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"THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS"

Introduction

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul (**1:1; 3:1**). Early sources in church history that attribute this letter to Paul include: Irenaeus (200 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (200 A.D.), and Origen (250 A.D.). Polycarp (125 A.D.) attests to its canonicity in his own epistle to the Philippians (chapter 12).

THE RECIPIENTS: There are reasons to believe that this epistle was not designed for just one congregation, but intended to be passed around to several churches in the area surrounding Ephesus. The earliest manuscripts do not contain the phrase "in Ephesus" (cf. **1:1**). The epistle itself is in the form of a general treatise rather than as a letter written to a specific church. For example, there are no specific exhortations or personal greetings. It is thought by some (Conybeare and Howson) that this letter is the epistle that was first sent to Laodicea (cf. **Co 4:16**), and designed to be shared with other churches, including Ephesus. Because Ephesus was the leading city of the region, and the main center of Paul's missionary activity in the area (cf. **Ac 19:1,8-10**), it is understandable why later scribes might have assigned this epistle to the church at Ephesus. Without question it was intended for **"the saints ...and faithful in Christ Jesus."** (**1:1**)

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THE REGION: Paul first came to Ephesus for a short visit toward the end of his second missionary journey (**Ac 18:18-19**). Located on the SW coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), Ephesus was one of the great cities in that part of the world. A Roman capital, it was a wealthy commercial center and home for the worship of the goddess Diana (cf. **Ac 19:23-41**). Though Paul briefly studied with the Jews at the local synagogue and was invited to stay longer, he made plans to visit them again after a quick trip to Jerusalem (**Ac 18:20-21**).

On his third missionary journey Paul made it back to Ephesus for an extended stay of three years (cf. **Ac 19:1,10; 20:31**). After his initial success in converting twelve disciples of John (**Ac 19:1-7**), Paul spent three months teaching in the local synagogue (**Ac 19:8**). Resistance to his doctrine forced him to leave the synagogue, but he was able to continue teaching in the school of Tyrannus for a period of two years. The end result is that the gospel spread from Ephesus throughout Asia Minor (**Ac 19:9-10**). A disturbance created by some of the local idol makers finally forced Paul to leave Ephesus (**Ac 19:23-20:1**).

Toward the end of his third journey, Paul stopped at nearby Miletus, and met with the elders of the church at Ephesus. Reminding them of his work with them, he charged them to fulfill their own responsibilities as overseers of the flock of God, and then bid them a tearful farewell (**Ac 20:17-38**).

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING: Ephesians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (**3:1; 4:1; 6:20**; cf. Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome (cf. **Ac 28:16,30-31**). If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Ephesians around **61-63 A.D.** from **Rome**. The indication

is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. **6:21-22; Co 4:7-9; Phile 10-12**).

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE: Unlike other epistles written to specific churches, this epistle does not deal with specific problems in a local congregation. Instead, Paul addressed great themes that pertain to the Christian's position in Christ, as a member of the body of Christ, the church. As expressed in his prayer for his readers, it was his desire that they might know:

- * **What is the hope of God's calling (1:18)**
- * **What are the glorious riches of God's inheritance in the saints (1:18)**
- * **What is God's great power toward those who believe (1:19)**

In the first three chapters, Paul answers his own prayer by expounding upon their spiritual blessings in Christ. The last three chapters focus on the conduct (or "walk", cf. **4:1,17; 5:2,8,15**) expected of those so richly blessed. Therefore Paul writes to:

- * **Remind Christians of their spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3)**
- * **Exhort Christians to have a "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (4:1)**

THEME OF THE EPISTLE: A grand epistle like Ephesians almost defies coming up with one main theme. With its exalted view of the church in God's plan of redemption, it is common to suggest the theme as **"The Church, The Fullness of Christ"**. Another theme which does justice to the content of the epistle and one that I suggest for this study is that offered by Warren Wiersbe:

"THE BELIEVER'S RICHES IN CHRIST"

KEY VERSE: Ephesians 1:3

"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,"

OUTLINE:

(adapted from The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 2, Warren W. Wiersbe, p.7):

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

I. DOCTRINE: OUR RICHES IN CHRIST (1:3-3:21)

- A. OUR SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST (1:3-14)**
 - 1. From the Father (**1:4-6**)
 - 2. From the Son (**1:7-12**)
 - 3. From the Spirit (**1:13-14**)
 - First Prayer: for enlightenment (**1:15-23**)

B. OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION IN CHRIST (2:1-22)

1. Raised and seated on the throne (2:1-10)
2. Reconciled and set into the temple (2:11-22)
- Second Prayer: for enablement (3:1-21; with verses 2-13 as a parenthesis)

II. DUTY: OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN CHRIST (4:1-6:20)

A. A CALL TO WALK IN UNITY (4:1-16)

1. Preserving the unity of the Spirit with proper attitudes (4:1-7)
2. Edifying the body of Christ by the grace given us (4:8-16)

B. A CALL TO WALK IN PURITY (4:17-5:21)

1. Walk not as other Gentiles (4:17-32)
2. Walk in love (5:1-6)
3. Walk as children of light (5:7-14)
4. Walk as wise (5:15-21)

C. A CALL TO WALK IN HARMONY (5:22-6:9)

1. Husbands and wives (5:22-33)
2. Parents and children (6:1-4)
3. Masters and servants (6:5-9)

D. A CALL TO WALK IN VICTORY (6:10-20)

1. Standing strong in the power of the Lord (6:10-13)
2. Equipped with the whole armor of God (6:14-20)

CONCLUSION (6:21-24)

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION

- 1) **To whom is this epistle addressed? (1:1)**
 - The saints and faithful in Christ Jesus; actual identity uncertain
- 2) **From where and when did Paul write Ephesians?**
 - From Rome, sometime around 61-63 A.D.
- 3) **What three other epistles were written about this time? What are the four epistles sometimes called?**
 - Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon
 - The "prison epistles"
- 4) **When did Paul first come to Ephesus (Ac 18:19-22)**
 - Toward the end of his second missionary journey
- 5) **When and how long did he spend most of his time at Ephesus? (Ac 18:23; 19:1; 20:31)**
 - On his third missionary journey; three years
- 6) **For what three things did Paul pray that they might know? (1:15-19)**
 - The hope of God's calling
 - The glorious riches of God's inheritance in the saints
 - God's great power toward those who believe
- 7) **What is the two-fold purpose of this epistle? (1:3; 4:1)**

- To remind Christians of their spiritual blessings in Christ
- To exhort Christians to have a "walk" worthy of their calling

8) What is the "theme" of this epistle, as suggested in the introduction?

- The Believer's Riches In Christ

9) What serves as the "key verse" of this epistle?

- Ephesians 1:3

10) According to the outline above, what are the two main divisions in this epistle?

- Doctrine: Our Riches In Christ
- Duty: Our Responsibilities In Christ