

## INVITATION TO EPHESIANS

Besides Colossians, Paul sent at least two more letters with Tychicus and Onesimus from Rome (see p. 1650). One of them has traditionally been known as Ephesians, but it may not actually have been written to believers in the city of Ephesus. The original letter hasn't survived, but there are many early copies, and some of the most accurate are addressed simply to God's holy people, not to God's holy people in Ephesus. If this letter had been written to the Ephesians, Paul would have included lengthy personal greetings at the end, since he spent two years in Ephesus and got to know many people there. Instead, he tells his readers that he's heard about their faith, and says they've no doubt heard about him as well. So, like Colossians, this is a letter from Paul to a group of believers he's never met personally. One possibility is that this is actually the letter to Laodicea mentioned at the end of Colossians (see p. 1654). The followers of Jesus in Laodicea fit the profile for the recipients of this letter very well. They had the same kind of relationship with Paul that the Colossians did: they knew he was in prison, and that his sufferings were for their benefit. On the other hand, if Paul were writing to the Laodiceans, we would expect him to introduce himself as a co-worker of their friend Epaphrus. But Epaphras isn't mentioned here. So another possibility is that this is a general letter intended to circulate among the churches of western Asia Minor, to address problems they all had in common. Even though we don't know exactly who the intended recipients were, we can at least tell from the letter that they were Gentiles who'd come to believe in Jesus. Paul addresses them as you Gentiles. He draws a contrast between we who were the first to put our hope in Christ, meaning himself and his fellow Jews, and you who were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth. They seem to have lived in a

place where there was little direct Jewish influence. They weren't being encouraged to follow certain aspects of the law as if this were needed to support their faith and help restrain their desires. Indeed, they don't seem to have been concerned enough about controlling their actions, and had to be exhorted to live better lives. As he often does in his letters, Paul uses the opening thanksgiving and prayer (which are quite lengthy in this case) to introduce his main theme. He writes that God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority. In this way, God brought everything together under the rule of Jesus the Messiah. Paul echoes a phrase from Psalm 8—God placed all things under his feet—to show that Jesus is the truly human one. Jesus fulfills the original human calling to rule over the creation properly. Paul immediately draws the implication from this, in the first part of the main body of his letter, that Jews and Gentiles have been brought together into one body, with Jesus at the head. This means that Gentiles who believe in Jesus are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. As Paul puts it, God is creating one new humanity through the reconciling work of Jesus. Paul tells his readers he's praying they'll understand the implications of their new identity. In the rest of the letter's main body, he explains those implications. These believers are part of a body that God has given the resources to ensure that each of its members becomes godly and mature. So they must give up their former way of life and practice purity in daily living and integrity in their relationships. As in the case of Colossians, the responsibilities of those in and under authority—husbands and wives, parents and children, servants and masters—are used as an important example of the new kind of relationships God is expecting. Paul also cautions his readers that by seeking to live a new kind of life in this world, they're

entering a spiritual battle. God's people must be on their guard and arm themselves with all the resources that God has provided—the full armor of God. Paul's closing greetings are understandably brief, because this is a letter to people he's never met and doesn't know well. While we can't determine exactly who they were, all who seek to take up their roles in God's drama will gain from this big-picture overview of salvation in Christ. It documents God's dramatic transformation of human communities when the message of truth about the exalted Jesus is heard and believed, looking ahead to the day God will bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.