

Ephesians

Background

Synagogues found outside the boundaries of Palestine are generally a sign of Jewish migration. There are three primary explanations for the migration of Jewish communities outside the Palestine region: natural migration (self-relocation), post-captivity resettlement (such as the Assyrian and Babylonian migrations), or forced resettlement resulting from expulsion or persecution.

The presence of a synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 18:19) suggests that it was a refuge city for Jews who fled to the region as a result of post-captivity resettlement (II Chronicles 36:22/II Kings 17:5) or expulsion (Acts 8:1, 12:1-2, 11:19-20, 13:14-50, 19:20-22; *Antiochus IV, 171 BCE).

Ephesus was a significant focal point of concern in the early days of the Church. The Apostle Paul made two excursions to the region of Southwest Asia to engage with the Gentile believers. The Apostle John, when exiled to the island of Patmos, received a declaration of judgment for the seven Churches in Asia. Ephesus was the first church listed, and the oral verdict against them called them to repent and return to their first works, or to risk having their place in their relationship with God being removed. (Revelation 2:7) No Church is featured more in the New Testament than the Church of Ephesus.



During his first visit, the Apostle Paul was warmly received by a small group that showed an interest in his teachings about the Messiah. The Apostle was invited to extend his visit so they could learn more. Instead of staying, he departed, hoping to reach Jerusalem to celebrate the annual feast, leaving Aquila and Priscilla, the husband-and-wife ministry team, to continue teaching and sharing the gospel. (Acts 18:19) Apollo, the celebrated orator, arrived to preach to the Ephesians during the tenure of the husband-and-wife duo. (Acts 18:24-25)



The Apostle's second visit ended in a citywide riot, following two years of teaching in a local school. Following an altercation with a local vendor who created idol images of the pagan goddess Diana, the Apostle found himself embroiled in a rift between new believers who accepted the gospel and a larger group that opposed it in favor of the cultural goddess of Ephesus. They rejected the Messiah represented in their Jewish faith. (Acts 19:28-40)

Primary Teaching theme: *Believer's Doctrine*

The teaching epistle to the Church at Ephesus uniquely explains the believer's spiritual standing resulting from the work of Salvation. It empowers the believer to know and understand their identity and purpose.

The doctrinal focus regarding the believer's faith in the Apostle's letter is an appropriate message to Jewish believers living in a strongly idolatrous Greek culture. Many Jews struggled to abandon their tolerance for idolatry and uphold their commitment to Judaism. They were plagued with the same indifference concerning their commitment to the gospel.

The Apostle's letter to the Church was intended to provide a healthy foundation for the believer's faith and to protect them against the deceptive lures that could draw them away from the truth.

The Present Standing of the Believer cp 1-3

Understanding the spiritual standing of the believer is the first premise in the doctrine of the believer. There is no "spiritual" life before salvation. Man is considered dead in the trespasses of his sin. The work of salvation brings man to life; he is "*quicken*ed," which means made alive.

The Gentiles in Ephesus needed to understand that salvation rescued them from spiritual lifelessness. Judaism and the practice of sacrificial rituals could not "quicken" or give spiritual life to Jews or Gentiles.

Believers in the Messiah are no longer dead or imprisoned by the consequences of sin. Access to eternal life, which was lost due to sin, has been restored. In the believer's past, Jews and Gentiles followed the course of the world they were born into. The spiritual forces in the world, which the prince of the air controls, direct man's path toward disobedience and destruction.

The salvation of God rescues lost souls from the path of destruction and guides them toward a life of purpose. Spiritual life is restored, giving them access to the blessings, promises, and purposes that God has set aside for them.

The new standing that gives believers life is accomplished through the salvation that comes from God. It is a work of grace accomplished by God alone. Man cannot earn salvation, and he does not affect how grace works. Man is saved by grace without any assistance or contribution.

The work of salvation is God redeeming man from sin and restoring his access to eternal life. The results of the finished work make man God's workmanship. Man's redemption is the finished work of God.



The Believer's Identity and Purpose cp 4-6

The Apostle Paul identified himself as a prisoner to God's calling upon his life. The term implies that he is held captive to the purpose God has assigned for his life. The Apostle compels all believers to know and understand their vocation, which is a legal term meaning to be summoned or required to appear for a specific appointment.

Quickening lost souls to life is intended to restore the identity and purpose of believers. Every believer has been summoned for a purpose aligned with their Creator. Like the Apostle, the life of a believer is placed at the involuntary disposal of their Life Giver. The Gentiles who once walked in the ways of the world are expected to apply equal effort and be appropriately aligned with the vocation (or legal summons) that God has placed upon their lives.

The characteristics of the believer's walk (identity) should represent:

- Lowliness: walking in humility, without pride or valuation of personal strength and ability
- Meekness: withholding the impulse for self-reliance, personal resilience, and personal ambition
- Longsuffering: demonstration of patience, showing strength to endure and trust the outcome
- Forbearing others: the ability to support others, including their differences in strength or ability

The characteristics of the believer's purpose:

- The Furnishing of the Believers: Ministry Offices set in the Church Body/ The Church Body Fitly Joined Together/ Every Joint Supplying (cp 4)

The characteristics of the believer's walk (identity) and family life should represent

- Walk in Love/Walk as Children of the Light: not children of darkness or partakers of unfruitful works of darkness (cp 5)
- Obedience and Relationship among Children/Parents/Spouses/ family life (cp 6)

Protecting/Preserving the characteristics of the believer's identity/purpose:

- Be Strong in the Lord/Armor of God: Protecting the work of God/Spiritual warfare (cp 6)

