

OUR PURPOSE

EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Ephesians and Colossians are called “Prison Epistles.” According to Christian tradition, Paul wrote these letters to the cities of Ephesus and Colossae during his imprisonment in Rome recorded at the end of Acts. That would date them to sometime around the years A.D. 60–62. Traditions are fallible, so it is no surprise that there are also well-argued, alternative suggestions.

Ephesians is the typically better known of the two letters. There is reason to think it served a larger audience than the church at Ephesus. Some scholars have suggested it was a circular letter for all of Asia. Others suggest it was written several decades after Paul’s death to share his voice with an audience that had only heard of him from the past (Eph. 3:2). Either way, Ephesians is Christian Scripture, and we read it as God’s word for us. This majestic epistle presents an overview of Paul’s theology much like Romans does, but in a more general and

concise way. Accordingly, it has sometimes served as a lens through which Christians have read Romans and the rest of Paul’s writings.

The most prominent theme of Ephesians is the unity of the church universal—that God has united Gentile with Jew through Christ, our peace (2:14). In Ephesians we hear that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (4:5–6). Ephesians highlights Christ’s defeat of spiritual powers and the strength of the armor of God.

Colossians and Ephesians cover similar material, but Colossians is more concrete. Its primary purpose was to warn the believers at Colossae not to get caught up in a Jewish “philosophy” that was current in the area. I think this philosophy was a form of Jewish mysticism aimed at worshiping with the angels. To argue against it, Colossians uses some of the strongest language in the New Testament against Gentiles keeping the Jewish Law. That Paul wrote Colossians from Rome remains a strong possibility, but it is also possible he wrote it during a brief, earlier imprisonment in Ephesus.

This book presents six weeks of Bible studies, four covering Ephesians and two covering Colossians. Each week follows a particular theme relating to a little more than a chapter in one of these letters. Within each week, there are five days of reflection on the text, looking at a few verses each day. The aim of this book is to experience life transformation by studying the words of God revealed to the audiences of Ephesians and Colossians. The goal is to hear God speak to you through Scripture and then live faithfully to his Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 1

POWERED BY GOD

Ephesians 1:1–2:10

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

—EPHESIANS 2:8–10

DAY 1

BLESSED BE GOD!

Ephesians 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians begins with a standard but rather short greeting compared to Paul's other writings. Paul then began to praise God in a magnificent blessing. Today we look at the first part of his blessing.

ENGAGE

After Paul's brief greeting, which probably did not originally mention Ephesus, he launched into a magnificent blessing of God in verses 3–14. We rarely think of blessing God but more often of God blessing us; however, the word Paul used means “blessed.” The translation “praise” is close, but the use of *blessing* would have invoked the meaning of honor versus shame. In a group-oriented world, the respect of one's people is highly valued. So to be honored

by God is the highest possible honor, and this passage shows that God honored us in many ways: by election, adoption, redemption, and forgiveness. In return, we honor him through our praise. Paul's blessing of God here embodies that sort of honor.

EXAMINE

A close comparison of Ephesians and Colossians reveals numerous similarities. For example, Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 say almost exactly the same thing. For this reason, scholars have often wondered if they were written at the same time. Since the earliest manuscripts of Ephesians do not name Ephesus (or any city) as the destination, some have suggested that Ephesians was the lost letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Colossians 4:16; and others say that it was a circular letter meant to be spread around. Of the two letters, Colossians is more concrete and seems more likely to have been the first written of the two. Ephesians generalizes and universalizes the content of Colossians in a magnificent and beautiful way.

EXPLORE

God has planned good things for us! Predestination is a way of describing the unexpected inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God, of God bringing all things together under Christ (Eph. 1:10). The idea was to highlight what a great privilege it was for Paul's Gentile hearers to be included as the sons and daughters of God, not to gloat about the fact that they were in and others were not. Our takeaway today must be similar. What a great honor and blessing it is to be forgiven by God, to be given his grace and sonship! We should praise and honor him for the incredible gifts he has given us.

“God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

—1 TIMOTHY 2:3–4

PRAYER

Father, thank you for what you have given me, and I honor you with the praise due such an awesome God!