

EPHESIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

J.K. MCKEE



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by John Kimball McKee

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by TNN Press. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Lidell & Scott)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	LXX: Septuagint
Ara: Aramaic	m. Mishnah
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	MT: Masoretic Text
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NIV: New International Version (1984)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NT: New Testament
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
Ger: German	OT: Old Testament
GNT: Greek New Testament	PreachC: <i>The Preacher's Commentary</i>
Grk: Greek	REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	t. Tosefta
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2001)	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Heb: Hebrew	Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible	TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	TNTC: <i>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>	TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)	UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)	v(s). verse(s)
KJV: King James Version	Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)	Vul: Latin Vulgate
	WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
	Yid: Yiddish
	YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

Each of Paul's letters seems to have a specific message to the person who reads it. We have encountered this in our previous two studies. In Philippians, we have seen that for Paul, the center of his life is Yeshua the Messiah. In Galatians, we have seen that he considers Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to be one in Him, with faith being the determining factor of one's membership among God's people.ⁱ As we prepare to turn to Ephesians, we are presented with yet another of one of the most important texts for today's emerging Messianic movement. An undeniable theme for today's Messianic community is the Apostle Paul's emphasis on Believers in Yeshua being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (2:11-12). This is a call that has certainly gone forth from many Messianic pulpits since the 1990s, as scores of non-Jewish Believers have embraced their Hebraic Roots and have desired a oneness with their fellow Jewish Believers. But what does it mean for any of us to be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel?

I would submit that one of the most difficult things for today's Messianic community to consider is what it means to be a people empowered by God and able to accomplish His mission for the Earth. This was certainly something demanded of Ancient Israel in the Torah, who were called by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), with the intention of recognizing that "all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). Being a testimony to the nations involved declaring His goodness, and being obedient to God via proper conduct (cf. Deuteronomy 4:5-6). When one examines Ephesians, these qualities are explained in a very eloquent and appropriate manner, especially for a group of non-Jewish Believers redeemed by the blood of the Messiah. The premise of one demonstrating himself or herself as a part of Israel via holy living has not changed between the Tanach or the Apostolic Scriptures, or even up until today!

The letter of Ephesians among the Pauline corpus also addresses First Century issues from which today's Believers can gain much insight. As Christopher J.H. Wright reminds us,

"Most of Paul's letters were written in the heat of missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the [assembly], tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young [assemblies] as the gospel took root in the world of Greek polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and so on."ⁱⁱ

Preparing myself to comment extensively on Paul's letter of Ephesians, I find myself in a similar predicament. I am a teacher in a Messianic community today that struggles with the issues of non-Jewish inclusion and oneness, the questions posed by what it means to be Messianic in the Twenty-First Century, various personal and congregational struggles common to us as Believers, and even some false teachings that have entered in which deride who the Messiah is to us as our salvation. How relevant is Ephesians to us, and why is it one of those texts of Scripture that commonly gets overlooked by our community? Should we not be concerned with "the unfathomable riches of Messiah" (3:8)? How might Ephesians mean *even more to us* when we place it against its ancient Jewish and Mediterranean background?

Paul speaks of the work of Yeshua in Believers, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:18). The Holy Spirit is sent to Believers, as "the guarantee of our inheritance" (1:14, RSV). Ephesians largely speaks to non-Jewish Believers in the First Century who were once "dead in...trespasses and sins" (2:1), yet who were made alive via the work of the gospel. These people, being made a part of God's Kingdom, now have some roles and responsibilities they must perform. While they have been saved by God's grace (2:8-9), He nonetheless requires good works of His children (2:10). And by inference, the Jewish members of Paul's audience must treat the non-Jewish Believers as equal members of the Messiah's Body, or their "fellow citizens" (2:19). *All* who have come to know the God of Israel via His Son have suffered, to one degree or another, from the consequences of sin unleashed upon humanity (2:2-3) – yet they have *all* been redeemed and *all* can enter into God's marvelous purpose!

While Ephesians undoubtedly inspires us to never take our salvation for granted, what does it teach us about God's Torah? Does Paul take a negative view of God's Law in this letter (2:14-15; cf. 6:13)? Is there any Torah

ⁱ Consult the author's commentaries *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* (2007) and *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (2007). Also consult his article "Congregations Among Us."

ⁱⁱ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 49.

background behind the behavior that he asks his audience to demonstrate? What might Ephesians teach us about the person of Paul, and the unique work that God assigned to him among the nations (3:8-10)? How are we as the *ekklēsia* to be a united people focused on Yeshua the Messiah as our central hope (4:3)? What does it mean for each of us to wear the full armor of God (6:11-19)? What does Ephesians teach us today about spiritual warfare and the challenges that life presents us? These are all important questions that need to be answered.

I believe today's Messianic movement is one that possesses great potential to enact a positive difference in today's world, when we will learn to take God's mission for His people seriously. While Paul undoubtedly emphasizes that the gospel is to be proclaimed "to the Jew first,"ⁱⁱⁱ Ancient Israel was given a mandate to proclaim the goodness of its God to the world around it. It is my personal opinion that while today's Messianics should be commended for evangelizing and seeing that a generation of Jewish people came to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, it has not done that well with the other side of evangelism and discipleship: "also to the Greek" or "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). Many in today's Messianic Judaism avoid the letter of Ephesians, because of Paul's emphasis on a oneness and unity between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers that either they do not want, or want to act as though it does not exist in the Bible.

For those Messianics who do believe in equality between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, I wonder why they do not often read Ephesians—because it gives us the clues on how we are to conduct ourselves, demonstrating the transforming power of God within us (4:23-24). **The audience of Ephesians is one which we should all truly strive to emulate and see replicated, as new Messianic congregations and fellowships are birthed.** How do we all learn to respect one another as human beings who have been redeemed by the Lord? How do we learn to function as one Body of Messiah? How does personal holiness extend to familial holiness and manifest itself into corporate holiness? Perhaps most avoided, how are we preparing ourselves for people—Jews, Christians, and others—who will one day come to us wanting unique *Messianic* answers? Ephesians has much that we need not overlook any more.

In order for today's Messianic community to enter into the great things that the Lord has in store for it, we need to go through a season of intense spiritual and theological refinement. I can think of no better text to consider for this than Ephesians. I consider the primary thrust of this letter to be, as Paul so aptly puts it, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (5:1). As the sons and daughters of the Most High, men and women who have come to know Him via His Son Yeshua, we should be following after the instructions of God. We are those who should be reaching forward "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah" (4:13b, RSV). Ephesians teaches us important life lessons about what it means to live not only as born again Believers—but as *adults* accomplishing the tasks of God! It tells us things about congregations and fellowships made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and how we must "attain to the unity of the faith" (4:13a).

So as we prepare to begin, what life lessons do you believe Ephesians will teach you, and aid you with, concerning the tasks the Lord has in store (5:3-33)? It is my sincere hope and prayer that our study of Ephesians will once again be helpful, as we all desire to see that mature, transformed, and impactful Messianic movement emerge that can be more than a movement—but a force for the power of God in the Earth! *Amein v'amein.*

J.K. McKee
Editor, TNN Online

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter of Ephesians¹ (Grk. *Pros Ephesiou*, ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ) is a very rich, full, and spiritual text of the Bible, having brought great inspiration to many Believers. Throughout history, this has been one of the favorite books of many, particularly as it regards the nature of God's people and Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) ruling and reigning over them. Yeshua the Messiah is uplifted over the cosmos, as the One from whom great blessings originate. It places an emphasis on proper living, and how God's people are to be empowered for His service. Ephesians is also a rather broad and general epistle; it includes both doctrine as well as an emphasis on the corporate election of God's people. Many have considered Ephesians to be a masterful work of ecumenicism, emphasizing the unity that God desires to have among all of His people. Ephesians certainly asks important questions of any generation or group of people that desires to be used by the Lord in the world, and place Him at the center of their mission.

Among many who read Ephesians is certainly the question of what kind of a text it actually is. While it is easy to call Ephesians a letter or an epistle, "Despite its epistolary opening and closing, it is a 'letter' only in a highly qualified sense. Ephesians has been characterized by many as a theological 'tractate' or 'manifesto'" (ABD).² Others consider Ephesians to be a homily. Harold W. Hoehner indicates, "this book is regarded by many as the crown of all Paul's writings,"³ followed by I. Howard Marshall who concludes, "it resembles the so-called 'catholic' epistles."⁴ From this point of view, Ephesians would more closely match the genre of the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John), and would almost serve as a capstone or summation to all of Paul's teachings. Some commentators have considered Ephesians second only to Romans⁵ in its significance among the Pauline corpus, with F.F. Bruce calling Ephesians "the quintessence of Paulinism."⁶ In my own personal view, it is not impossible at all that Ephesians is a text akin to James the Just's "James" (although I doubt that few would necessarily view Ephesians as "Paul").

Yet, in spite of all of the excellent and encouraging qualities that one can list regarding Ephesians, there are some questions regarding Ephesians that will have to be answered in our examination of the text. Not enough people who just pick up their Bibles and read Ephesians are aware of these issues, yet they certainly dominate both conservative and liberal exegesis. A significant issue concerns whether the Ephesians are the only audience of the letter, one of its audiences, or not an audience at all. Likewise, there are many theologians who doubt whether or not the Apostle Paul is even the true author of Ephesians, or that it was even written during his lifetime. Furthermore, does the Epistle to the Colossians play any role in the message or themes of Ephesians? Which one came first?

Examining the letter of Ephesians as a whole, and engaging in a dialogue with contemporary scholarship regarding its composition, are things that are widely overlooked by today's Messianic community. This text of Scripture has much to teach us about our mission, purpose, and what God desires us to be—as the Commonwealth of Israel—a theme that is emphasized. Ephesians has a unique character forming ability that need not be ignored, especially as Messianic Believers should be eager to accomplish those assignments that the Lord has given us in the best way possible. Robert H. Gundry rightly remarks, "Ephesians expresses praise for the unity and blessings shared by all believers."⁷ A desire for unity is certainly expressed in much of today's Messianic movement, so perhaps by examining

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to Ephesians as "the Book of Ephesians," I am going to purposefully not refer to this text by this designation. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

Per the debate of Ephesians' actual audience, I will simply be referring to its recipients as "the audience," "Paul's listeners," "those who received the letter," etc.

² Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians, Epistle to the," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:536.

³ Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 613.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, "Ephesians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1385.

⁵ Consult the author's entry for Romans in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

⁶ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 229.

⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 397.

Ephesians in much more detail we will understand how such unity can be achieved. And, this unity is not just unity in a general sense, but in a very actualized sense between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, the latter of whom could not be redeemed without the nation of Israel.

In examining Ephesians in detail, this commentary also represents the first serious Messianic engagement with what is often considered to be a Deutero-Pauline text.

WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER?

The most significant issue as it concerns a proper examination of the letter titled Ephesians, is whether or not the Ephesians were the only audience. This is a significant discussion in theology today that does affect one's interpretation and application of the epistle, and whether or not location specific information needs to be considered. Was Ephesians sent to only one audience, or was the letter intended to be circular to multiple audiences?

While it is not obvious to most English Bible readers (although a good study Bible should reference this in some way),⁸ there are some noticeable differences among the textual witnesses of Ephesians. Whereas most Bibles begin the epistle with "Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Messiah Yeshua" (1:1, NASU), the 1952 Revised Standard Version broke tradition and rendered the verse with: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus."⁹ The notable clause that is missing is "to Ephesus." In critical editions of the Greek New Testament, the source text reads *tois hagiois tois ousin [en Ephesō] kai pistois en Christō Iēsou* (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), with "in Ephesus" placed in brackets.¹⁰ Bruce M. Metzger explains,

"The words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are absent from several important witnesses (P⁴⁶ B* B^{42c} 1739) as well as from manuscripts mentioned by Basil and the text used by Origen... Since the letter has been traditionally known as 'To the Ephesians,' and since all witnesses except those mentioned above include the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, the Committee decided to retain them, but enclosed within square brackets."¹¹

The oldest extant manuscripts of Ephesians lack the clause *en Ephesō* or "in Ephesus."¹² While this may not seem to be that substantial of an issue at first, it actually can become one when we consider the relationship of the author of Ephesians to his audience. Unlike the other Pauline Epistles that are directed to specific audiences, where Paul does act as though he knows his audience personally, the author of Ephesians does not appear to know his readers personally (1:15; 3:2; 4:21) despite having ministered almost three years to them (Acts 20:31). The author of Ephesians has "heard about your faith" (1:15, NIV); the audience has "heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you" (3:2); and the author will assert "if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him" (4:21)—all indicating a detached relationship. There are no references to anyone that he might have known, or people that both the audience and Paul knew even if they had not met personally. Because the author and audience appear to be somewhat distant, certainly in comparison to the other Pauline letters, it indicates that there may be more to "Ephesians" than meets the eye.

Interpreters of Ephesians have certainly been able to propose various solutions regarding the manuscript differences of 1:1, and the distance between author and audience. The most significant view regards Ephesians as a circular epistle, meaning that perhaps while the Ephesians were *an* intended audience of the message, they were by no means *the only* intended audience. Donald Guthrie summarizes, "It is widely held that Ephesians, designated as a circular, was... probably taken to various [assemblies] in the province of Asia by Tychicus,"¹³ who is the letter's courier (6:21). Ephesus was located in Asia Minor (present day Turkey), and could have either been the origin point for

⁸ Cf. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1417; Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1829; Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2090; Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1916.

⁹ A. Skevington Wood indicates, "This is doubtless the most satisfactory way of construing the participle in the absence of 'in Ephesus' or some other designation," although noting that there are some "grammatical difficulties" ("Ephesians," in Frank E. Gaebel, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 11:11).

¹⁰ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 503; *Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament*, NE27-RSV (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), 503; cf. Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 655.

¹¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 601.

¹² David H. Stern notes in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), "Some manuscripts lack 'in Ephesus'" (p 577), but does not attempt to explain further the issues surrounding the epistle's target audience.

¹³ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 530.

distribution to other congregations, or one that was later responsible for preserving the text. D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo further explain,

“Perhaps the best form of the circular-letter theory is that which sees Paul as having sent such a letter with Tychicus when he sent Colossians and that the letter was copied and circulated from Ephesus. Since it was a circular, there would be a blank instead of the name of the recipients, but the letter would be known to be associated with Ephesus, and in time that name was attached to it.”¹⁴

Taking this into account, the Ephesians need not have been the only audience of the Epistle of “Ephesians,” or for that same matter even the primary audience, as the tone of the text is rather general and broad not concerning those of a specific location.

There are, of course, many others who hold to the view that the Ephesians were in fact the primary audience of the letter that bears their name. Some conservatives like Hoehner argue, “all the letters Paul wrote to churches mention their destinations,” yet is forced to admit, “the epistle may still be considered a circular letter.”¹⁵ Even those who believe that Ephesians was originally, or at least primarily, written to *the Ephesians*, still often have to concede that the letter was composed in a general enough manner to be used elsewhere, unlike those which were directed to specific circumstances or crises in a particular geographical setting.

Of possible alternative locations for Ephesians’ audience, the vicinity of Ephesus in Asia Minor is the most frequently proposed, perhaps including cities such as Hierapolis¹⁶ and assemblies located in the Lycus Valley. One opinion often present is that it is actually the Epistle of “Ephesians” that Paul wrote to the Laodiceans,¹⁷ as Colossians 4:16 attests, “When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the [assembly] of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea.” If true, this would certainly suggest some kind of reliance of Ephesians upon Colossians, or vice versa. And regarding this, there is certainly a divergence among interpreters.

The Epistles of Ephesians and Colossians do rely on one another to some degree, as 34% of Colossians is paralleled in some way by Ephesians, and 26.5% of Ephesians is paralleled in some way by Colossians.¹⁸ This is certainly a good indication that both Ephesians and Colossians were written at the same time, and that the ideas of Paul were certainly fresh on his mind in composing one and then the other. Francis Foulkes summarizes:

“In Colossians we have a great exposition on the place of Christ in the universe; this is assumed in Ephesians, but this Epistle goes further to show the cosmic significance of the [*ekklesia*] in fulfilling the great work of Christ. In Colossians there is emphasis on the reconciliation of men to God through the cross of Christ. In Ephesians, as we have seen, this is taken for granted, and we have the further truth of the reconciliation of men one to another through the cross in the Body of Christ which is the fellowship of reconciliation.”¹⁹

There are varying degrees among interpreters, particularly conservatives, as to how much reliance Ephesians has on Colossians, or Colossians has on Ephesians. *ABD* indicates, “most scholars are now agreed that one must reckon with the literary dependence of one letter on the other, and specifically of Ephesians on Colossians,”²⁰ and most commentaries are written from the perspective that Colossians preceded Ephesians, which it surely could have. But which one really came first? Did the (anonymous) author of Ephesians borrow extensively from Colossians, redacting it, perhaps even as an introduction to a collection of the Pauline Epistles? This is one proposal that has been made by scholars. But on the opposite end of the spectrum, as Guthrie asserts, “There is, in fact, only one passage of any length which can be verbally paralleled in the two epistles, and that concerns Tychicus”²¹ (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7).

It may very well be true that Ephesians and Colossians have a unique relationship, and that specific statements or remarks made in one are derived or expounded upon by the other.²² But to limit any comparison of Ephesians to just Colossians, would be a mistake. Bruce rightly states, “its affinities with other letters...are unmistakable.”²³ Perhaps in

¹⁴ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 489.

¹⁵ Hoehner, in *BKCNT*, 613.

¹⁶ Cf. N.A. Dahl, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *IDBSup* in Keith Crim, ed., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 268.

¹⁷ Cf. G. Johnston, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:08-109; Wood, in *EXP*, 11:10; Gundry, 398

¹⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), pp xlvi-xlix; Peter T. O’Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp 8-9.

¹⁹ Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 22.

²⁰ Furnish, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 2:537; cf. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 413; PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), pp 353-354.

²¹ Guthrie, 501.

²² Consult the author’s entry for Colossians in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

²³ Bruce, 231.

examining Ephesians, additional remarks made in Colossians will be helpful to take into consideration.²⁴ But this should not only be true of using Colossians to help one understand Ephesians. Beyond Colossians, Pheme Perkins actually indicates that “Romans is more frequently evident in parallels to Ephesians than any other Pauline letter.”²⁵

Even if the Ephesians were only one of several intended audiences of this epistle, perhaps also including the Colossians and others in Asia Minor, Paul’s audience was still primarily composed of non-Jewish Believers (even though Jewish Believers are by no means excluded). These were people who had come to faith in Messiah Yeshua via the spread of the good news, but had once been a part of Greco-Roman religion. Paul states that before coming to faith, these people were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:11). The epistle is, in fact, written “for you the nations” (3:1, YLT), and that they should “walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk” (4:17) having experienced a significant transformation.

I do not find the evidence that overwhelming to assert that the Ephesians were the *only* audience of this letter, so in this commentary we will simply refer to “the audience,” “the listeners,” “those who received the letter,” or something comparable in explaining those who were to take its message seriously – whoever they were.

I can, however, certainly accept the fact that the letter was written to Believers in Asia Minor, and that the Ephesians did somehow receive the letter. It is not inappropriate if you have once referred to the audience as the “Ephesians.” This is ultimately a rather minor point, only affecting how much Paul’s personal interaction with the Ephesians seen in Acts chs. 19-20 specifically guides our interpretation of the text. C.E. Arnold rightly suggests, “Ephesians may very well give us a picture of the situation of the [assemblies] in Ephesus in the mid first century,”²⁶ and Ben Witherington III concurs, “it is believable that that city’s name was later appended because that is where the document finally ended up, whatever other cities it circulated in.”²⁷ The view of Ephesians being a circular letter, as Wood notes, “appears to be the least exceptionable.”²⁸

No reputable scholar has ever suggested a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for the Epistle of Ephesians; only misguided Messianics disengaged from academic conversation have done so.²⁹ Concurrent with this, it is difficult for many Messianics to recognize one of the principal thrusts of Ephesians, as Peter T. O’Brien explains, “the readers belong to one new humanity which was created in Christ out of Jews and Gentiles (2:14-16; 3:6) who have been reconciled to God and to one another. This new creation of God is characterized by its unity in diversity and maturity (4:1-16).”³⁰ Mature Believers rightly recognize that Israel’s election carries with it the responsibility to bless *the entire world*, per the Psalmist’s declaration “God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2ff).³¹ Reaching out to the nations requires that one communicate in languages other than Hebrew.

Even though linguistically Ephesians’ composition was in Greek, this in no way discounts the fact that there is a legitimate Hebraic background behind the message of the text and its communication style. Arnold is keen to note, “Although the OT quotations in Ephesians are not numerous (there are only four explicit quotations), there are many allusions evidenced by the author’s dependence on OT phraseology, terminology and concepts.”³² Witherington further explains:

“The author of Ephesians may well be familiar with sermonic practice in the synagogue. The Jewish sermon would often open with a benediction...and close with prayer and doxology. These elements are found in the first half of the discourse in Eph. 1:3-14 and 3:14-21. Yet we also seem clearly to have a proper rhetorical eulogy in ch. 1...and so some mixing of Jewish and Greek influences must be accounted for.”³³

²⁴ Note that there are current plans to immediately follow this commentary with *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*, where the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians will be further explored.

Colossians and Philemon are inextricably linked because the people who are mentioned in Colossians are the same who are mentioned in Philemon (Colossians 1:1 and Philemon 1; Colossians 4:10-14 and Philemon 23-24; Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2; Colossians 4:9 and Philemon 10ff.), indicating that the letters were written at the same time.

²⁵ Perkins, in *NIB*, 11:354; cf. Bruce, pp 231-232.

²⁶ C.E. Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 252.

²⁷ Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3.

²⁸ Wood, in *EXP*, 11:12.

²⁹ Specifically, the academic conversation over the intended audience and the authorship of the text known as “Ephesians.”

³⁰ O’Brien, 50.

³¹ Cf. Wright, pp 254-264 for a further explanation of this, related passages, and the implied mission of Ancient Israel as seen in the Tanach.

³² Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 239.

³³ Witherington, 219.

Some commentators today have also stressed some parallels between parts of Ephesians, and various theological emphases seen among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THIS LETTER?

The Epistle of Ephesians is part of a collection commonly known as the Deutero-Pauline letters (also including: Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus), meaning that not all theologians agree that it was written by the Apostle Paul. Any interpreter engaging with Ephesians' scholarship will encounter commentators who believe that Ephesians was written by a pseudonymous hand in the name of Paul. However, there are still many commentators who hold to genuine Pauline authorship.

Is Paul the actual author of this text? The author of Ephesians does identify himself as Paul by name (1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:7, 13; 4:1; 6:19-20), and he asks his audience for them to remember his circumstances (6:21). The composition style is not inconsistent with what is seen in other Pauline Epistles.³⁴ Tychicus is listed as Paul's courier (6:21-22; cf. Colossians 4:7-8). Pauline authorship does not have to be limited to Paul's hand *exclusively*, because if Tychicus is Paul's courier carrying the letter, and Paul is imprisoned, it is not too much to suggest that an amanuensis or secretary has been used to help him compose his letter. This could certainly account for any stylistic or vocabulary differences between Ephesians and some of the other Pauline Epistles.³⁵ O'Brien is also keen to summarize, "This may be due to a range of factors bound up with the apostle's mood, his relationship with his readers, and the issues addressed—in short, the whole epistolary situation."³⁶

Many of the claims against genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians are made on the basis of shifts in vocabulary and composition style. Guthrie notes, "Some scholars...cannot imagine a man like Paul refusing original terms to express new ideas...The problem is whether it is psychologically possible for a man with such fluency as Paul to repeat words and phrases, but with a different meaning."³⁷ Critics of Pauline authorship often view Paul as being incapable of adding new words to his vocabulary, or possibly also fluxuating the usage of words.

Early Christian tradition certainly accepted genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians, especially given its wide circulation. By the late Second Century, Ephesians was firmly accepted within the Apostolic canon.³⁸ Ephesians can be dated no later than the late First Century, as the letter was known to Clement of Rome:

EPHESIANS	1 CLEMENT
There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).	Have we not <i>all</i> one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? And have we not one calling in Christ? (<i>1 Clement</i> 46:6). ³⁹

Most are agreed that *1 Clement* was written between 90-95 C.E., so Clement knowing about Ephesians probably necessitates it being written much earlier—before Paul's death in the late 60s C.E.—to allow time for its dissemination.

By the late Second Century, Irenaeus will testify, "the blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that 'we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' [Ephesians 5:30]" (*Against Heresies* 5.2.3). The heretic Marcion acknowledged genuine Pauline authorship, although he called the text "Laodiceans." And, even the Gnostic Nag Hammadi literature acknowledges Ephesians as being authentically Pauline.⁴⁰ Those who deny genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians have a difficult time explaining much of this away, especially as it comes from such a variance of sources and perspectives.

Genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians was widely accepted until the Nineteenth Century, when it began to be challenged due to a variety of factors. Today, all liberals deny Pauline authorship. Perkins is quick to remind us,

³⁴ Cf. Wood, in *EXP*, 11:4.

³⁵ Cf. Carson and Moo, 481.

³⁶ O'Brien, 6.

³⁷ Guthrie, 502.

³⁸ Cf. Wood, in *EXP*, 11:3-5.

³⁹ Other parallels, or adaptations of vocabulary, include: Ephesians 5:31 and *1 Clement* 2:1; Ephesians 1:18 and *1 Clement* 36:2 (cf. Wood, in *EXP*, 11:19).

⁴⁰ *Hypostasis of the Archons* II.86.20.25: "[T]he father of truth, the great apostle - referring to the 'authorities of darkness' (Col 1:13) - told us that 'our contest is not against flesh and [blood]; rather, the authorities of the universe and the spirits of wickedness' (Ep 6:12)" (Bentley Layton, trans., "Hypostasis of the Archons," in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990], 162.)

Exegesis on the Soul II.6.131: "Paul...said...For our struggle is not against flesh and blood - as he said (Ep 6:12) - but against the world rulers of this darkness and the spirits of wickedness" (William C. Robinson, Jr., trans., "The Exegesis on the Soul," in *Ibid.*, 192.)

“Although some still argue that Paul was the author of Ephesians, most scholars agree that the letter is pseudonymous.”⁴¹ At first, German and American scholars were those quick to deny Pauline authorship, but now it has spread to much of British scholarship and there are now no clear national lines from which to divide. It is also true that even some conservatives consider Ephesians to be pseudonymous.

Genuine Pauline authorship is discounted from suggested differences in vocabulary compared to some of Paul’s other letters. There are some very long sentences in the Greek (1:3-14; 3:1-7), and ninety words that apparently do not appear elsewhere in the Pauline corpus.⁴²

There are also suggested differences in the theological emphases of Ephesians, compared to some of Paul’s other letters, including: the Messiah’s (cosmic) high exaltation, salvation as opposed to justification, a high and developed ecclesiology, and a realized eschatology.⁴³ In Ephesians, it is said that Paul does not desire to reconcile Jewish and non-Jewish Believers (2:15-16), because apparently enough time has passed by for it to have already taken place. In Ephesians, Paul apparently upholds the role of marriage (5:22ff), whereas elsewhere he orders young people to stay single (1 Corinthians 7). In Ephesians, it is asserted that Paul considers the Believer’s faith to be built upon the foundation of the *Apostles* and the *Prophets* (3:5), whereas elsewhere he states it is only Yeshua (1 Corinthians 3:11). The main view is that Ephesians represents an institutional and closed development in doctrine, which the other Pauline Epistles indicate are still in flux.

Those who argue that Ephesians is not authentically Pauline usually suggest that a member of a Pauline school, or one of his close disciples, is simply enhancing the Apostle’s teachings (perhaps even “re-writing” the [previous] letter of Colossians).⁴⁴ Writing under a pseudonym to honor someone from the past was an accepted practice in the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds of the First Century, yet it is clear that with adopting this view of Ephesians, some can easily castigate the text as being a fraud.

Still, this has not stopped some from proposing alternative views for authorship other than the Apostle Paul. *IDB* suggests, “The writer cannot be identified. It might have been Onesimus.”⁴⁵ R.P. Martin is one who has suggested Lukan authorship of Ephesians.⁴⁶ And others such as Andrew T. Lincoln can only assert that the author of Ephesians was an unidentified person who was doubtless a strong admirer of Paul:

“[H]is particular use of the OT, his familiarity with other Jewish traditions, including those of the Hellenistic synagogue, and his style with its Hebraisms, the real author was in all probability a Jewish Christian admirer of Paul. He may well have been a member of a Pauline ‘school’ in the loose sense of that term, a circle of those who began as his fellow workers in the Pauline mission and from which there later emerged some who consciously and deliberately worked with the heritage of Paul’s thought in order to preserve it and pass it on in a form adapted for their own times.”⁴⁷

Concurrent with Ephesians’ relationship to Colossians, some shifts in liberal scholarship have indicated, “an increasing number of scholars tend to think that Paul was the author of neither of these letters—or of both of them” (*IDBSup*).⁴⁸ Many liberals, though, who deny Pauline authorship still regard the message of Ephesians as being Pauline. “One must admit that there is some reduction in value...but from its own qualities and in particular its capacity to be a vehicle for the living Spirit of truth, the truth as it is in Jesus. By this test Ephesians maintains an honored place in the affection of the church” (*IDB*).⁴⁹

Can the door be totally closed against genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians?

Do the shifts in vocabulary or style definitely indicate that Paul is not the author? While this is a main argument against Pauline authorship, any one of us can learn new words or grammatical forms by interacting with others on the street—and start implementing them immediately in our speech and writing (even though this can often take place with incorrect grammatical forms).⁵⁰ For an intellectual like Paul, who even had the ability to debate with Epicureans and

⁴¹ Perkins, in *NIB*, 11:351.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 11:355-356.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 11:357-361; Lincoln, lxii-xiv, lxxxix-xcv; O’Brien, pp 21-33; Witherington, pp 14-17.

⁴⁴ Cf. Johnston, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:111-112.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:112; cf. Lincoln, lxxviii-lxx; Gundry, 398.

⁴⁶ Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 240; cf. Wood, in *EXP*, 11:7.

⁴⁷ Lincoln, lxx.

⁴⁸ N.A. Dahl, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *IDBSup*, 268.

⁴⁹ Johnston, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:112.

⁵⁰ Over the past ten to twenty years in North American English, it has become quite commonplace to hear sentences ending with the preposition *at*, when the usage is unnecessary or redundant. Questions such as “Where are you?” or “Where do you work?” or “Do you know where he/she is?” are now commonly followed by the preposition *at*, i.e., “Where are you at?” Such usage, while common today, is nevertheless grammatically incorrect.

Stoics at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), it is not at all unlikely that the more he interacted with others in the Mediterranean world, the more his ability to use his Greek improved and diversified. Regarding the supposed differences in grammar between Ephesians and other Pauline letters, Carson and Moo point out,

“[It is argued] that in Ephesians ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) always refers to the universal church, while Paul normally uses the word for the local congregation. Yet insofar as it is true that Paul’s usage of the word in this letter extends beyond the local congregation, that reality becomes less surprising if this is a general letter written to circulate around a number of churches in the Roman province of Asia.”⁵¹

In an entirely secular context, *ekklēsia* could easily mean “an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned” (LS).⁵² It could be a civil gathering of people who are to hear proposed legislation for a town, or it could be an unruly mob (Acts 19:32). However, *ekklēsia* was also widely used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Hebrew *qahal* (קָהָל), referring to the assembly of the Israelites.⁵³ The usage of *ekklēsia* referring to the universal body of Believers obviously need not be a result of pseudonymity in Ephesians, but a recognition on our part of its author’s knowledge of the Tanach Scriptures in their Septuagint form. And, a significant number of commentators – both conservative and liberal – indeed attest to Paul being familiar with the LXX.

The supposed differences between Ephesians and other recognized Pauline letters are not that significant. In spite of some supposed differences, the basic composition style of Ephesians and the other Pauline letters is still the same. Guthrie summarizes,

“[T]here are distinct affinities with Paul’s other epistles in the literary type to which they belong. We find characteristically Pauline sequence of opening greeting, thanksgiving, doctrinal exposition, ethical exhortations, concluding salutations and benediction...In particular, the basing of moral appeal on theological argument can not only be paralleled in Paul’s other epistles but was in fact an integral part of the apostle’s approach to practical problems.”⁵⁴

A shift in emphasis or subject matter between Ephesians, when compared to some of the other Pauline letters, need not imply any kind of pseudonymity. The stylistic differences we see could easily be a result of Ephesians’ unique genre as some kind of sermon or homily, as well as an amanuensis assisting Paul in its composition. Marshall validly indicates, “The versatility of Paul himself is obvious enough from his acknowledged writings and is broad enough to accommodate the rich theology of Ephesians.”⁵⁵

It is important for you to note that there are some evangelicals who do deny Pauline authorship of Ephesians,⁵⁶ but by no means does this include all. F.W. Danker is one who claims, “Neither the value nor the authority of the Epistle is weakened by uncertainty concerning its authorship...The apostle was already dead, and there could be no suggestion of underhanded methods, but rather a reaffirmation of Paul’s instruction.”⁵⁷ Arthur G. Patzia urges moderation between those who adhere to genuine Pauline authorship for Ephesians, and those who adhere to pseudonymity, commenting,

“Disagreements on matters of authorship should not separate Christians into theological camps, as if one position were right and the other wrong, or as if one represented a higher view of Scripture than the other. Certain epistles, such as Ephesians...for example, do not lose their canonical status, value and authority for the church today if they are judged to be written by someone other than Paul.”⁵⁸

The challenge regarding Ephesians possibly being pseudonymous, of course, is that it is not a text like Hebrews⁵⁹ or Ecclesiastes⁶⁰ where no author is stated by name, and/or where the vocabulary used requires us to place its composition within a distinct period of time. While it is important that we are aware of the issues surrounding the authorship of Ephesians, the job of any good interpreter is still to deal with the text as we have it (in its final form), and provide a reasonable interpretation of it. Interestingly enough, when writing in the somewhat Left-of-Center *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, Marshall refers to the author of Ephesians as “Paul” in quotation marks.⁶¹ Paul is certainly the

⁵¹ Carson and Moo, 483.

⁵² H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

⁵³ Jack P. Lewis, “qāhāl,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790; K.L. Schmidt, “ekklēsia,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

⁵⁴ Guthrie, pp 497-498.

⁵⁵ Marshall, in *ECB*, 1386.

⁵⁶ Cf. Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 240.

⁵⁷ F.W. Danker, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:112.

⁵⁸ Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 78.

⁵⁹ Consult the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

⁶⁰ Consult the author’s entry for Ecclesiastes in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

⁶¹ Marshall, in *ECB*, 1386.

implied author of Ephesians, and requires any interpreter—whether he believes in genuine Pauline authorship or Pauline pseudonymity—to treat the text as though Paul is speaking.

It is the view of many commentators that until Pauline authorship of Ephesians can be definitively denied, **it must be assumed**.⁶² If the text actually does have an anonymous author, then it was the intention of that author to emulate Paul as closely as he could to honor him. Arnold notes that “perhaps a majority of scholars today [hold] that the letter was not written by Paul. This situation is rather ironic in that a good number of scholars have esteemed Ephesians as ‘the crown’ of Paul’s thought.”⁶³ O’Brien indicates that adhering to a pseudonymous epistle actually creates more problems than it is worth:

“[T]here is a number of hard-core problems for the advocates of pseudonymity that will not easily go away—including the early and consistent testimony to apostolic authorship, the expressions in Ephesians that seem to have been used by the author of Colossians, the evidence against pseudonymity in relation to the New Testament letters, the restrictions placed on Paul’s ability and versatility as a writer and theologian, the changed epistolary situation envisaged in Ephesians, and so on. Is it being unfair, then to suggest that the problems created by pseudonymity are greater than the ones solved by it?”⁶⁴

Witherington further comments, “I would suggest that [Paul] would be more likely to [write this] and would do it better than an imitator, especially as he reached the end of his period of house arrest in Rome and was thinking of moving on to further ministry.”⁶⁵

This commentary accepts genuine Pauline authorship of Ephesians, but we will be engaging with some commentators who deny it in varying degrees (Martin, Lincoln, Perkins).⁶⁶

WHERE WAS PAUL WHEN HE WROTE THIS LETTER?

Paul’s location when writing Ephesians is closely connected to the issue of genuine Pauline authorship, or pseudonymity. Ephesians often considered to be a part of the Prison Epistles, also including: Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

As Paul identifies himself in Ephesians, he is a “prisoner of Messiah Yeshua for the sake of you Gentiles” (3:1), “the prisoner of the Lord” (4:1), and “I am an ambassador in chains” (6:20). Although a place is not stated specifically in the letter, the traditional view of Ephesians’ composition is that Paul wrote the letter while imprisoned in Rome (cf. Acts 28:23-31). If Rome were indeed the place of his composition, more seem to be agreed that Ephesians was composed during his first imprisonment, than his second imprisonment when he was in a dreary dungeon (2 Timothy 1:16). There are some who hold to a minority view that Paul wrote Ephesians when imprisoned in Caesarea (cf. Acts 23-26). **Our analysis of Ephesians will stand by the traditional view that this text was written by Paul when he was in Rome.**

Those who adhere to Ephesians being a pseudonymous text may suggest that Ephesus is, in fact, the place of origin, with Ephesians being written by members of some kind of Pauline “school.” Colossae is also sometimes suggested as a place of origin.

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

The authorship of Ephesians also affects the presumed date of composition. If Ephesians is authentically Pauline, then the letter can be estimated to have been written sometime around 60-62 C.E. If Ephesians is pseudonymous, then the text could have been written anywhere from 70-95 C.E., but not beyond 95-96 C.E. as it was known and employed in *1 Clement*.⁶⁷

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO HIS AUDIENCE

When considering Ephesians, did Paul intend to write a specific epistle to the Believers in Ephesus, or a general epistle to the Believers in Asia Minor? In determining Paul’s relationship to his audience, an interpreter has to seriously consider his statements “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints” (1:15, NRSV), and “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you” (3:2, NIV). There is a detached relationship between Paul and these people, which has led many interpreters to conclude that the Ephesians,

⁶² Cf. Wood, in *EXP* 11:5; Guthrie, 499.

⁶³ Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 240.

⁶⁴ O’Brien, 46.

⁶⁵ Witherington, 12.

⁶⁶ For those wishing to investigate the authorship of Ephesians in more detail, consult Guthrie, pp 509-528 for a thorough explanation and defense of Pauline authorship, as well as Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 240-243.

⁶⁷ Carson and Moo, 487.

at best, can only be one of the intended audiences of Ephesians. “Most likely the letter was originally a circular letter to various gentile churches, probably in western Asia Minor” (*EDB*).⁶⁸ The title of “Ephesians” would have been assigned as Paul’s letters were finally being collected near the end of the First Century.

But even if the Ephesians were not the main, or even the original audience of this letter (cf. 1:1, Grk.), does the city of Ephesus get completely removed from the discussion? Not really. While there might not be anything *specific* we can infer from Ephesus regarding Paul’s letter, there are some *general* things that we need to keep in mind – particularly as Ephesus represented a major political and religious center of Asia Minor.

Ancient *Ephesos* (Ἐφεσός) was an important city in Asia Minor, and an urban center of the Roman Empire, being capital of the province of Asia. The city had once been a major seaport, and had grown into a major trading center, albeit waning by the First Century C.E. Arnold indicates, “Ephesus may accurately be called the leading city of the richest region of the Roman Empire.”⁶⁹ Ephesus possessed a major amphitheater which could seat up to 24,000.

The city of Ephesus was originally part of the Ionian colonization of Asia Minor, sometime in the First Millennium B.C.E. Originally a Greek city, it was overcome by the Persians (546 B.C.E.), but then liberated by Alexander the Great (334 B.C.E.). After his death, it was administered by the Seleucid Dynasty, which later found itself beaten by Rome. By 133 B.C.E. Ephesus was under full Roman jurisdiction.



Ephesus was a major center of Artemis (Diana) worship, with many ancient pilgrims flocking to the city as “tourist-worshippers” (*NIDB*).⁷⁰ This is confirmed in the Biblical record with the mentioning of Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis (Acts 19:23-28), and whose business was hurt by the gospel preaching of Paul. In the mid-First Century C.E., it is estimated that Ephesus would have had a population of between 200,000-300,000. The city would have been considered a place of both ethical and moral decline.

The city of Ephesus was by no means unimportant for the early Believers. It is significant that Ephesus became the third most important city for the early Messianic community after Jerusalem and Antioch. Timothy is remembered as being the first bishop of Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.5),⁷¹ as Paul told him “remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines” (1 Timothy 1:3). According to tradition, the Apostle John would escape to Ephesus after the fall of Jerusalem and be buried there (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.1; 3.31.2-4),⁷² with both Ephesus and the surrounding vicinity being the likely places where he wrote his Gospel, the three letters of 1-3 John, and Ephesus is listed as one of the seven assemblies of Asia in Revelation (2:1-7).

Paul himself visited the city of Ephesus during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19-28). He testifies, “night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31), probably from 54-57 C.E. during his Third Missionary Journey. Luke records, “he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:8-10). While spending time in Ephesus, Paul was able to minister to a great number of Jewish and non-Jewish people from around the vicinity of the city.

While in Ephesus, Paul encountered and immersed some disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). Luke testifies that “God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out” (Acts 19:11-12). So significant were the supernatural events, that some Jewish exorcists even tried to cast out demons in the name of the Yeshua “whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:13ff). Also quite significant was a riot caused by Demetrius, who made images of the goddess Artemis. He claimed, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of

⁶⁸ Gundry-Volf, “Ephesians, Letter to the,” in *EDB*, 411.

⁶⁹ C.E. Arnold, “Ephesus,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 249.

⁷⁰ Edward M. Blacklock, “Ephesus,” in Tenney, Merrill C., ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987),

⁷¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 67.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 69, 96.