

## EPHESIANS

In Ephesians, Paul summarises the most important apocalyptic event in history ...Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit to bring new creation right here in the present world. Paul wants his audience to comprehend the nature of the apocalypse of Jesus and how to respond to it.

### Introduction to Paul

It's important to remember that we are reading somebody else's mail from the ancient world. The 13 NT books authored by Paul are letters. I know we know that, but it's important to think about that as we navigate them. 13 snapshots of his correspondence with these ancient communities.

Some people knew Paul as "Rabbi Saul" and some as "Paulus Apostolos". He was an itinerant starter of Jesus communities throughout the Greek and Roman world. Mostly around the Northern Mediterranean. He spent his adult years with the public status of someone who had been imprisoned, yet 2000 years on we are reading his collection of letters.

There's a lot of literature that comes down to us from the ancient world such as the writings of Homer, Cicero, Virgil etc., For the most part if an ancient writing survived 2000 years later it would be because your sponsor was the emperor, and they set you up well to have the leisure of writing. Yet, overshadowing all of them in terms of influence and shaping people's lives and human history, the apostle Paul outweighs all of those ancient authors. Roughly 80 pages versus many hundreds of pages by the ancient Greek and Roman classical authors.

Paul's letters in some ways are very accessible and easy to read for modern Western readers but they can also be incredibly frustrating to read as we encounter things like women wearing head coverings, gender issues, slavery or the powers and principalities of darkness. It is easy to be alienated by some of the things that he talks about.

In religious communities, the words of Paul can be so over familiar that one of the most difficult things to do is to let them become strange and new and allow your imagination to run with the idea of what it must have been like to receive one of these letters as part of a community of Jesus' followers in the ancient world.

### The Authorship of Paul's Letters

Placing Paul's letters in their first-century context will reshape our perception significantly.

1. **Letters had multiple authors.** Paul's letters contain material that is written by Paul and some that is written by his authoring partners, with Paul as the authorising sender.
2. **Letters were compiled communally over time.** Paul's letters would have been created over periods of weeks and months in multiple stages and in group sessions with the named co-authors.
3. **Material was employed in multiple contexts.** Teachers and writers carried notebooks (wax tablets in wood frames) where they would take notes, write down

ideas and short paragraphs, and collect materials they could employ in multiple contexts.

4. **There are shared materials between letters.** Paul's letters contain preformed material from these notebooks, such as Hebrew Bible quotations, excerpts from early Christian hymns, teaching traditions, and other material that Paul had his friends had composed (the shared material between Colossians and Ephesians is a great example). Many letters involved the editing and composition of preexisting material interwoven with new material written for the specific audience.
5. **Paul used a secretary to write his letters.** The skill set required to write these letters was highly specialist.
6. **Letters went through multiple drafts.** Paul's letters certainly went through multiple drafts involving editing, re-wording, and re-ordering material (2 Corinthians is a great example).
7. **Letters became part of collections.** Paul would have retained copies of his letters kept in notebooks.
8. **Letters were expensive to produce.** Some of Paul's letters were much longer than a typical letter in his time (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians). Letters were very expensive to produce. In today's currency, the letter of 1 Corinthians would have required about £2,000 to write and send.
9. **Letter carriers played a key role in a letter's reception.** They would have read the work aloud, explained difficult parts based on personal knowledge of the author's intentions, and answered questions from the recipient. Phoebe (for Romans), Eutuchus (for Ephesians), Epaphras (for Philippians), and Onesimus (for Colossians and Philemon) are among the named carriers.