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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. What Makes Ephesians Different?**

- The letter is not directed to a particular congregation or in response to a particular situation. Well, I suppose it could be, but the letter itself doesn't indicate either. Ephesians 1:1 seems to indicate that that is directed to the church at Ephesus:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: -- Ephesians 1:1

However, "[t]he words 'in Ephesus' (I:I) which most translations still include, are not present in the earliest and best MSS [manuscripts]; and second century references to letter do not know it as sent to Ephesus (see Best 1987)."[1] The statement, "To the Ephesians" is first attested by 2nd century Christian writer and theologian, Irenaeus, in 180 CE. "A generation earlier, however, Marcion had edited a collection of Paul's letters that used the title, "To the Laodiceans.""[2]

- The letter's writing style is also quite interesting. Its style is at times marked by repetitions and redundancies.[3] However, in my view, the repetitions lead combine to make a beautiful and moving letter.
- Scholars have noted similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. For example, there are verses that share identical phraseology.[4]

### **B. Authorship**

- The writer names himself as Paul in Ephesians 1:1 and 3:1. However, this identification is doubted by many scholars (although some scholars still defend Pauline authorship). "The questioning of Pauline authorship is based on content, vocabulary, theological differences from undisputed Pauline letters, literary dependence on the Pauline Corpus and literary dependence on Col."[5]
- Should doubted authorship affect or change how we view Ephesians? I tend to think not. First it is important not to impose modern conventions of copyright and plagiarism onto 1st century documents. Second, the letter is clearly represents Pauline tradition and was accepted by earlier Christianity to be within that tradition. J.D.G Dunn, I think, expresses this sentiment well:[6]

A close associate or disciple of Paul, who stood within the tradition begun by Paul and was recognized to do so, was seen to represent the Pauline tradition after Paul's death and was able to re-express it in some measure in his own terms. And he did so in Paul's name, without deceit; his words were acknowledged to be appropriate sentiments to Paul.

### C. Date Written

- If the Paul is the author, then the letter was probably written in the early 60s.[7] If Paul is not the author than a date range between 80–100 is more likely.[8]

### II. God's Plan

- Read Ephesians 1:3–14:

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (7) In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (8) Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; (9) Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: (10) That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: (11) In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (12) That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (13) In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, (14) Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

- Note: Scholars point out that in Greek these verses "can be punctuated as a single sentence." [9]
- *What do you notice about this pericope? What themes are mentioned?*
- *How does Paul use repetition to make his point?*
- *Is this a prayer? Is this a hymn?*

- *Could you call this pericope a summary of God's plan? Do the verses suggest that God's plan has already been accomplished?*
- *How is the theme or idea of "blessing" developed in the pericope? Is it important that the theme of "blessing" or being "blessed" starts with God and Jesus?*
- *In verse 3 what does it mean that God, "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?"*
- *Why does Paul mention both the time "before the foundation of the world" and the "dispensation of the fullness of time?"*
- *We see the use of the word "predestined" in these verses. This can be troubling because of its larger theological connection and its theological opposition to notions of free-will and agency. Try to ignore those background theological issues and focus on how the word is used in this pericope. *Is the use of the word appropriate here? What does it emphasize? How does it connect and enhance the picture painted by this pericope? How does the word reinforce the main point of verses 5 and 11? Are verses 5 and 11 meant to parallel each other?**
- *What role does Christ play in these verses?*
- *We usually understand the phrase, "the dispensation of the fullness of times", as referring to today and the Modern church but could verses 9–10 be using that phrase differently? *Is dispensation of the fullness of time, the dispensation of Christ (in some sense)? The word translated as dispensation could also be translated as plan? Does "plan" make sense here?**

### III. What God has Done

Read Ephesians 2:1–10:

(1) And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (10) For we are his

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

- *Is it fair to say that the first three verses describe the natural human state without God? What characteristics or situations of the natural state do the verses emphasize?*
- *Who is the "prince of the power of the air" or the "ruler of the power of the air" or the "ruler of the kingdom of the air?" What does that language or imagery emphasize?*
- *Do these verse imply the we already have salvation? For example, does verse 6 imply that the letter recipients are in heaven now?*
- *What does it mean in verse 5 that God, "quickened us together with Christ?"*
- *Is verse 7 important? Does it add important perspective to preceding verses and the concepts of salvation and the heavenly place?*
- *What is the concept of grace connected with in this pericope? How does the grace of God change us? Do these verses imply that the grace of God "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus?"*

#### **IV. New Humanity**

- Read Ephesian 2:11–19:

(11) Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; (12) That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: (13) But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (14) For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; (15) Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; (16) And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (17) And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. (18) For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (19) Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

- *How did Christ change the world?*
- *What does it mean in verse 14 that Christ is our peace?*
- *Are you surprised that Circumcision is referred to as "in the flesh made by hands?" What*

*does that mean? What does it imply about circumcision? Why emphasize the physical aspect of circumcision?*

- *Why emphasize the uniting of Jews and Gentiles? What does it remind the reader of? Why does it lead to a discussion of peace? Why emphasize that the dividing wall has been broken down? Why is this an important part of the mission of Jesus Christ?*
- *Some scholars have suggested that the barrier wall broken down might have specific figurative reference to the wall separating the Gentiles from the inner court of the Jerusalem temple?[10] What do you think of that possibility? Does it make sense given the imagery of verses 20–22?*

(20) And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; (21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: (22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

## **Endnotes**

1. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1165.
2. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HarperCollins, 1150.
3. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1165.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1165.
5. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 884.
6. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1166.
7. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1166.
8. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 885.
9. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1166.

10. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 885.