

Chapter Summary: Ephesians

While Paul was living and working in Ephesus, he sent his coworkers out to start churches across the Roman province of Asia. Epaphras planted churches in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, but Paul was arrested in Jerusalem shortly after leaving Ephesus to deliver an offering for the poor. Paul was eventually brought to Rome and imprisoned while awaiting trial. By the time he heard about the situation in Colosse, he had been away from the province of Asia for at least three years.

Paul realized that by now other churches also needed advice, encouragement, and correction from him. (He likely got information about many of them from people who came to visit and help him in Rome.) So, Paul gave his co-workers, Tychicus and Onesimus, a letter to read to these churches in addition to delivering his letters to the Colossians and to Philemon.

Today this letter is known as "Ephesians," even though the earliest and best copies of the letter are addressed to "God's holy people," not "God's holy people in Ephesus." (As is the case for all of Paul's letters, we no longer have the original.)

Paul is apparently writing to people he has not met personally because he tells the recipients that he has only "heard of their strong faith in the Lord Jesus." By contrast, when he writes to the Corinthians, he refers to "what I told you about Christ," and he reminds the Thessalonians of how "we brought you the Good News." In addition, the lack of specific personal greetings at the end also indicates that Ephesians was written for a more general audience.

Because this is a more general letter, Paul doesn't begin by explaining his connection to the recipients as he does in other letters. Instead, he writes a longer-than-usual opening thanksgiving, delivering a big-picture description of everything God has accomplished through Christ.

The Good News is the revelation of how God has brought his long-term plan to fulfillment. God is one, and He intends to unify all things under the authority of Christ. Paul's prayer is for the believers' understanding: that they would know the great scope of God's work for them. Their hope is secure because the same power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that also sustains them.

Paul begins the main body of his letter by emphasizing the same truth as in Colossians – that following Jesus means beginning a whole new way of life in a new kind of community. Paul identifies the recipients as Gentiles but emphasizes that in Jesus they are now fellow citizens with all of God's people and full members of His family. They were previously in exile ("in this world without God and without hope") but now they have been joined to the Messiah. Because Christ has torn down the wall of hostility that once divided Jews and Gentiles, one new human family has come into existence. Paul refers to this family as God's new holy temple, the place where God makes His home, built on the cornerstone of Jesus himself.

This has always been God's mysterious plan: to bring all the world's people together in Christ. And Paul's own special mission is to announce this Good News throughout the Roman Empire, especially to the Gentiles. Overcome by this vision for the world, Paul writes his second prayer, giving thanks for the great love of Christ that makes it all possible.

How is this vision to be implemented in the believers' life together? They should each use the "special gift" God has given them to help both the community and its individual members to become mature. In practical ways, they should allow God's Spirit to renew their thoughts and attitudes. And as he did in the letter to the Colossians, Paul instructs them in how the light of Christ should show itself in their household relationships. Paul concludes by pointing out that God has given them everything they need to resist the "mighty powers in this dark world" and continue to walk in Christ's light.