

## **Thoughts about Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (?)**

### **A Brief Introduction**

Whoa! What is that question mark all about? The apostle Paul did write a letter to the Ephesians, didn't he? Well...according to some scholars the answer is both yes and no. It appears there is more to the story than some believe.

Did you know Ephesians is one of four letters written by Paul that are known as the Prison Epistles? Colossians, Philemon and Philippians were the other three. (*Simply defined, an epistle is a teaching letter.*) Paul was once again in jail, most likely in Rome because of the nature of his teaching, (*e.g. Jesus rose from the dead*), and the civil unrest it was supposedly causing.

He wrote the letters partly because of some disturbing information given to him by Epaphras, a brother in Christ. Heretical teaching had begun to take root in the church. (*Heresy is known as a teaching that distorts or opposes what is already known to be true, e.g. there were those who opposed the truth that Jesus as the Son of God is "the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being". Hebrews 1:3*) Paul had time to spare while under house arrest and wrote several letters to oppose heretical teaching. (*Paul was under house arrest and had access to friends, food, writing supplies and probably a scribe to whom he dictated his teaching.*) His letters were intended to be a correction to the false teaching his intended readers were either knowingly or unknowingly embracing.

Take note of this: did you know that 75 of the 155 verses in Ephesians are found in parallel form in his letter to the Colossians? Paul uses many of the same thoughts, expressions and phrases in both letters. (*See Eph. 5:16 and Col. 4:5. Then turn to Eph.5;21-6:9 and Col. 3:18-4:1*) There are more similarities between these two letters than any other two in the New Testament. (Yes, the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke have a lot in common, but the percentage of similarity is lower.) What's going on with Ephesians and Colossians? Well, since the two letters were written close to or in 60 A.D., it can be assumed that one of the letters provided some basic but important teaching that was applicable to multiple situations in the church and Paul used them in a second letter. Make sense?

If one reads both letters carefully it seems Paul's letter to the Colossians is more personal and direct as if he may have some personal ties to the churches there. The tie is his good friend, Epaphras, whom scholars believe was the church leader in Colossae. More than likely, Paul wrote Colossians first then expanded some of his ideas and expressions as he wrote a second letter that was impersonal and more theologically directed at the churches of Asia Minor in general. The letter eventually received the name Ephesians.

With some of these ideas in mind, was this letter directed solely at the Ephesians? Probably not. Why? While this letter could have been directed solely to the Ephesians, there are good reasons to doubt it. First, in Eph 1:1 the words "in Ephesus" are not found in the earliest and oldest copies of the letter. For another thing, Paul's choice of words and phrases is curiously impersonal for a man who had earlier spent years in Ephesus. There are no personal greetings, no personal experiences shared about friends; it is a strangely impersonal letter if in fact it was only directed to the Ephesians. Finally, the letter itself appears to suggest that Paul and the people of Ephesus did not know each other. In Eph. 1:15 Paul writes, "ever since I heard about your faith." And in 3:2 Paul comments, "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you." Does this sound like someone who intimately knows the people to whom he is writing? You make the call.

Some scholars have suggested that this letter was written intentionally as a circular letter to strengthen believers in their faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the church. It was carried by Tychicus (Eph. 6:1) and read in various churches in Asia Minor; finally ending up in Ephesus where that name was eventually attached to the letter.

*(Did you know that originally, the four gospels and N.T. letters that comprise the New Testament were not named, but were given titles much later by church leaders to help distinguish one book from another?)*

So now, with this little bit of background, are you ready to look at portions of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians?

## Lesson 1 Count your blessings

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

### Digging into God's Word

1. What is God's motivation in what He does for us? (see verses 4 and 12)
2. Understanding God's will is not an easy thing. What is it for you? (see verses 9-10)
3. What can we learn about **our** purpose as Christians as we read verses 4, 6, 11-12 and 13-14?
4. What is the key to obtaining our inheritance from God? (verses 13-14)

### Applying God's teaching

1. In response to what God has done for us through our faith in Jesus, what attitudes and actions are the most satisfying for you?
2. Finish this sentence. "My purpose in life as a Christian is to....."