



Summary of Ephesians

Introduction

Despite claims by some in modern times, the early church accepted that Paul was the author of this letter and modern methods of analysing his other letters show strong support for this indeed being a Pauline epistle. It was almost certainly written while Paul was in a Roman prison, probably around AD62.

There are two main themes of Ephesians:

1. Christ has reconciled all creation to himself and to God.
2. Christ has united people from all nations to himself and to one another in his church.

Unlike many of his letters, Paul does not seem to be responding to address any particular issue in the church. It seems almost a social letter, simply providing an opportunity for him to tell them how he was doing in prison and also allowing him to encourage them through his praise of God and Jesus.

The letter is written in the classical epistle style and can be split into two parts: the doctrinal section in chapters 1-3 and the practical section in chapters 4-6.

Chapter One

Paul identifies himself as the author and, in this translation, the churches in Ephesus as the intended recipients. However, many early manuscripts omit this and there are those who believe it was a general letter to the region rather than just the city churches.

Paul then offers an extended prayer for his readership. The first part of the prayer is one of praise for, adoration of and worship to God (vv.3-14), announcing that everything God has done, he has done through his Son.

This is followed by Paul's thanksgiving for the faithfulness of his readers, asking that God may grant them power, wisdom and an understanding of the grace that has been poured out upon them (vv.15-23).

Chapter Two

Paul commences with a stark reminder of the hopelessness of life for the Gentiles without God, for they were heading down the wrong road of life, alluding also to the fact that even the Jews fared little better in principle because of the state of the human nature and its natural inclination towards the worldly desires of the flesh. Yet God is above all things and he has reached out in the richness of his grace and mercy by giving his Son to the world so that those who would turn to him would become a new creation.

Paul reminds them that the Gentiles and the Jews were once poles apart, with the Jews looking down on their pagan neighbours. But Christ had come and abolished the need for the written law of God, uniting all of mankind into one body, his church. Yet this new united church carries with it the promises made before its conception - the promises made to Abraham and the resulting nation of Israel. All are now citizens of a new reborn nation.

Paul goes further still. Not only are Christians a united nation, they are now both individually and corporately the new Temple of God, the place where his Spirit will dwell. To the Jews the Jerusalem Temple was where heaven and earth met - that is now in the heart of each believer because God has given them his Spirit to indwell them.

Chapter Three

Paul starts by ensuring his readers are aware that one of God's great mysteries is revealed in the Gospel that Paul was appointed to bring to them; that the Gentiles are included in all the promises that he has made to his chosen nation Israel and, indeed, as their equal partners in the Kingdom of God. The secret that had been kept for long ages, although some of the prophets had alluded to it, was that God had drawn up the blueprint for this all inclusive family long before Creation.

Paul follows up this revelation with a call for his readers not to be disheartened by his own imprisonment, but to ensure that the secret that had been made known was spread far and wide by those who had accepted the call to come to Christ. The message that needed to be told by the church, especially to rulers and those in authority, was that wisdom was key, and that it was God's wisdom that would rule over all else.

Paul concludes the chapter by revealing that it is his prayer that his readers will be so captivated by their new found knowledge of God in Christ, and the riches of his wisdom for their lives, that they will respond to his love in such a way that will see them go from strength to strength in their faith and actions.

Chapter Four

Having provided a doctrinal basis for this letter, Paul now starts to explain to his readers the fundamental instructions for Christian living. There are three things which emerge as basic: the meaning of their call to follow Christ; the

grace which has equipped each of them to play their part in serving him; and the unity they already have, but which they must make every effort to guard. It is for the sake of the Gospel that Paul was a prisoner in the Lord, leading by example in just how valuable it is.

Having dealt with the general calling, Paul goes on to list some of the spiritual gifts that are given to those called into roles of church leadership. The objective of these gifts is to disseminate the Gospel to those who would trust in Christ and build the church up to maturity and unity.

Paul then instructs his readers that they cannot live as if they were still pagans, attracted to all sorts of worldly desires. They have to put off that old way of living and turn to the life they had learned of through hearing and accepting the Gospel of Jesus. They are to be renewed in their spirits into a new humanity for Christ.

The chapter concludes with a list of activities that a believer should not engage in: lying, dishonesty, rash speech and angry exchanges with others. Such actions would grieve the Holy Spirit. Instead, people are to act kindly towards each other with mutual respect and love for one another.

Chapter Five

Paul writes of the practical applications of Gospel living with respect to what is expected of those who have come to Christ. Their lives should reflect the nature of God and Paul cites particularly the need to refrain from a whole host of sexual sins, including those that were part of secret pagan rituals, as well as avoiding listening to the idle talk of unbelievers, who may be seeking to lead them away from the Gospel truth.

Paul warns them to stay away from the darkness that is in the world but instead to seek the light that comes by being filled with Holy Spirit. This will lead them into songs of praise and thanksgiving, keeping them focused on what is good.

Paul then turns his attention to the responsibilities within the marriage union; the wife is called upon to subject herself to her husband out of respect for him as the head of the family, just as Christ is the head of the church. In return, the husband is to love, care and provide for his wife.

Chapter Six

The theme of appropriate Christian obedience continues, with Paul exhorting children to obey both parents, citing God's commandment for them to do so. He calls on slaves to obey their earthly masters, not out of compulsion but because of the Lord. Likewise, masters should treat their slaves with dignity and without threats of violence or intimidation.

Paul then calls all believers to be resolute in their faith, reminding them they are in a battle with dark spiritual elements that have strong influence over the affairs of the world. To combat this Paul encourages them to put on the full armour of God that will provide the defence needed to protect them.

Paul then turns to his final weapon in the Christian armoury - prayer. He asks them to pray that the whole church may remain alert to the dangers that will confront them, and he asks that they pray for him in his confinement, that he might still be given the words to proclaim when the opportunity, his forthcoming trial, presented itself.

He tells them that Tychicus, who was the bearer of this letter, would keep them informed of how Paul is and what he is doing, for Paul knew the church held him in high regard and cared for his welfare. He then ends with a benediction, calling for God's peace, love and grace to be upon all of them.