Author and Title

Pauline authorship of Ephesians was universally accepted until modern times. Today a number of scholars claim that it was written in Paul’s name by an unknown follower or imitator of Paul, and they give two main reasons: (1) the letter’s style and thought does not strike everyone as characteristically Pauline; and (2) the author of Ephesians does not seem to be familiar with the letter’s recipients (see 1:15; 3:2; 4:21), which seems odd given Paul’s extended stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:10).

However, there are sound reasons to affirm that Paul wrote Ephesians. First, the letter explicitly claims to be Paul’s (1:1; 3:1), which should weigh heavily in the debate unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The early church—which rejected other spurious letters—unanimously accepted this letter to Ephesus as being written by Paul, and this was a city with a reputation for discernment regarding false apostolic claims (Rev. 2:2). Furthermore, letters in antiquity were usually transmitted through a person known by both author and recipient(s) who would have guaranteed the original copy’s genuineness and elaborated on its details—see note on Ephesians 6:21–22 regarding Tychicus.

Second, analyses of an author’s style are often subjectively based on incomplete evidence. With the aid of more sophisticated computer analysis, further careful study has shown that Ephesians has more similarities to Paul’s accepted style than was earlier recognized. In addition, recent research suggests that the roles of secretaries in the composition of ancient letters should be given greater consideration than it has been given in the past. Ephesians does indeed demonstrate close similarity with Paul’s forms of expression and thought. Critics have used this evidence to ascribe authorship to someone Paul had influenced, but it is more likely that these marks of Pauline thought and writing style confirm that he himself wrote the book.

The question of Paul’s apparent unfamiliarity with his readers can easily be explained. Ancient archaeological evidence has shown that Ephesus controlled a large network of outlying villages and rural areas up to 30 miles (48 km) from the city. Also, Acts 19:10 reveals that reports of Paul’s preaching during his stay at Ephesus had radiated out to “all the residents of Asia.” Hence, Paul would not have been personally acquainted with newer pockets of believers in the Ephesian villages and rural farms that had sprung up since his stay in the city a few years before the writing of this letter.

Moreover, many have suggested that Ephesians in its present form stems from the Ephesus copy of a circular letter to several Asian churches that Tychicus was delivering in the course of his journey to Colossae, along with the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7–9). Therefore, the absence of personal greetings is no cause for surprise.

Finally, it would be extraordinarily odd for someone to write so forcefully that his readers should “speak the truth” and “put away falsehood” (4:15, 25) in a letter he was deceptively forging! Consequently, it can be affirmed with good confidence that Paul wrote Ephesians.

The title “to the Ephesians” is found in many early manuscripts (see note on 1:1). It indicates that the letter was written to the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding dependent region.

Date

Because Paul mentions his imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), this letter should be dated to c. A.D. 62 when Paul was held in Rome (Acts 28). Critics who date Ephesians later in the first century do so from doubts about Paul’s authorship rather than from strong evidence against the earlier date.
Theme

There are two main themes of Ephesians: (1) Christ has reconciled all creation to himself and to God, and (2) Christ has united people from all nations to himself and to one another in his church. These great deeds were accomplished through the powerful, sovereign, and free working of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and are recognized and received by faith alone through his grace. In light of these great truths, Christians are to lead lives that are a fitting tribute of gratitude to their great Lord.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

There was no specific occasion or problem that inspired this letter, though Paul does mention that he desired the Ephesians to know how he was faring in confinement (6:21–22). Ephesians articulates general instruction in the truths of the cosmic redemptive work of God in Christ; the unity of the church among diverse peoples; and proper conduct in the church, the home, and the world. Unity and love in the bond of peace mark the work of the Savior as well as Christians’ grateful response to his free grace in their lives.

Ancient Ephesus forms an appropriate background to the book of Ephesians because of this city’s fascination with magic and the occult (see Acts 19:19, and below). This helps explain Paul’s emphasis on the power of God over all heavenly authorities and on Christ’s triumphant ascension as head over the church and over all things in this age and the next. The Ephesians needed to be reminded of these things in order to remain resolute in their allegiance to Christ as the supreme power in the world and in their lives.

Timeline

### The Ancient City of Ephesus

An important port city on the west coast of Asia, Ephesus boasted the temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world). Just a few decades before Paul, Strabo called Ephesus the greatest emporium in the province of Asia Minor (Geography 12.8.15; cf. 14.1.20–26). However, the silting up of the harbor and the ravages of earthquakes caused the abandonment of the harbor city several centuries later. Today, among the vast archaeological remains, some key structures date from the actual time of the NT.

The grandiose theater, where citizens chanted “great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:29–40), had been enlarged under Claudius near the time when Paul was in the city. It held an estimated 20,000 or more spectators. The theater looked west toward the port. From the theater a processional way led north toward the temple of Artemis. In the fourth century B.C. the Ephesians proudly rebuilt this huge temple with their own funds after a fire, even refusing aid from Alexander the Great. The temple surroundings were deemed an official “refuge” for those fearing vengeance, and it played a central part in the economic prosperity of the city, even acting at times like a bank. A eunuch priest served the goddess Artemis, assisted by virgin women. Today very little remains of that once great temple beyond its foundations and a sizable altar, although the nearby museum displays two large statues of Artemis discovered elsewhere in Ephesus.

Other archaeologically extant religious structures include a post-NT temple of Serapis and several impor-
tant imperial cult temples. Before Paul’s day, Ephesus had proudly obtained the right to host the Temple of the Divine Julius (Caesar) and the goddess Roma. The city later housed memorials to the emperors Trajan (A.D. 98–117) and Hadrian (A.D. 117–138); and it possessed a huge temple of Domitian (A.D. 81–96), which may have been constructed during the time the apostle John was in western Asia. Luke testifies to Jewish presence in Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 24; 19:1–10, 13–17), and this is confirmed by inscriptions and by literary sources (e.g., Josephus, Against Apion 2.39; Jewish Antiquities 14.262–264).

Civic structures during the time of Paul included the state agora (marketplace) with its stoa, basilica, and town hall. This spilled out onto Curetes Street, which contained several monuments to important citizens such as Pollio and Memmius. Curetes Street led to the commercial agora neighboring the theater; this large market square could be entered through the Mazaen and Mithradates Gate (erected in honor of their patrons Caesar Augustus and Marcus Agrippa). Shops lined this agora and part of Curetes Street. A building across the street from the agora has frequently been called a brothel, although some have questioned this. On the way to the Artemis temple from the theater, one would have passed the huge stadium renovated or built under Nero (A.D. 54–68).

The wealth of some residents of Ephesus is apparent in the lavish terrace houses just off Curetes Street. Later inscriptions mention a guild of silversmiths and even give the names of specific silversmiths (cf. Demetrius the silversmith, mentioned in Acts 19:24). However, as in most Roman cities, many people would have been slaves, and others would not have claimed much wealth. By the end of the second century (after the NT period) many other monumental structures were added, including some important gymnasia and the famous Library of Celsus. Remains of the giant Byzantine Church of Mary remind one that this former pagan town later hosted an important church council (the Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431).

**History of Salvation**

Christians have experienced in Christ the salvation and blessings that God promised through the ages, and look forward to the consummation of God’s purposes in Christ. (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the Overview of the Bible, pp. 23–26.)
Ephesians exemplifies the genre of the NT epistle, with its salutation (including sender, recipients, and greeting), thanksgiving, exposition, exhortation, and closing (including final greetings and benediction). The main argument of the letter is punctuated by several prayers and an interior benediction (3:20–21) that marks the transition from doctrinal affirmations to practical exhortations. Chapter 2 takes the form of a spiritual biography, in which Paul recounts the saving work of Christ in the life of every Christian, and especially in the lives of Gentiles who are now included in the one new people of God. In chapter 3 the apostle takes an autobiographical turn as he testifies about his calling to the Gentiles and his prayers for the Ephesian church. The paraenesis (series of moral exhortations) consists mainly of instructions for household conduct, both for the church as the household of faith and for individual believers in their domestic relationships. The famous description of the complete armor in the last chapter is an extended metaphor. Paul also catalogs the blessings of salvation in a lofty and exhilarating lyrical style.

Ephesians finds its central unity in the work of Jesus Christ and in the community of people (both Jews
and Gentiles) who are corporately united in him. The strong opening statement of praise and the absence of any theological polemics make Ephesians pervasively positive in tone. The clear division of the epistle into two halves of nearly equal length (namely, the doctrinal section in chs. 1–3 and the practical section in chs. 4–6) also provides a strong sense of structural unity.

Outline

I. Introduction (1:1–14)
   A. Greetings (1:1–2)
   B. Spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3–14)

II. Paul’s Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:15–23)

III. Salvation by Grace through Faith (2:1–10)
   A. Hopelessness and helplessness without Christ (2:1–3)
   B. Hope in Christ (2:4–10)

IV. Unity and Peace of Christ (2:11–22)
   A. Unity of Christ’s people (2:11–15)
   B. Peace with God (2:16–18)
   C. Implications of Christ’s peace (2:19–22)

V. Revelation of the Gospel Mystery (3:1–13)
   A. Paul’s apostolic ministry (3:1–7)
   B. The mystery and wisdom (3:8–13)

VI. Paul’s Prayer for Strength and Insight (3:14–21)

VII. Unity of the Body of Christ (4:1–16)
   A. Exhortation to unity (4:1–6)
   B. The different gifts (4:7–10)
   C. The gifts for edification of the church (4:11–16)

VIII. Paul’s Testimony (4:17–24)

IX. Exhortation to an Edifying Lifestyle (4:25–32)

X. New Life in Love (5:1–20)
   A. Exhortation to self-sacrificial love (5:1–2)
   B. Instruction in holy living (5:3–20)

XI. Submission to One Another (5:21–6:9)
   A. Submission in general (5:21)
   B. Wives and husbands (5:22–33)
   C. Children and parents (6:1–4)
   D. Slaves and masters (6:5–9)

XII. The Whole Armor of God (6:10–20)
   A. The Lord’s strength (6:10–13)
   B. Standing firm (6:14–17)
   C. Being constant in prayer (6:18–20)

XIII. Conclusion (6:21–24)
Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
   To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
   Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, and in him the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

8 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, in order to make eternally effective for those who are called the way of atonement for our sins, through the life everlasting.

9 And with this he has made him the firstborn among many brothers, since he knew that those who belong to God as sons are heirs, and that heirs possess the fullness of life everlasting. In the same way Christ worshiped the Father and was made in the likeness of flesh in the form of a servant, and was made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of the Most High God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was made a sinner, that he might become the savior of sinners; he is the savior of the world. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Ephesians 1:21

According to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight
9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ
10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.
12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.
13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,
16 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power over us who believe, according to the working of his great might
17 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
18 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

1 Or he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known . . . 2 Or down payment. 3 Or until God redeems his possession. 4 Some manuscripts omit your love.

21 Ch. 4:10; Col. 2:10; See John 3:31; 41. Cor. 15:24; Ch. 3:15; Phil. 2:9; (Heb. 1:4) [Matt. 12:32]