

19. The Epistle to the Ephesians

I. The Letter Opening (1:1-2) Some missing words. Addressed to the Ephesians, whose city was Paul's base of operations (cf. Acts 19:8-10), although the apostle had not founded its community of believers.

II. A Strange Letter: It is almost completely without expressions of familiarity with the community in which Paul lived for more than two years. Lacks Paul's customary epistolary greetings in the letter closing. Mentions only Tychicus by name (Eph 6:21-22). Doesn't once use the familiar and characteristic "brothers and sisters" (adelphoi) as a form of address

The "author" appears to have only heard about their faith (1:15-17). A central and seemingly exclusive role assigned to Paul in the communication of God's revelation in Eph 3:2-3. It is literary in style rather than warm and personal.

III. Dependent on Colossians: Similar structure. Similarity of style and vocabulary. Long, periodic sentences. See, for example, Eph 1:3-14 and 3:1-7, both of which are a single sentence in Greek. Similarity of vocabulary: More than one third of the words in Colossians recur in Ephesians, where they constitute a quarter of the text.

Some thematic similarity, including the prisoner motif (3:1; 4:1) And some wholesale borrowing, for example, the household code (Eph 5:21-6:4//Col 3:18-4:1) and commendation of Tychicus, the letter-carrier (Eph 6:21-22//Col 4:7-8) So, it's a new revised and expanded edition of the epistle to the Colossians, a third generation document, probably composed in the waning years of the first century.

IV. A treatise on the church within an epistolary framework (1:1; 6:21-24)

A cosmological perspective, presented in the opening benediction, the berakah of 1:3-14. The unity of Jews and Gentiles. A major theme of the letter is the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection (3:4-6).

Construction imagery is used to teach that Gentile believers are no longer outsiders, strangers and sojourners, but are now fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God (2:19).

Prior to Christ's death and resurrection, Gentiles were without hope and without God (2:12). That is no longer the case.

The reconciliation of Gentiles and Jews is not only an important element of the unity of the church; it is also a major factor in the reconciliation of the cosmos.

Review Questions

1. Is Ephesians really a letter?
2. What does the blessing, the berakah of Ephesians 1 teach about Christ?
3. Does the epistle's plea for the unity of Jews and Gentiles challenge the Church today to bring together people of different ethnic backgrounds?