

EPHESIANS

STUDY GUIDE

AUTHOR

There are some who question Paul's authorship of Ephesians, believing the book to have been written after Paul's death. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. The early church attributed the book to **Paul**, and many recent scholars affirm Paul's authorship. Additionally, Paul names himself as the author in the first verse.

Date & Audience

Most believe Paul wrote the book from Rome while imprisoned (3:1), which is also when he wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Because of this, these books are often known as the "prison epistles" and would have been written around **AD 64**.

The audience of the book is somewhat up for debate, for the words "in Ephesus" (1:1) is missing from some key manuscripts. Additionally, this letter doesn't address specific problems the way some of his other writings do, so the letter most likely was meant for a broader Gentile audience, circulating to several churches in Asia Minor.

Literary Genre & Structure

The literary genre of Ephesians offers some challenges. In many ways it is like an ancient letter with beginning greetings (1:1-2) and closing salutations (6:21-24). However, the body of the letter resembles more of a sermon. Given that communications such as Ephesians were read aloud to gathered groups, the sermonic quality would certainly serve a purpose: to instruct & encourage the receiving audience. The sermon within Ephesians contains two types of instruction: 1) strengthening the convictions the people already hold (ch. 1-3), and 2) moving the people toward a particular action (ch. 4-6).

Greetings (1:1-2)

Position in Christ (1:3-3:21)

Practice in Christ (4:1-6:20)

Salutations (6:21-24)

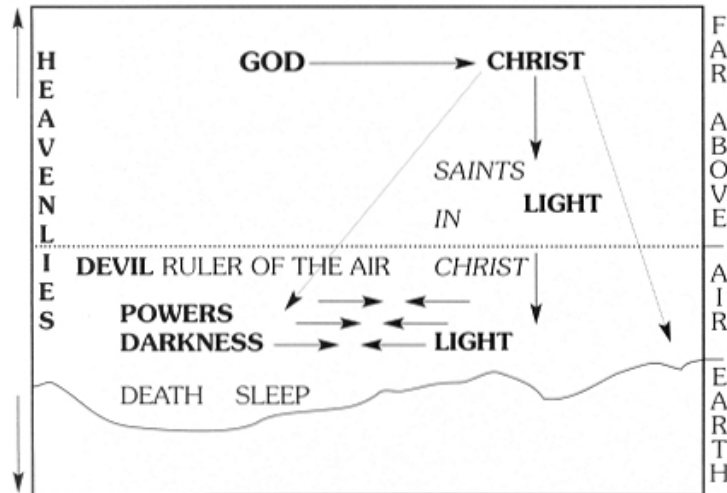
Ephesians and Colossians share a fair amount of similar content. In fact, more than a third of Colossians is also found in Ephesians. The most probable explanation for the similar content is that Paul wrote both pieces fairly close in time to each other. The similarities and differences between Ephesians and Colossians can be thought of as the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels: similar content with different emphases and viewpoints.

The Heavens

Ephesians presents a different view of the heavens that our western mindset. Understanding how Paul and his readers would have understood the heavens and earth, and spaces between, will help you understand what Paul is communicating about Christians and their place in Christ.

To the ancient individual, up is better than down, and therefore God is in heaven – even far above the heavens! Between God and humans are good and bad spiritual powers. These good and bad powers create the spiritual realities humans experience on a day-to-day basis.

THE HEAVENLIES AND EARTH
 “Ephesians,” by Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld



The data [according to Ephesians] can be summarized as follows:

- God, Christ, believers, and evil powers all reside in the heavenlies (1:3, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12)
- God, Christ, and those who are raised and exalted with him (1:20, 2:6) are located above all powers (1:21)
- Christ descended to the lower parts of the earth (4.9)
- Christ ascended far above all the heavens (4:10)
- The prince of the power of the air controls the disobedient (2:2; the air appears to be synonymous with the heavenlies in 6:12)

Notice the heavenlies make up almost all of reality and spiritual blessings are available in the present (1:3). While there is a hint of future with references to the seal and guarantee of the Spirit (1:14), the age to come (2:7) and day of redemption (4:30), spiritual blessings are available to the believer in the here and now. Also, while believers exist on earth, they are also present in Christ, raised and seated in the heavenlies above all powers (1:20-21, 2:6). Ephesians 6:10-13 makes it clear that believers live in the area where encounters with the devil and his powers is unavoidable and to be expected. For this reason, they need the Spirit and power of God (5:18-22, 6:10-13).

Use this information while reading Ephesians to help grasp what it means for you as a believer to be “seated in the heavenlies, far above all powers” (1:20-21), and how being “in Christ” makes that all possible.

FINDING OBSERVATION WORDS

It's time for you to expand your Bible study skills and identify some key words of your own within Ephesians! How do you find key words? I'm so glad you asked!

1. Read through the entire book of Ephesians.
2. Read the book again, this time taking notice of repeated words or terms used to communicate important points or themes. Make sure to identify synonyms as part of that same key word (Example: chosen, elect, selected = same key word "chosen")
3. Be prepared for chapters or sections to have key words of their own which speak to important themes or points within the book, but might not be used all throughout the book.

Let's use Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV) as an example:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Certainly, there are other words or themes one could choose within this same passage, but notice the key words and attached synonyms for: united, Christ, and humility.

- When it comes to the “armor of God,” what are the various pieces and what do they speak to? What does this section teach you about the devil’s schemes and the believer’s response?

Key Word – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

Key Verse – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

Key Chapter – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?