

Basic Required Information: Ephesians

SECTION I: Literary Method

1. The type of literature found in Ephesians contains all the hallmarks of an epistle. The author is self attributed as Paul addressing, “the saints who are in Ephesus,” from 1:1, then with a greeting of blessing in 1:2.

Paul follow with a praise and thanksgiving, or a hymn in 1:3-14. – (The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible Volume 2, “IV Content and Organization,” page 348.)

The body of the letter is between 1:3 and 6:20 with a noticeable literary division between 3:21 and 4:1. – (The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible Volume 2, “Content and Organization,” pages 348-349.)

The final greeting is found in 6:21-24 as Paul concludes the epistle by saying that he will be sending Tychicus in person to the Ephesians to give an update and ends with a farewell of peace and grace to all who love the Lord.

2. There is a quote from Psalm 68:18 that Paul references as he begins to begins giving application during the latter division. – (Ephesians 4:8; The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible Volume 2, “IV Content and Organization,” page 350.)

SECTION II: Critical Method

1. Paul not only wrote this letter but refers to himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus. Paul references being a prisoner three times in his letter. One during 3:1, he shares that he is, “a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.” The second during 4:1, he calls himself, “a prisoner for the Lord.” And finally in 6:20, he calls himself, “an ambassador in chains.” Paul is actively proclaiming the mystery of the gospel and requests prayer near the end of his letter in 6:19-20.

2. The letter was addressed to the saints in Ephesus. In 2:11 and 3:1, Paul specifically addresses the Gentiles. In the passage of 4:17-24, Paul clearly is building off previous teachings in Christ that they have had when he says, “but that is not the way you have learned Christ!” And all throughout, the epistle he refers to them as the church and body. It is evident when Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ and referring to the Gentiles as, “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus,” that he is also addressing Jews in 3:4-6. Paul then addresses the households of the church of Ephesus by first exhorting wives then husbands in 5:22-32. Then he addresses children and fathers in 6:1-4. And then bondservants and their masters in 6:5-9.

3. Within the epistle itself, there isn’t a clear indication of when it was written, but with some of the clues within the epistle it can be pieced together that it was written between 60-61 AD. – (Class Lecture: Bill Donner, “Historical Background of Ephesians,” May 12, 2017.)

4. Details from the book of Acts details Paul’s journey as he is forced to flee Macedonia and Greece, then eventually to Jerusalem where he gets arrested by Romans and taken to Rome in 60-62 AD. Since the writing of the epistle falls within the same timeframe, that means the letter

to the Ephesians was written from a prison in Rome. – (Acts 20 and 21; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, pages 301-302.)

SECTION III: Historical Method

1. Paul's ministry with the Ephesians initially started sometime within 52-55 AD and planted the church after his visit to Corinth and Jerusalem. Paul founded the church with the help of a Jewish-Christian couple from Rome named Priscilla and Aquila. (Acts 18:18-22, 19; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, "Introduction to Christianity to the city," page 302.)

2. The church makeup in Ephesus was of all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia. Some of the backgrounds of these church members were Gentile God-fearers, Jewish sympathizers, and Gentiles coming out of the cults and false religions of the day, particularly those who were worshippers of Artemis. (Acts 19:10; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, "Introduction to Christianity to the city," page 302.)

3. The readers of Ephesians were located in and around the port city of Ephesus. This was the 3rd largest city of the known world at that time with a population of 250,000. Ephesus was located on the Aegean Sea and was considered a major trading city. It's also believed that during Paul's three years of ministry in Ephesus, he wrote the epistles to Colossae, Corinth, to Philemon, the Philippians, and the Galatians from this city. So Ephesus was ministry headquarters for Paul. (Class Lecture: Bill Donner, "Historical Background of Ephesians," May 12, 2017; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, "Ephesus and Western Asia Minor," page 301; Dictionary of New Testament Background, "4. Pauline Correspondence Produced at Ephesus," page 320)

There were fifty different gods being worshipped in Ephesus, but the most prominent was Artemis, a goddess of fertility. During the 7th century BC to the time of the Roman empire, there was a temple that was quite prominent and dedicated to the goddess of Artemis. It was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world due to its immaculate structure. Other than worship, the temple was also a bank for exchanging currency, savings and giving loans for the whole region. (Class Lecture: Bill Donner, "Historical Background of Ephesians," May 12, 2017; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, "The Spiritual Climate of the Area," and, "A Portrait of the Situation," pages 302-303)

All the gods that were worshipped in Ephesus reveals a spiritually pluralistic society. It wasn't uncommon for people to worship more than one god. Shamanism, animism, and magic was practiced among the people. Ephesians believed that their world contained good and evil spirits that could give them powers or curse them. However, as Jesus was being proclaimed there was a crazy fear of the Lord that overcame some of the people of Ephesus after they witnessed a group of Jewish high priests, the sons of Sceva, get the tar beaten out of them by one demonized man, who said they recognized Jesus and Paul but not those jokers. The people gathered their books of magic and burned them before the Lord. Up to that point, the priests must have been quite reputable and impressive for people to respond in such a way. It almost seemed like their failure legitimized the power and authority that Paul carried. Chapter 6 in Ephesians has Paul breaking down what their authority looks like as followers of Christ and how it impacts the heavenly realm. He uses the image of a wrestler, which they would have understood perfectly since they had multiple gymnasiums in the city that celebrated different

holidays with various sports. (Acts 19:17-20; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3, "The Spiritual Climate of the Area," page 302)

There is a mention of the word "mystery" that is used seven times in the epistle. In all of Paul's epistles, he has used it 21 times and usually with the actions of Christ being the revelation of that mystery. Of all the epistles that it is used in, Ephesians gives the clearest theological explanation than any other epistle. Mysteries were also part of pagan practices to receive demonic spiritual power. An example of performing a mystery initiation was to receive in oneself an indwelling entity called "the lord of the air." Paul uses the idea of Jesus Christ being the ultimate revelation to the ultimate mystery. And it's completely free as opposed to mystery cults. Without a financial barrier to Jesus, it's not a wonder that Christianity was growing, yet hard to grasp. It would have been hard for people to truly believe that an ultimate power in the universe died FOR mankind WHILE still enemies, then SHARING an inheritance with anyone willing to follow Jesus and yet still LOVING them. It sounds so simple, but a lot of mental and emotional hurdles for the believers in Ephesus to get over. (Class Lecture: Bill Donner, "Historical Background of Ephesians," May 12, 2017; Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, "Mystery in Paul; 2.2 Colossians and Ephesians," pages 622-623.)

Finally, there are the units of the Greco-Roman society called household that Paul refers to in his epistles but in his letter he addresses each member of the household in Ephesus. Ethicists of the time saw the stability of the city-state as dependent on healthy management of the household. When Paul addressed the household in Ephesians 5:22-6:9, he was addressing in a manner that was commonly used in household codes when he specifically mentioned a husband, wife, father, children, slaves and masters. By exhorting wives, husbands, sons, fathers, slaves, and masters, he actually addressed the same person of the household three times with three sets of commands as a husband, then as a father, and then as a master. The man of the household was the recognized legal authority over his household. He had legal obligations and responsibilities to uphold for each member. Identity, belonging, and security were part of what the head of the household was meant to provide. As Christians grew to reflect the heart of Christ in their household, it was then in turn meant to build and establish the nation/kingdom of God. When Paul talked about the different members coming together in unity and growing together in 2:17-20, he is addressing the house churches in Ephesus. (Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, "Households and Household Codes," pages 417-418; Dictionary of New Testament Background, "Family and Household; 2.4 Paternal Authority," page 357)

4. Strengths that the Ephesians would have had were:

- They would have had pockets of believers all around and somewhat easier access to reach them. They were far from isolated.
- Being a mix of Jew and Gentile believers, the Jewish heritage would have become a strength to the Gentiles as they grew to understand how they fit within the inheritance of Jews.
- Their faith was growing and love was abounding.
- Growing the church rapidly with a larger, centralized population.
- Paul had sent Tychicus, a very reliable friend, to the Ephesians.

Weaknesses would have been:

- With a greater population and popular city, huge influxes and streams of new ideas and rising cults would have presented endless temptation. Some of them may have been holding onto or returning back to their old practices. Paul said to, "put off the old self," in 4:22.

- The mix of Jewish and Gentile believers caused tension because of the unfamiliarity that Gentiles would have had with the Jewish heritage.
- Jewish Christians may have treated Gentile believers as second class Christians with less spiritual blessing.
- The presence of the temple for Artemis would have presented a constant challenge to the growth of the church. And the financial dealings of Christians would have been severely strained if all banking was done in the temple.

SECTION IV: Survey Method

1. The main idea of the epistle is that God's family is growing in identity and unity under the leadership of Jesus, and is empowered to overcome evil.

2. Paul was ensuring that both Jewish and Gentile Christians understood that they shared in the same spiritual inheritance and was calling for unity. He wanted to remind them that ultimate power and authority was revealed in Jesus and to turn from anything else that granted special knowledge, favor, or power. He also wanted to see the domain of the family as a reflection of the love of Jesus.

SECTION V: Character & Nature of God

1. This letter to the OR would have revealed that God's household is available to all. That His supreme power will put an end to the evil rulers of the heavenly realm. The riches of God's household are immeasurable and unsearchable. That Christians are HIS inheritance as much as He is theirs.