

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Surbey of Ephesians

By

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A Survey of Ephesians

Introduction

The reading time for this book is approximately twenty minutes and it contains 155 verses.

It is always interesting to consider the contrast between how a book begins and ends. For instance, Romans begins with a statement concerning the gospel as “promised afore by His prophets in the holy scriptures” (Rom. 1:1-2). It ends with a statement about the mystery, “mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest” (Rom. 16:25-26). The beginning statement was about that which had been revealed aforetime (Rom. 1:2), and the closing was about that which had been hidden since the world began, but now is made manifest (Rom. 16:25-26). In Romans Paul develops the truth of the first statement, the gospel; but it is not until Ephesians that he develops the truth of the mystery, which is the final statement in Romans. Therefore, Ephesians is the development of the Roman epistle.

Furthermore, if we consider Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, there will be seen a development of truth. In Romans we have “died with Christ” (Rom. 6:8); in Colossians we are “risen with Christ” (Col. 3:1), and in Ephesians we are “seated with Christ” (Eph. 2:6)

The focal point of Ephesians is the mystical body of Christ which is the congregate of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture, of which Christ is the head. The scriptures record a number of metaphors of this corporate body of saints.

Metaphor	Reference	Metaphor	Reference
Bride	Rev. 21:2	Church of God	Gal. 1:13 1 Cor. 15:9
Flock <i>(In the KJV it says “one fold” but the correct wording is “one flock”. A fold has a circumference but no center, whereas a flock has a center and no circumference.)</i>	Jn. 10:16	Church of the living God	1 Tim. 3:15
Temple	Eph. 2:21-22	Church of the Firstborn	Heb. 12:23
Body of Christ	Eph. 4:12	Building	Eph. 2:20-21
One body	1 Cor. 12:13	Holy Nation	1 Pet. 2:9
House	Heb. 3:6	A Royal Priesthood	1 Pet. 2:9
Mystery	Eph. 3:9	Holy City	Rev. 21:2
Wife	Rev. 21:9	Chosen generation	1 Pet. 2:9
New Man	Eph. 2:15	A peculiar people	1 Pet. 2:9

In Ephesians Paul will use three pictures of the church, viewing it as:

- a) A temple (ch. 2:21-22)
- b) As a body (ch. 1:22-23)
- c) As a bride (ch. 5:25-32)

Throughout much of the Old Testament the prophets of God prophesied of the coming kingdom when Christ would rule as King (Psa. 2:6; 110:2; Isa. 9:6-7).

- a) When our Lord was here this kingdom was offered to Israel, but in rejecting the King (Lk. 19:14; Jn. 19:15) they rejected the kingdom.
- b) In Acts the gospel was presented to them again, both in the homeland and in the distant lands, but again they rejected until Paul said: "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles" (Acts 13:47), "I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

From then on it is as if Israel disappeared for nothing is heard of them until the Book of the Revelation (Rev. 7:4).

During the intervening period God had said: "To take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14), and while unlike Israel, which could be seen as a congregation, this congregation could not be seen as such for it cannot on earth be localized. This congregation, the church, began at Pentecost and its sojourn on earth will end at the rapture. God tells quite clearly that this was a mystery, a sacred secret, and that congregation would consist of people who were in an organic union with Christ as the Head. It was and is a profound truth. Every saint of this era is a member in a living organism, the mystical body of which Christ is the Head. In this "church", "body", there would be a fixed equality of people, void of any divisions, for: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female" (Gal. 3:28). This congregation is called, among other names, "The body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). It is this living organism that Paul speaks of (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Col. 1:18, 2:19) but the doctrine of which is expanded in Ephesians. However, while it is presented as a "body", here the teaching is different from 1 Cor. 12:12-27. There the whole body is seen as the saints, but here the Head is Christ, and the saints of this age are the body. It must be stressed that the church is not an outgrowth of Israel, neither is it in place of Israel. They are two totally distinct entities.

The Author

The authorship of Ephesians was never disputed until 1792 when Evanson pronounced it as a forgery. Others, while not calling it such, allow it to be viewed as a phony. This is because of the difficulty of the name "Ephesus" and the difficulty to explain statements made in the book. See the next section under "Observations".

In Ephesians Paul identifies himself twice over (ch. 1:1; 3:1). In Pauline fashion he describes his apostolic authority as God given, just as in 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Col. 1:1. He also declares himself to be the "least of all saints" and "is this grace given" (to be an apostle and preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (ch. 3:7-8).

As when dealing with atheists, it is not my responsibility to prove God is, but theirs to prove He does not exist. Here it is not my responsibility to prove Paul is the author, but for skeptics to prove he is not.

To deny the authorship of Paul leaves unanswered questions such as:

- a) Why did the Holy Spirit, who is omnipotent, permit a forgery to be accepted as genuine for almost 1800 years?
- b) Could any deceiver encourage the saints by presenting such high truths and write: "lie not one to another"?
- c) Could someone have just used Paul's name?

Surely the Almighty had and has sufficient providential control that He could prevent, and would prevent, such situations.

Observations

That which is emphasized in Chapters 4, 5, 6 is our walk, not our talk.

- a) Chapter 4:1-16 – a worldly walk
- b) Chapter 4:17-32 – a renewed walk
- c) Chapter 5:1-5 – a loving walk

- d) Chapter 5:6-14 – a childlike walk
- e) Chapter 5:15 to 6:9 – a circumspect walk

Those To Whom It Was Addressed

It is very easy to say that “the Bible says it was to the saints in “Ephesus” (ch. 1:1) therefore, with many that ends the matter. The problem with this is that we are going by a handed down translation and not the original manuscripts.

- a) To what extent does this statement “at Ephesus” give the true understanding of that which was written?

If one were able to read that which Paul originally wrote the question would be easily answered. The argument that it was exclusively to the saints at Ephesus leaves several major questions. It does seem strange to me that Paul, who spent three years with the saints in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), does not mention one of the saints in the salutation or closing comments. To say that he has “heard of their faith . . . and love” (ch. 1:15), or that they had “heard of the dispensation of the grace of God” given to him (ch. 3:2) would be almost hurtful to those with whom he had wept (Acts 20:37).

It would appear to me there could be several possibilities, none of which effect the content and truths presented.

The following suggestions have been made it was written to:

- a) The saints at Laodicea (Col. 4:16). Of this I can find no evidence.
- b) To saints in general as the RSV says: “to the saints who are also faithful in Christ”. However, this leads to the question of why would Paul be so ambiguous when in other epistles he names the place. (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2)
- c) It may have gone to Ephesus first, for the letter to them also comes first in Revelation 2:1. Was this the way the postman went, that is, in a great circular fashion, the first major stop being Ephesus, then Smyrna, and in time to Laodicea?
- d) Rather than being exclusively for the Ephesian church it was all the churches in the area.

In a summary and consideration of all the possibilities, I see this letter not exclusively for the local church at Ephesus but mainly for the churches in the area where Paul had not been. This would explain why salutations, etc., would be left out. There can be no doubt that it had to do with the city of Ephesus and the surrounding area.

Background

Ephesus was an important city in Asia Minor. It had a theater that seated 50,000. It’s temple to Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world.

The scriptures do not inform us of when, how, or who God used to start the church at Ephesus. One thing we do know, it was not Paul for he was forbidden to go into that area and preach (Acts. 16:6). It would seem that Priscilla and Aquila were either the start of it or came to Ephesus shortly after it began. In time, this godly pair who sought to teach the truth of God (Acts 18:26) were left there by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-19). Later Paul came back during his third missionary journey and stayed there three years (Acts 20:31). It was not easy work for Ephesus was the scene of much conflict due to the devotion to Diana (Acts 19:28). So fierce was the conflict that Paul, recalling it, spoke of it that he had “fought with beasts” (1 Cor. 15:32). It was here he had almost lost his life in the riot (Acts 20:1). After three years Paul left. Possibly Aquila and Priscilla had gone elsewhere or died, and Timothy was left caring for the saints. It was not long before men of influence, (Hymenaeus and Alexander) possibly elders in the church, began to teach error. Due to their teachings of “fables and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4) and ascetic teachings such as forbidding of marriage and abstaining from certain foods (1 Tim. 4:3), problems began to arise. These doctrines resulted in that which was not “godly edifying which is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:4). This resulted in the great danger of division between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul’s writing will teach them that there can be no division in the mystical body of Christ. A truth which is sadly not recognized by many despite the verbal belief of it.

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When Written

It is beneficial to get a summary of the missionary journeys of Paul and when the epistles were written.

Experiences	Date	Books written	Main themes
1st Missionary Journey	47-50 A D	None	
2nd Missionary Journey	51-54 A D	1 & 2 Thessalonians	The Coming The key concept: hope
3rd Missionary Journey	54-58	1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans	The Cross The key concept: faith
1st Imprisonment		Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon	The Church The key concept: love
4th Missionary Journey	65-67	1 Timothy, Titus	The Congregation The key concept: consistency
2nd Imprisonment	67-68	2 Timothy	

(The above structure and thoughts were adapted from “The unfolding Drama of Redemption” Scroggie)

Peculiarities

Words peculiar to Ephesians of which I am aware:

Words	Reference	Words	Reference
Obtained an inheritance	ch. 1:11	First trusted	ch. 1:12
Greatness	ch. 1:19	Without God	ch. 2:12
Middle wall	ch. 2:14	Fellowcitizens	ch. 2:19
Fitly framed together	ch. 2:21; 4:16	Builded together	ch. 2:22
Same body	ch. 3:6	Partakers	ch. 3:6
Less than the least	ch. 3:8	Manifold	ch. 3:10
May be able	ch. 3:18	Unity	ch. 4:3, 13
He led captivity	ch. 4:8	Lower	ch. 4:9
Perfecting	ch. 4:12	Sleight	ch. 4:14
Tossed	ch. 4:14	Past feeling	ch. 4:19
Deceive	ch. 4:14	Go down	ch. 4:26
Be renewed	ch. 4:23	Filthiness	ch. 5:4

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Words	Reference	Words	Reference
Wrath	ch. 4:26	Jesting	ch. 5:4
Foolish talking	ch. 5:4	Shall give thee light	ch. 5:14
In secret	ch. 5:12	Wrinkle	ch. 5:27
Fools	ch. 5:15	Live long	ch. 6:3
Nourisheth	ch. 5:29	Rulers	ch. 6:12
We wrestle	ch. 6:12	Darts	ch. 6:16
Preparation	ch. 6:15	Shield	ch. 6:16
I may open	ch. 6:19	Perseverance	ch. 6:18

Key Verse:

Chapter 1:7

Key Words

Key words	No. of verses	Key words	No. of verses
In Christ Jesus	5	In Christ	5
Walk	6	Together	6
According to	14	Love	14
Riches	5	Heavenly places	4
Grace	12	Glory	8
Fullness	4	Filled	2
Fill	1	In Him	12

Notes

Ephesians and Colossians are both similar and contrastive.

Similarities

Data	Ephesians	Colossians
Paul a prisoner	ch. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20	ch. 4:3
Tychicus was the postman	ch. 6:21-22	ch. 4:7
Commended for their faith and love	ch. 1:15	ch. 1:4, 8

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That both would grow in the knowledge of God and understanding	ch. 1:17	ch.1:9-10
Both would know the will of God	ch. 5:17	ch. 1:9
Both mention redemption through Christ	ch. 1:7	ch. 1:14
Both speak of Christ as the Head	ch. 1:22-23	ch. 1:18, 24
In both Christ is above principalities and powers	ch. 1:21	ch. 1:16-17
Both speak of deliverance from darkness	ch. 2:2	ch. 1:13
Both explain the process by which this deliverance was wrought	ch. 2:1-10	ch. 2:14-16
Both speak of the termination of the law	ch. 2:14-15	ch. 2:14-16
Both have a call to holiness	ch. 4:17 - 5:13	ch. 3:1-7
Both speak of being strengthened by God's Spirit	ch. 3:16; 4:23-24	ch. 3:9-10
Both speak of forgiveness that is the outcome of love	ch. 5:21 - 6:9	Col. 3:18 - 4:1
Both speak of forgiving as God forgives	ch. 4:32	ch. 3:13
Both have a prayer at the end for the preaching of the gospel	ch. 6:18-19	ch. 4:3

Contrasts

Ephesians	Colossians
Greeting only one name (ch. 6:21)	Personal greeting and many names (ch. 1:1-12; 6:4-17)
Were exhorted to lay hold of hope (ch. 1:18, 2:12, 4:4)	Commended for their hope (ch. 1:5)
In Ephesians: "I am in Christ" (ch. 1:1)	In Colossians: "Christ is in me" (ch. 1:27)
The main problem in Ephesus seems to be the lack of unity between Jew and Gentile (ch. 2:1-22)	There are several problems in Colosse which include, Judaism, asceticism and degrading Christ (ch. 2:18, 21)

Themes

In reading Ephesians one is impressed by the themes of the book:

- a) The blessings from God:
 - i) "The riches of His grace (ch. 1:7), "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (ch. 3:8), and "the riches of His glory" (ch. 3:16)

- b) The grace of God:
 - i) The blessings of being in Christ are based on grace (ch. 1:2, 6, 7; 2:7); His peace (ch. 1:2); His will (ch. 1:5); His pleasure and purpose (ch. 1:9); His glory (ch. 1:12, 14); His calling and inheritance (ch. 1:18); His power and strength (ch. 1:19; 6:10); His love (ch. 2:4); His workmanship (ch. 2:10); His Spirit (ch. 3:16); His offering and sacrifice (ch. 5:2); and His armour (ch. 6:11, 13).
- c) The obligations of Christian living:
 - i) “Be filled with all the fulness of God” (ch. 3:19); to “come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (ch. 4:13); and to “be filled with the Spirit” (ch. 5:18) and (chs. 4-6).
- d) The sovereignty of God:
 - i) “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us” (ch. 1:3); “He hath chosen us” (ch. 1:4); and “the good pleasure of His will” (ch. 1:5).

The Old Testament and Ephesians

It will be observed that there are comparatively few Old Testament quotations in Ephesians, but there are some as well as those which have a distinct similarity of concept as the following table shows. The reason for differences is often because of the use of the Septuagint, a translation, and perhaps more of a paraphrase of the Old Testament. It was the work of seventy scholars and therefore it's name is often abbreviated as LXX.

Quotation	Ephesians	O T. Reference
“When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men”	ch. 4:8	Psa. 68:18
“When he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places”	ch. 1:20	Psa. 110:1
“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church”	ch. 1:22	Psa. 8:6
“Speak every man truth with his neighbour”	ch. 4:25	Zech. 8:16
“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light”	ch. 5:14	Isa. 60:1-2
“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath”	ch. 4:26	Psa. 4:4
“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh”	ch. 5:31	Gen. 2:24
“Honour thy father and mother”	ch. 6:2	Ex. 20:12
“That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth”	ch. 6:3	Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16
“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness”	ch. 6:14	Isa. 59:17

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Quotation	Ephesians	O T. Reference
“Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace”	ch. 6:15	Isa. 52:7
“Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”	ch. 6:17	Isa. 59:17
Making one new man	ch. 2:15	Ezek. 37:16-19
“Preached peace”	ch. 2:17	Isa. 57:19

Suggested Structure

Chs. 1-3	Chs. 4-6
Doctrinal	Practical
The truth expounded	The truth outlived
The privileges of the saints	The obligations of the saints
Consider your inheritance	Comprehend your inheritance
Our standing before God	Our state in the world
What I am in Christ	What I should be for Christ
That I might know	That I might be
We are sitting	We are standing

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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