionary journeys to carry the gospel farther and farther abroad, which resulted primarily in Gentile converts (Acts 16:1-21:16). On his third missionary journey, he conceived the idea of sponsoring an offering among Gentile churches for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, who were suffering from a severe drought. He expected the offering to become a means of bringing peace between Gentile and Jewish believers (Acts. 24:17; Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:5). His effort failed to accomplish Paul's purpose. Instead, it became the occasion for his imprisonment that stretched over about four or five years in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome (Acts 21:26-28:30). His disappointment over the failure of his effort to bring peace between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jerusalem must have intensified his urge to share with those who would listen his vision of unity through Christ. He saw an unusual faith and love in the Ephesian believers that made him believe they provided him his major opportunity to share his vision with some who would listen and his major hope that they would pass it on to still others. For the sake of that vision, he poured out his heart to the Ephesian believers in this marvelous letter. He challenged them to believe that unity and harmony will come to all created things in the end and to live as examples of that unity and harmony in the present.

Paul's emphasis in this book fits perfectly into all the events we know about in his life.

**STRUCTURE.** Like most of Paul's writings, Ephesians contains two main sections, with a brief opening or salutation and a brief ending or conclusion.

In Paul's brief salutation, he surveyed the great truths of salvation and its ultimate goal of bringing all the cosmos together into one harmonious whole through Christ.

The first major section of the book is theological. In it, Paul discusses the most exalted of all theological topics. He discusses God's ultimate goal to be achieved at the end of the ages. That goal is to unite in perfect harmony all things everywhere and for all time. At the close of that discussion, he prayed for the Ephesians and for all saints to have super strength to be able to understand that great goal. All the theological statements that preceded the prayer led up to the prayer and prepared the Ephesians to respond to his prayer through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second major section of the book is practical. In it, Paul told the Ephesians how to live in a manner that was worthy of the great goal toward which their salvation was headed. He presented the principles that contribute to unity among people, especially believing people, while they still live on the earth. It is the best advice ever written on how to live in peace and harmony in a troubled and divided world.

The sections of this commentary are divided according to the topics Paul discussed in the two major sections of the book. The sections of the commentary are as follows:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Chapters</u>
Salutation	Ephesians 1:1-14	2
I. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians	Ephesians 1:15-3:21	3-7
A. The motivation for Paul's prayer	Ephesians 1:15-16	3
B. The purpose for Paul's prayer	Ephesians 1:17-23	4
C. The basis for Paul's prayer	Ephesians 2:1-22	5
D. The pray-er of Paul's prayer	Ephesians 3:1-13	6
E. The praying of Paul's prayer	Ephesians 3.14-21	7

II. Paul's challenge to the Ephesians	Ephesians 4:1-6:18	8-14
Introduction	Ephesians 4:1	8
A. Walk in unity and diversity	Ephesians 4:2-16	8
B. Walk not like the other Gentiles but like Christ	Ephesians 4:17-24	9
C. Walk not in hostility but in love	Ephesians 4:25-5:2	10
D. Walk not in darkness but in light	Ephesians 5:3-14	11
E. Walk not as unwise [ones] but as wise [ones]	Ephesians 5:15-6:9	12
F. Be empowered	Ephesians 6:10-18	13
Personal words	Ephesians 6:19-24	14

Each section in the commentary below begins with the author's translation of that section. The translations are printed in bold italic type in order to clearly distinguish the inspired words of the Biblical text from the writer's comments. Any quotations of the Old Testament are also underlined. The following two features of the translations are followed strictly.

The first feature of the translations is that they are as literal as it is possible to translate Greek into English. This writer believes that the Book of Ephesians is an inspired book that contains the actual words revealed and inspired by God and that those words are inerrant and infallible. The best way to communicate to English readers the message God sent to the Ephesians in the Greek language is to use the words God actually inspired as closely as it is possible to transfer them into English. It is better for the writings to sound a little unusual in English than to change the words in order to make them sound smooth and literary in the ears of English readers. By that means, the reader is free to understand for himself what God actually said, rather than having the words interpreted to him by the translator. If the translator smooths out the language by using words and expressions that are familiar to English readers, he runs too great a risk of inserting his own ideas of what he thinks the text should say instead of what it actually says. Therefore, the translations in this commentary are word-for-word translations to the extent that it is possible for them to be understandable in English. Any additional words that are necessary in order to make the Greek text understandable in English are enclosed in brackets and printed in normal type, so the reader can leave them out and judge for himself if they change the meaning in any way.

The second feature of the translations is that they are arranged in outline form. The purpose is to show how the sections, paragraphs, and sentences are related to each other. The outlines will help the reader identify the topics Paul discussed in each section and discern how Paul's statements relate to each other as he developed each topic. Understanding those relationships should make it easier for the reader to grasp Paul's meaning. The outlines also show how well organized Paul's thoughts were as he presented the topics he discussed, and it helps the reader to analyze the topics Paul discussed in an orderly and understandable manner. Any headings in the outline that are added in order to identify the subject of a section are enclosed in brackets and printed in normal type to show that they are not a part of the inspired text.

The comments that follow each section of the outline are intended to help the reader discern the actual meaning of the text in that section. Every effort is made not to add the writer's thoughts but to clarify the thought God put in the mind of Paul and in the pen of the recorder who wrote down Paul's inspired words. The reader is encouraged to compare the comments carefully with the text to discern for himself how accurately they portray what Paul actually wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Hopefully the comments will help the reader to be inspired and enthralled by the superb message this book contains.