

JEREMIAH
BIBLE STUDY SERIES

EPHESIANS

THE INHERITANCE WE HAVE IN CHRIST

DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

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Prepared by Peachtree Publishing Services



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INTRODUCTION TO

The Letter to the Ephesians

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1–2). Paul wrote these words to believers in Asia Minor, the site of a battle royal taking place between Christianity and Greek and Roman religions. The city of Ephesus, for its part, was home to a temple dedicated to Artemis, a fertility goddess, and her worship involved prostitution and other illicit sexual activity. Other cities in the region had similar temples devoted to one god or another—and believers were feeling the tension between their new faith in Christ and the practices of the culture that surrounded them. So Paul penned this letter to remind them that Jesus was superior to everything the pagan religions had to offer. In fact, they had been spiritually *dead* in their former lives, living under the power of the enemy and sin, but Jesus had set them free and actually returned them to *life*. Paul’s words still resonate with believers today, for we also need to know that following Jesus has a point and a purpose—and that life in Christ is far superior to any other way of life the world has to offer.

AUTHOR AND DATE

The writer of the letter identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1) and “Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus” (3:1), and the content, themes, and vocabulary in the epistle share similarities with his other letters. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 35–108), an early church father, quotes from the letter in his own writings and indicates that he assumed

the author was Paul. The author of Ephesians also claims that he was a prisoner (see 3:1), and this fact aligns with Luke's account in the final chapter of Acts, where he tells of Paul's house arrest in the city of Rome. Given that Ephesians shares many similarities in content to the epistle of Colossians, scholars believe that the two letters were penned at about the same time. This would likely place the date of composition at AD 60, during the time of Paul's arrest in Rome.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

Paul's letter to the Ephesians was likely circulated to a group of believers in the region of Asia Minor, rather than to the church located in the city. Scholars believe this is true due to the fact that (1) the word *Ephesus* does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts, (2) the author reports hearing information about the believers secondhand, and (3) the overall tone of the letter is impersonal in nature. All of these factors would prove to be inconsistent if Paul were directing the letter at a beloved community of believers in a city where he ministered for nearly three years. Unlike most of Paul's other letters, the specific situation that prompted his writing this letter is also unknown. There appears to be no crisis that Paul was addressing and no specific arguments from opponents that he was countering. Most likely, the purpose behind the letter (as with the epistle of Colossians) was to encourage the believers to be united in love and fully understand the blessings of the gift of salvation they had received. As previously noted, Paul was likely in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter, and he was seeking to ground, shape, and challenge his readers long-distance so they would grow in their faith.

KEY THEMES

Several key themes are prominent in the letter to the Ephesians. The first is that *salvation comes through faith alone and is a gift of grace from God*. Paul wanted the believers to understand the incredible riches that they had been given in Christ. They had once been dead in their sins but had now received

eternal life. This life in Jesus was far superior to anything the world had to offer (see 1:1–23). Paul also wanted the believers to recognize they were saved not because of anything they had done but because of everything God had done (see 2:1–3:21). Understanding that salvation is a gift, unearned, and freely given, encourages a humble spirit.

A second theme is that *believers in Christ need to be united* (see 4:1–6, 17–31). This was an especially important message for the congregations in the region of Asia Minor, which were comprised of both Jewish and Gentile converts. These two groups had historically been opposed to one another, with Jews considering the Gentiles to be “unclean” and the Gentiles considering the Jewish practices to be strange and unusual. In order to establish unity, the believers needed to get past these ingrained animosities toward one another.

A third theme is that *believers must exercise their spiritual gifts* (see 4:7–16). Paul explains that all believers are given unique spiritual abilities by God. Some people are equipped to be teachers. Others are equipped to be administrators or evangelists. Paul’s discussion of these spiritual gifts dovetails with his theme of unity. The apostle makes it clear that the believers’ spiritual gifts were intended to be put to use for the benefit of the *entire* body of Christ.

A fourth theme is that *believers must walk in love, light, and wisdom* (see 4:17–6:9). Paul called the Christians in Asia Minor to live in light of all the blessings they had received and conduct themselves in a way that was worthy of their high callings. They were to put off old behaviors that were incompatible with their new life in Christ and serve one another in the body of Christ. They were to imitate God’s attribute of love within their communities.

A final theme is that *believers must engage in spiritual warfare* (see 6:10–24). The Christians in Asia Minor were no strangers to Satan’s strategies. The pagan activity in Ephesus and the other Roman cities exerted a strong pull on them. Those who resisted were regarded as outcasts and often persecuted for choosing to follow the way of Christ. Paul recognized these attacks against believers as coming directly from the enemy—“The

prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (2:2). He encouraged them to recognize they were in a spiritual battle and needed to utilize the armor of God to defend themselves.

KEY APPLICATIONS

Ephesians is one of the most influential documents ever written. In this short letter, Paul calls us to consider all the riches that we have received in Christ and live worthy of our high calling. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, it should make a profound difference in our lives—for we move from spiritual death and are reborn as completely new creations. Paul asks us to remember that we are set apart by God and should be pursuing His purposes as a unified body. We must also never forget we are in a *spiritual battle*—and “armor up” accordingly each day.

SECURE IN CHRIST

Ephesians 1:1–14

What comes to mind when you hear the word *saint*?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Paul begins this letter with an introduction and an address: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in

Ephesus” (1:1). Paul’s use of the term *apostle* (*apostolos* in the Greek) refers to one who has been commissioned by a higher authority to fulfill a particular mission. Paul is consistent in each of his letters in claiming that he was commissioned by Jesus Himself to spread the gospel to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. Thus, Paul establishes from the beginning of this letter that he is stepping into that role as an apostle, providing the guidance they need to follow so they can mature in their faith.

Paul refers to these believers as *saints*. While this term often brings up images in our minds of venerated figures in church history who have churches and cathedrals named after them, the Greek term that Paul employs (*hagioi*) simply refers to those who have been called to follow Jesus and are faithful in pursuing His ways. In the New Testament, the word almost always appears in the plural, and it always refers to the people of God.

In other words, a *saint* is just another name for a Christian. But Paul’s use of the term is especially poignant for the believers in Ephesus. The city at the time rivaled Corinth for its decadence and pagan worship practices. It was one of the filth capitals of the Roman world, and the believers were constantly surrounded by debauchery. Yet Paul reminds them that God had called them out of that cesspool of evil and sin. They had risen from their surroundings—like beautiful lilies on a stagnant pond—and God considered them *saints*.

For believers today, the word *saint* doesn’t suggest that we are all perfect or that any of us is better than anyone else. However, it does remind us that we are *set apart* for a higher purpose . . . which is the literal meaning of the word *holy*. All believers in Christ are *saints*—adopted children of God who have been given the blessings of God’s eternal kingdom.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Greeting to the Saints (Ephesians 1:1–6)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

1. In his greeting to the believers, Paul not only identifies himself as the author but also establishes his credibility by calling himself an apostle. What does Paul want his readers to understand about his calling as an apostle (see verse 1)?

2. Paul is clear in this passage that God chose these believers and predestined them for spiritual adoption into His family. The word *predestined* implies setting boundaries so that a person stays on a certain course and reaches a specific destination. According to Paul, for what reason does God choose to predestine a person (see verses 4–6)?

Redemption in Christ (Ephesians 1:7–14)

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

¹³ In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

3. The *mystery* that Paul mentions refers to something that is not discoverable through human knowledge or insight. What mystery has God revealed to the believers (see verses 9–10)?

4. Paul reminds the believers that they not only have been chosen by God but also have received a promised *inheritance* from Him (see verses 11–14). Why would this have been important for them to remember, given the temptation they were facing to return to their former ways?

GOING DEEPER

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with a typical “thanksgiving” section that he includes in most of his epistles (what scholars refer to as a *doxology*). However, the apostle also picks up on a theme that was found in the Old Testament books of prophecy—that God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (verse 11). In the following passage, the prophet Isaiah expounds on this idea that God is sovereign and works out all things according to His purposes.

Dead Idols and the Living God (Isaiah 46:8–13)

⁸ “Remember this, and show yourselves men;

Recall to mind, O you transgressors.

⁹ Remember the former things of old,

For I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like Me,

¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning,

LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

¹² "Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted,
Who are far from righteousness:
¹³ I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off;
My salvation shall not linger.
And I will place salvation in Zion,
For Israel My glory."

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

6. How does God summarize His sovereignty and His purposes (see verses 10–13)?

Paul not only confirms that God is sovereign but also that He has a perfect plan for His creation. In Ephesians 1:10, he uses the phrase *gather together*, which can also mean “to unite” or “to sum up.” In ancient times, it was used to describe the process of adding a column of figures and putting the sum up at the top. Paul thus states that God will make all things “add up” for believers in the end. He reiterates this point in his letter to the Romans.

From Suffering to Glory (Romans 8:18–25)

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for

the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

7. How does Paul put into perspective “the sufferings of this present time”? How does Paul compare creation in its present state with the glory that is to come (see verses 18–22)?

8. Paul uses the process of birth as a picture of the hope we have in Christ. How does hoping for “what [you] do not see” affect the way you live (see verses 22–25)?

REVIEWING THE STORY

Paul begins his letter by explaining the riches of God—a wealth that cannot be lost. He emphasizes that God is the giver of every spiritual blessing and that Christians are the recipients. To help the Ephesian believers understand what this means, he lists eight different spiritual blessings: they have been chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, enlightened, given an inheritance, sealed, and secured. Paul wants the believers to understand their identity in Christ and exactly what it means to be chosen by God.

9. What has God done for us (see Ephesians 1:3)?

10. When did God choose us? What was His purpose in choosing us (see Ephesians 1:4)?

11. What do we have in Christ (see Ephesians 1:7)?

12. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our lives as believers (see Ephesians 1:13–14)?

APPLYING THE MESSAGE

13. List the blessings that stand out to you from Ephesians 1:1–14. Why are they so meaningful to you?

14. How does knowing that you have an eternal inheritance help you face trials in this life?

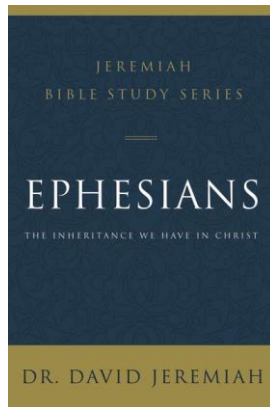
REFLECTING ON THE MEANING

The story is told of an old man who was asked to give his testimony in his church. He was excited about the opportunity, and when he got up, he talked about God until he couldn't think of anything more to say. He spoke at length about how God had loved him, called him, found him, cleansed him, and filled him. He gave a glorious testimony.

At the end of the service, he was approached by a younger man in the congregation who felt it was his duty to provide some correction. He came up to the old man and said, "I liked your testimony . . . except you just talked about God's part. You didn't tell us about your part. Salvation is a two-way deal. You've got to do your part, and God has got to do His part. We only heard about God's part. Why didn't you tell us about *your* part?" The old man thought about this for a moment. "Well, I guess I should," he said. "I'll tell you what my part was. I ran away from God as fast as I could, and He ran after me. That's the way it worked."

This is the way that it worked for most of us. We didn't come begging to God. Rather, God came after us and pursued us until He made us His own. As a result, we now know that we are adopted into His family, accepted in His Beloved, redeemed, and forgiven . . . and that we have an eternal inheritance in store for us. God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). From eternity past to eternity future, we are in Christ.

How did God pursue you and lead you to put your faith in Christ?



EPHESIANS

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Paul's reminder of our identity in Christ.

Ephesus was located in Asia Minor, a region full of spiritual darkness and the site of a clash taking place between Christianity and pagan religions. However, the apostle Paul saw an opportunity to advance the kingdom of God. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul walks the believers through their spiritual inheritance in Christ. This inheritance moves them from death to life and into God's family – something so much better than anything they had in their former lives. Because of this, they need to “walk worthy of their calling,” understand and use their spiritual gifts, and put on the armor of God.

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