

EPHESIANS

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BACKGROUND

Next to Rome, Ephesus was the most important city Paul visited on his missionary journeys. The main city of the Roman province of Asia, it was a populous port city, important as a center for commerce, religion, and politics. It had two great architectural wonders, the temple of Diana and a 50,000-seat theater ([Acts 19:29](#)). It also had a stadium or race course that often hosted fights between men and wild beasts (see [1 Cor. 9:24-25](#); [1 Cor. 15:32](#)—words written from Ephesus).

Paul visited Ephesus during his second journey, a visit cut short by his haste to return to Jerusalem ([Acts 18:19-21](#)). He visited again on his third journey and remained there for three years ([Acts 19-20](#)). He later sent Timothy to Ephesus as his representative. After Paul's death, the apostle John made Ephesus his headquarters until his death, by which time the Ephesian church had "fallen from [its] first love" ([Rev. 2:1-7](#)).

AUTHOR

Paul ([Ephes. 1:1](#); [Ephes. 3:1](#); see [Romans: Author](#)).

DATE AND LOCATION

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter ([Ephes. 3:1](#); [Ephes. 4:1](#); [Ephes. 6:20](#)). If these remarks refer to his imprisonment in Caesarea ([Acts 24:27](#)), the letter would have been written about A.D. 57-59. If they refer to his imprisonment in Rome ([Acts 28:30](#)), which is more likely, the letter was written about 60-62. Since he expressed no hope of release, it was probably just after his coming to Rome, while he was imprisoned in his own rented house ([Acts 28:30](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Epistles of Paul, The](#)

RECIPIENTS

The words "in Ephesus" ([Ephes. 1:1](#)) are missing in some important Greek manuscripts. This, coupled with the fact that there are no personal greetings in the letter and no specific church problem is addressed, has given rise to the idea that Ephesians was originally a cyclical letter, intended for circulation among the seven churches of Asia Minor ([Rev. 2-3](#)). However, the majority of extant Greek manuscripts do include "in Ephesus," and none of those manuscripts indicate any other destination. Ephesians may have been intended as a cyclical letter, being first sent to Ephesus, the main city of Asia, where Paul had made his headquarters as he ministered throughout the region ([Acts 19:10](#)).

Having received a good report about these churches ([Ephes. 1:15](#)), and hearing that Tychicus ([Ephes. 6:21](#)) was ready to make a trip to Ephesus, Paul seized the opportunity to send a letter.

PURPOSE

- To teach about the church as the body of Christ, composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers
- To exhort believers to conduct themselves properly toward one another because of their oneness in Christ
- To equip them for spiritual warfare

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Ephesians addresses no specific church problem.
- It is one of the least personal of Paul's letters. There is almost no personal greeting, and only two personal names appear: Paul and Tychicus.
- In the original Greek, [Ephes. 1:3-14](#) is the longest sentence in the Bible.
- The phrase "in the heavenly realms" occurs five times here ([Ephes. 1:3, 20](#); [Ephes. 2:6](#); [Ephes. 3:10](#); [Ephes. 6:12](#)), and nowhere else in Scripture.
- Paul used three great figures of speech to illustrate our union with Christ:
 - building ([Ephes. 2:21-22](#))
 - body ([Ephes. 1:22-23](#); [Ephes. 4:15](#))
 - bride ([Ephes. 5:25-32](#))

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Joshua:

- Joshua deals with the conquest and possession of the Promised Land, the "earthly realms"; Ephesians deals with our taking possession of our promised "heavenly realms" (see exposition on [Ephes. 1:1-6](#)).

Colossians:

- The content of 78 of the 155 verses in Ephesians is repeated in Colossians with only slight differences; 78 out of the 95 verses in Colossians resemble Ephesians:
 - Both epistles stress the relationship between Christ the head and the church his body.
 - Ephesians emphasizes the body, while Colossians emphasizes the head.

Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, Philemon:

- Like these epistles, Ephesians was written while Paul was in prison in Rome, with 2 Timothy coming during his second imprisonment when death was near.

OUTLINE

1. CALLING THE CHURCH OUT OF THE WORLD ([Ephes. 1-3](#))
 1. Salutation ([Ephes. 1:1-2](#))

- 2. Praise for God's redemption ([Ephes. 1:3-14](#))
- C. Awareness of redemption ([Ephes. 1:15-23](#))
- D. Saved by grace ([Ephes. 2:1-10](#))
- E. United by grace ([Ephes. 2:11-22](#))
- F. United as equals ([Ephes. 3](#))

II. THE CHURCH'S CONDUCT IN THE WORLD ([Ephes. 4-6](#))

- A. In unity ([Ephes. 4:1-16](#))
- B. In righteousness ([Ephes. 4:17-32](#))
- C. In holiness ([Ephes. 5:1-21](#))
- D. In marriage ([Ephes. 5:22-33](#))
- E. In family and household ([Ephes. 6:1-9](#))
- F. Amid conflict ([Ephes. 6:10-20](#))
- G. Conclusion ([Ephes. 6:21-24](#))

TIMELINE

A.D. 35:	Paul's conversion
A.D. 52:	Paul in Ephesus on 2nd journey
A.D. 54-57:	Paul in Ephesus on 3rd journey
A.D. 60-62:	Paul imprisoned, in Rome writes Ephesians
c. A.D. 67:	Paul martyred

[Ephes. 1:1-14](#) *The Trinity and our salvation.* Paul praised the work of all three members of the Godhead in bringing about our salvation ([Ephes. 1:3-14](#)). This is one of the Bible's clearest teachings on the Trinity (see exposition on [§Genesis 1:26-31](#)):

Chosen by the Father in the past (1:1-6). God chose us for salvation and sanctification before the creation of the world and has given us "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms." "Heavenly realms" simply describes our experience of the reality of salvation. On "predestined" ([Ephes. 1:5](#), KJV, NIV), see [1 Peter 1:1-2](#). On "adoption," see exposition on [§Galatians 3:26-4:7](#). On sanctification, see exposition on [§Hebrews 10:1-18](#).

Redeemed by the Son in the present (1:7-12). In the person of Jesus Christ, God has redeemed us through his blood shed at Calvary ([Ephes. 1:7-8](#)). Calvary was the final fulfillment of God's mysterious, ages-long plan of salvation ([Ephes. 1:9-11](#); see exposition on [§Ephes. 3:1-13](#)), in which believers are privileged to participate ([Ephes. 1:12](#)).

Oikonomia, the Greek for "dispensation" ([Ephes. 1:10](#), KJV), occurs elsewhere with a meaning referring to stewardship or management, as in [Luke 16:2-4](#), [1 Cor. 9:17](#), and [Col. 1:25](#). The school of Bible interpretation known as *dispensationalism* views the world as a household run by God. God "dispenses" or administers the affairs of his "household world" in various stages of revelation (see [Biblical Dispensations](#)). Christ, as the very focal point of all these stages, was born "in the dispensation of the fullness of times" (KJV) or "at the right time"—a time that was right in terms of both the divine plan and the human condition (see [Matthew: Background](#); [Galatians 4:4](#)).

Sealed by the Spirit forever ([1:13-14](#)). At the time of salvation, the Holy Spirit "seals" or "identifies" the believer, "guaranteeing" his or her salvation. This seal image suggests several things about the believer's relationship to God:

- The believer is owned by God (see [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#); [2 Tim. 2:19](#)).
- he or she is eternally secure (see [Ephes. 4:30](#); see exposition on ^s[John 10:22-30](#)).
- Salvation is a completed transaction (see [Jeremiah 32:9-10](#); [John 17:4](#); [John 19:30](#)).

The Holy Spirit is "promised," for Christ promised his coming ([Ephes. 1:13](#); see [John 14:16-17](#); [John 16:7](#), [13](#); [Acts 1:4-5](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

[Ephes. 1:15-23](#) *Understanding the Trinity and our salvation.* Having heard of the Ephesians' faithfulness, Paul thanked God for them and prayed that God would show them just who Christ is, what he has done for believers, and who they are in him. Christ is the head of the church, which is his "body" ([Ephes. 1:22-23](#)). The NT often describes the church as the body of Christ (see [Ephes. 4:7-11](#); [Romans 12:5](#); [1 Cor. 12:6](#); see exposition on ^s[Col. 2:4-3:4](#)). On being "filled" by Christ ([Ephes. 1:23](#); [Ephes. 3:19](#)), see exposition on ^s[Col. 1:15-23](#).

[Ephes. 2:1-10](#) *Transformed from transgressors to trophies.* We were lost in sin and under God's curse ([Ephes. 2:1-3](#)), but now by grace we have been saved and given a place in God's eternal plan ([Ephes. 2:4-7](#)). This salvation is "a gift from God" given "by his special favor" ([Ephes. 2:8](#)). God's "special favor" is also referred to as grace, and it describes God's part in offering salvation apart from any requirement to keep the law. "When you believed" describes faith, our part in accepting that offer. It is *apart* from works ([Ephes. 2:9](#)) but is also *for* the good works God created us to do ([Ephes. 2:10](#)).

The Greek for "masterpiece" or "workmanship" ([Ephes. 2:10](#)) is *poema*, from which we get *poem*. God has two treasured poems:

- the poem of creation (see [Romans 1:20](#); [Rev. 4:11](#))
- the poem of salvation ([Ephes. 2:10](#); see [Rev. 5:9-10](#))

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

[Ephes. 2:11-22](#) *From aliens to family members.* Gentiles, once alienated from Israel and from God, are now joined to both by the blood of Christ, who has removed the wall of separation represented by the law and has joined Jew and Gentile together into "one people" with direct access to God ([Ephes. 2:11-18](#)). Gentiles, once strangers, can now be members of God's household, living stones in his holy Temple, of which Christ is the chief cornerstone ([Ephes. 2:19-22](#); see [1 Peter 2:4-5](#)).

Jesus "ended" the law "by his death" ([Ephes. 2:15](#)) by fulfilling it (see [Matthew 5:17](#)). He fulfilled it when he died on the cross for our sins, thus bringing the law to an end (see [Romans 10:4](#)).

[Ephes. 3:1-13](#) *"Let me tell you a secret."* God made known to Paul a "secret plan," or mystery, hidden for ages ([Ephes. 3:1-5](#)): that Gentiles would now have the same opportunity as Jews for salvation ([Ephes. 3:6](#)). Both would be "part of the same body," namely, the body of Christ (see exposition on [Ephes. 1:15-23](#)). Gentiles could be saved before Christ, but only by becoming Jews (see [Isaiah 56:1-8](#)). See exposition on [Col. 1:24-29](#). This joining of Jew and Gentile into the one body of Christ would complete the revelation of God's plan to the unseen realm of angels and demons (see [Ephes. 1:21](#); see exposition on [Ephes. 6:10-17](#)). It was a sort of school in which they could learn about his grace ([Ephes. 3:8-12](#); see [1 Peter 1:10-12](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

[Ephes. 3:14-21](#) *The dimensions of his love.* Paul asked God to help his people grow stronger in their faith and better understand the full extent of his love for them ([Ephes. 3:14-19](#)). He ended this first half of his letter with praise to a God well able to do just that ([Ephes. 3:20-21](#)).

[Ephes. 4:1-6](#) *Maintaining the unity.* Having been united by their faith in Christ, believers should want to prove themselves worthy of their new condition. They should be at peace with each other ([Ephes. 4:1-3](#)), remembering all that they have in common ([Ephes. 4:4-6](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

[Ephes. 4:7-16](#) *The Giver and the goal of his gifts.* When Christ ascended to heaven, he distributed a wealth of spiritual gifts to his followers ([Ephes. 4:7-11](#)) to enable them to minister together as his body on earth (see exposition on [Ephes. 1:15-23](#)) and to bring each believer to spiritual maturity ([Ephes. 4:12-16](#)).

[Ephes. 4:17-32](#) *Walk the new walk, talk the new talk.* Gentile Christians should "throw off" their pagan past and instead display a way of life in keeping with their new nature in Christ ([Ephes. 4:17-24](#); see [Romans 12:2](#)). Paul offered specific guidelines relating to things such as dishonesty, anger, stealing, and misuse of the tongue ([Ephes. 4:25-29, 31-32](#)). Such wrong actions bring grief to the Holy Spirit, who is the permanent houseguest of every believer ([Ephes. 4:30](#)).

[Ephes. 5:1-13](#) *Walk in holiness.* We are to imitate God, to love as Christ loved, and to avoid immoral action and language ([Ephes. 5:1-5](#)). We are not to keep company with the godless but instead are to expose their sin, both by our godly example and by direct reproof ([Ephes. 5:6-13](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

[Ephes. 5:14-21](#) *Walk in readiness.* As we pursue holiness, we are to be alert, making the most of every opportunity, for we live in difficult days ([Ephes. 5:14-17](#)). Rather than indulging fleshly appetites, we should seek the spiritual refreshment available in the fellowship of the church ([Ephes. 5:18-21](#)).

Ephes. 5:22-33 *A word to wives and husbands.* Just as Christ is the head of the church (see exposition on ^s[Ephes. 1:15-23](#)), a husband is the head of his wife. Therefore, women should submit to their husbands "as [they] do to the Lord" ([Ephes. 5:22-24](#)). Just as Christ loves the church, husbands should love their wives ([Ephes. 5:25](#)). A husband's love for his wife, like Christ's love for his church, should be sacrificial ([Ephes. 5:25-29](#)) and intimate ([Ephes. 5:30-33](#)).

Ephes. 6:1-4 *"Children, obey. Fathers, don't provoke."* Children are to obey their parents ([Ephes. 6:1](#)), who are responsible for their spiritual welfare ([Ephes. 6:4](#)). Obedient children will be blessed ([Ephes. 6:2-3](#); see [Exodus 20:12](#)). Fathers are to use their authority with love, lest they make their children angry and resentful ([Ephes. 6:4](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Book of Ephesians, The](#)

Ephes. 6:5-9 *Both slaves and masters serve Christ.* Whatever our station in life, slave ([Ephes. 6:5-8](#)) or master ([Ephes. 6:9](#)), we should treat others as we would treat Christ, the master of us all.

Ephes. 6:10-17 *His armor against our adversary.* Reminding us of the might of our adversary the Devil, Paul urged us to use all the resources of God against him. These include the confidence of our right standing before God ("righteousness," "salvation"), as well as the truth of God's Word.

Whatever specific roles the "evil rulers" or "powers of darkness" play in his army, Satan is powerful and resourceful ([Ephes. 6:11-12](#)). The believer is never told to attack the Devil, but the believer is told to withstand and resist him ([Ephes. 6:11, 13-14](#); see [1 Peter 5:8-9](#)):

- When tempted to do wrong, we should flee as Joseph did (see [Genesis 39:7-23](#)).
- But when attacked by Satan for doing right, we should stand firm as Daniel's friends did (see [Daniel 3:1-25](#)).

Someone has observed that as pilgrims we walk, as witnesses we talk, as contenders we run, but as fighters we stand.

Ephes. 6:18-20 *One final weapon: Prayer.* Our spiritual warfare should always include prayer, for ourselves and for others ([Ephes. 6:18](#)). Paul asked for prayer for himself, that he might find the right words for witnessing ([Ephes. 6:19-20](#)). As we pray we must also "stay alert" to our spiritual enemy ([Ephes. 6:18](#); see [1 Peter 5:8](#)). Christians are often told to stay alert or to be ready (see [Matthew 26:41](#); [Luke 12:37-40](#); [Acts 20:31](#); [1 Thes. 5:6](#); [2 Tim. 4:5](#); [1 Peter 4:7](#); [Rev. 3:2](#); [Rev. 16:15](#)).

Ephes. 6:21-24 *"He'll bring you up to date."* Paul closed by noting that Tychicus would have the latest news concerning his ministry. Then, as usual, he wished his recipients peace and grace.