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Ephesians

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Ephesians

A. Overview and Summary.

1. Ephesians is one of the so-called “prison letters” written by Paul from his imprisonment in Rome along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. This would put the writing about 60-62 AD. The city of Ephesus was the old capital of Asia Minor, now in modern-day Turkey. It was located on the east side of the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River, which later silted up and caused the eventual decline of what was once a thriving trade center. It was known for the temple to Artemis, or the goddess Diana, which was the center of pagan worship of that false deity. Paul’s preaching resulted in a riot led by the silversmith Demetrius, as recorded in Acts 19:24-41.
2. The first three chapters focus on theology, or Christian doctrine, while the last three chapters are on Christian practical behavior. A key theme of the book is the mystery, or previously unrevealed truth, that the church is comprised of Gentiles who are part of the body of Christ and are partakers of God’s promise in Christ through the gospel.

B. Chapter One.

1. Paul opens with a strong word about God’s predestination: “Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens. For He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved” (1:3-6). If God chose us before the foundation of the world, how could He ever un-choose us?
2. He continues with a solid statement of the gospel: “We have redemption in Him through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” (1:7-8). He then gives us a validation of our inheritance in Christ: “When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory” (1:13-14).

3. He prays that the believers in Ephesus would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. That they may know “what is the hope of His calling, what the glorious riches of His inheritance are among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His vast strength” (1:18b-19).
4. The chapter concludes with: “He demonstrated this power in the Messiah by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens—far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put everything under His feet and appointed Him as head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way” (1:20-23).

C. Chapter Two.

1. He begins by reminding us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins but that Christ has made us alive in Him and that we were saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves, but it is God’s gift, not of works, so that no one can boast (2:8-9).
2. He addresses unity and reminds the Gentiles that they were without a Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, foreigners of the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world (2:12). “But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility” (2:13-14).
3. Paul concludes this line of argument with “He did this so that He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross and put the hostility to death by it. When the Messiah came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. So, then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household” (2:16-19).

D. Chapter Three.

1. Paul explains that the Gentiles are now “coheirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of His power” (3:6-7). He continues with: This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints—to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of the Messiah, and

to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (3:8-9).

2. Paul reveals his desire for them in his prayers: “For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power in the inner man through His Spirit, and that the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and to know the Messiah’s love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:14-19).
3. He concludes this chapter with: “Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us—to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (3:20-21).

E. Chapter Four.

1. The chapter begins with Paul urging the Ephesians to: “walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (4:1-6).
2. He then presents the concept of Christ first descending into Hades and then ascending to heaven. He refers to Psalm 68:18: “When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people” (4:8). His full text on this is: “But what does “He ascended” mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth? The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (4:9-10). From this portion of Paul’s text, a portion of what is called the “Apostle’s Creed” was developed in 5th-century Gaul. It is called the Apostle’s Creed, not because the Apostles developed it, but because it contains the Apostles’ teaching. Many churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, use the Apostles’ Creed in their liturgical services. It states the essentials of the Christian faith, including the Trinity, the virgin birth, the forgiveness of sins, Christ’s eventual return, and judgment.
3. The full text of the Creed says that Christ “descended into hell,” but many churches omit this phrase as they deem it offensive. That is because they do not

understand the difference between “hell” and “Hades”. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament calls the place where the souls of men go as “Sheol” or place of the dead. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Greek word “Hades” was used. The Lord Jesus provided additional insight on Hades. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells of a man called Lazarus and of one just referred to as a rich man. They both die and Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham’s side while the rich man is carried to a place of torment in Hades. Abraham’s side, or “bosom” as some translations call it, is the comfortable portion of Hades or Paradise. The rich man went to hell, or the place of torment. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus with water to ease his torment, but Abraham replies this is impossible due to a great chasm between where he and Lazarus are (Paradise) and the place of torment in Hades called hell. Jesus referred to Paradise on the Cross in His dialogue with the repentant thief: “today, you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

4. Many Bible teachers believe, based upon this passage in Ephesians 4:8, the soul of Jesus descended into Hades (Paradise) while His body remained in the tomb for three days. While in Hades, He preached a message of judgment upon those in torment in hell. These same teachers believe when He ascended, he took “captive” all the souls with him to heaven thereby emptying Paradise. This viewpoint is not accepted by all Bible teachers. However, it is not a crucial item of the faith as the New Testament reveals when we die, we will be with Jesus wherever He is (Philippians 1:22-24).
5. Paul tells us that Jesus gave different gifted individuals to the church. He lists five: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). These gifted individuals are often referred to as comprising “the five-fold ministry.” What is often overlooked is these gifted individuals’ mission is “for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, becoming mature with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit” (4:12-14). But often, these gifted ones only minister to their particular church body and do not train others to minister themselves.
6. There is ongoing discussion about whether the gifts of apostles and prophets are still active today. Some believe these gifts ceased after the first century with the original apostles, as their foundational mission was completed. However, others

believe these gifts continue in the church today, though their role may look different from the foundational apostles and prophets of the early church. The Old Testament provides a test for prophets: if their prophecies do not come to pass, they are considered false prophets. In the New Testament context, the term “apostle” can also refer to “sent ones”, such as missionaries or leaders sent by a church or fellowship to spread the gospel. The gift of pastor, often translated as “shepherd,” is a key role in the church, focusing on the care and guidance of God’s people, though it is mentioned only once in this letter. Teachers and evangelists continue to serve in the church today, but it is essential for these gifted individuals to not only minister to the church but also to equip others for ministry, to build up the body of Christ so that more can be sent out to carry the gospel forward.

7. Paul spends the rest of the chapter presenting instructions about living the new life in Christ. He admonishes not to walk as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their thoughts (4:17). He tells them they have put off the old way of life and are being renewed in the spirit of their minds (4:22-23). He tells us to speak truth to our neighbors, to be angry but not let the sun go down on our anger. He speaks against thievery and not allowing foul language to come from our mouths. He says not to grieve the Holy Spirit and “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ” (4:32).

F. Chapter Five.

1. Paul continues with his instruction by telling us to “be imitators of God, as dearly loved children” (5:1). He cautions strongly that sexual impurity and greed should not be heard among us. He continues by telling us that coarse and crude joking are not suitable but rather the giving of thanks (5:3-4). As previously warned in his epistles to Corinth: “For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God” (5:5). As explained in the synopsis of the book of 1st Corinthians, many Bible teachers believe this applies to an unsaved person. Although this is true, consider the example in the Old Testament of Esau, who lost his inheritance for a bowl of stew. Or Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal son who wasted his inheritance on sinful living. For a saved person who continues in sinful living, this pertains to rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.
2. He warns us again: “Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. Therefore, do not

become their partners. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—for the fruit of the light results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—discerning what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:6-9).

3. Paul continues with words to married couples and compares the relationship to the church and Christ: “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of His body (5:22-30).

G. Chapter Six.

1. In the final chapter to the Ephesians, Paul opens with advice to children and fathers. He admonishes Children to obey their parents as they would obey Christ. His words to fathers are not to stir up anger in their children but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (6:1-4). He also instructs slaves and masters in their relationship to each other (6:5-9).
2. The chapter concludes with words about spiritual warfare and the armor of God: “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (6:10-12). He gives an analogy using armor of soldiers: “Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; taking up the shield of faith, by which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (6:14-18).

H. Discussion Questions, Application and Passing it On.

1. Have you ever considered the opening words of this epistle about God choosing us in eternity past before the foundation of the world as a strong promise we will never lose our salvation? This was before all of your sins past, present and future occurred. This confirms your salvation is all of God and not according to your works. Pass this truth on to someone who may be wavering in their faith about the security of their salvation.
 2. Is the explanation of the difference of what is meant by Hell and Hades helpful? Would you be able to explain that to someone else?
 3. If you are a “gifted one” as listed in chapter four, are you ministering to others to build them up and train them to minister themselves?
 4. Do you put on “the whole armor of God” in your personal spiritual warfare?
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This New Testament survey was provided by Joshua Nations (JoshuaNations.org)