

It has been said of Ephesians that, “among the Pauline writings only Rom can match Eph as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and Spirituality”.¹ The epistle is rich with doctrine as well as practical life application helpful for the Christian to live out his faith in the Messiah. Before we can examine the passage in question, we must first examine the historical context of the letter. After that, we must trace the argument up until the passage under consideration.

Historical Context

The first area of examination regards the authorship of the letter itself. The opening greeting of the letter claims that Paul is the author of Ephesians, and until recent times, this was not seriously challenged.² According to Raymond Brown, “at the present moment 80 percent of critical scholarship holds that Paul did not write Ephesians”.³ Though Brown’s statement describes the current view on the authorship of Ephesians, it does not seem to be the view that was held in the early church. In his massive commentary on Ephesians, Hoehner gives examples from the writing’s of early church fathers as well as Gnostic writings to show that from the earliest time the church considered Paul to be the one who authored the letter.⁴

The second area is the inclusion/omission of $\epsilon\nu$ Εφεσω . The inclusion or omission of this phrase is important to the background of this epistle and to understanding some of the issues that Paul addresses. The external evidence of the phrase $\epsilon\nu$ Εφεσω is fairly widespread. The earlier manuscripts \mathfrak{P}^{46} , \mathfrak{N}^* , \mathfrak{B}^* omit the phrase from the opening greeting, while the majority of

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction the New Testament*, (Doubleday, 1997), 620.

² For arguments for and against Pauline authorship see D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Zondervan, 2005), 480-86. Also, Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, (IVP, 1990), 496-528; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Baker Academic, 2002), 2-61.

³ Raymond E. Brown, 620.

⁴ Hoehner, 2-6.

manuscripts (the corrector of **N**, **A**, the corrector of **B**, **D**, etc.) all include it.⁵ But when the internal evidence is examined, the omission of *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ* leaves the reading a bit awkward.⁶ Therefore, it seems that *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ* is either the original reading, or that it was left intentionally blank due to it being a circular letter intended for more than one destination.⁷

The Argument

As is common with his other letters, Paul begins with an initial greeting (1.1-2).⁸ After his greeting, Paul opens his epistle with a long eulogy to the Father (1.3-6), to the Son (1.7-13), and the Holy Spirit (1.14) for the work of predestining believers, redeeming us through the work of Jesus, and sealing us with the Holy Spirit. As is common with his other letters, Paul then gives thanks for the Ephesians and prays that they would understand the hope to which they have been called to (1.17, 18) and also the power the church has through Christ, who is the head of all things (1.19-23).

Paul then describes the Ephesians' salvation from their former state after they received the gospel (2.1-10). Paul describes them as being "dead in trespasses and sins" (2.1a), and were "following the course of this world", which was controlled by "the prince of the power of this world" (2.1b). They were living "in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath" (2.3). But God showed his great mercy and

⁵ See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed., (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), pg. 532

⁶ "The construction without 'at Ephesus' or any similar phrase is awkward: 'to the saints who are also believers in Christ Jesus' is not a natural form of address. For Paul and his circle 'saint' and 'believers in Christ' are synonymous", F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians (NICNT)*, (Eerdmans, 1984), pg. 250.

⁷ "In Eph. 1:1 some indication of place is required by the construction, and if 'at Ephesus' be omitted, the best translation is: 'to the saints who are . . . , believers in Christ Jesus.' A space is thus left for the insertion of an indication of place, which would be appropriate in a circular letter, except that such a device, familiar as it is today, is difficult to attest for the first century", Bruce, 250.

⁸ In three other places the identical phrase Πάυλος αποστολος Χριστου Ιησου δια θεληματος θεου occurs: 2 Cor. 1.1, Col. 1.1, and 2 Tim. 1.1.

love towards them and by his grace saved them and raised them up with Christ and seated them in the heavenly places with Christ (2.4-6). He did this in order that “in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness” to them (2.7). Paul reminds them that they were saved solely by the grace of God through their faith, and it is not in anyway dependent upon their works (2.8, 9). Paul ends this section with the reminder that they are to engage in the good works which God prepared for them to walk in (2.10).

Summary of Ephesians 2.11-22

After discussing the grace of God that leads to salvation for all people, Paul turns his focus to how this manifests itself in the relationship between Jew and Gentiles. The present pericope is separated by three discourse markers: *διο μνημονευετε* (v.11); *γαρ* (v.14); *αρα ουν* (v.19). Paul begins with reminding the Gentiles of their previous condition apart from Christ (vv. 11-13). Before the grace of God came to them they were without the Messiah and strangers from the promises that were associated with his chosen people Israel. But as v.13 states they have now “been brought near by the blood of Christ”.

In 2.13-18 the focus is no longer on the Gentiles only, but on both Jew and Gentile;⁹ more specifically what the Messiah did in order to bring about the peace that now exists between them. Because of the Messiah’s sacrificial death, peace has been accomplished between both Jew and Gentile. Christ has “reconciled them both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in himself” (2.16). Furthermore, he “rendered in operative the law of commandments contained in decrees, so that in himself he may make the two into one new man, thus making peace” (2.15).

⁹ This can be seen in the shift from 1st person (vv.11-13), to 2nd person (vv.14-18), back to 1st person (vv.19-22). For a more in-depth analysis see J. Michael Wynn Jr., *The Scope of Personal Pronouns in Ephesians 1 & 2* (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003).

Paul concludes his discussion about the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles by once again focusing on the Gentiles and their being brought into the household of God. Because of what Messiah accomplished at the cross, the Gentiles are strangers, but are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (2.19). They have been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, and Christ himself is the cornerstone of that foundation (2.20). Finally, both Jew and Gentile are being built up together into a holy temple in the Lord; a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (2.21, 22).

a. Exegesis of 2.11-13

2.11 Διὸ μνημονεுετε οτι ποτε υμεις τα εθνη εν σαρκι οι λεγομενοι ακροβυστια υπο της λεγομενης περιτομης εν σαρκι χειροποιητου.

With the use of the inferential conjunction Διὸ, Paul ties in vv. 1-10, which speaks of the former state of his Gentile readers and the mercy and grace of God in saving them, with what he is about to say. Paul commands¹⁰ them to remember their former state in light of what God has done for them in Christ and also what he is about to say. What they are to remember is contained in two content clauses introduced by ὅτι, with the second picking up where the first one left off. The word ποτε does not refer to a specific time in the past, but rather refers to their condition prior to their salvation. The Gentiles to whom Paul is writing are described as εν σαρκι. This could refer to their prior spiritual state (cf. Rom. 7.5, 18; 8.8-9 where the contrast is between

¹⁰ The use of the “present imperative may suggest continuance, and hence the Gentiles were to continue to remember their former plight”, Hoehner, 353.

those εν σαρκι and εν πνευματι), but in the present context it is better to see εν σαρκι as referring to their physical flesh.¹¹

The phrase οι λεγομενοι ακροβυστια υπο της λεγομενης περιτομης εν σαρκι χειροποιητου is a parenthetical statement that further emphasizes the physical uncircumcision of the Gentile readers in contrast to the circumcision of the Jews.

With the use of ακροβυστια in contrast with περιτομης, Paul is showing the division that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. Also, there is the idea that the circumcision of the Jews is no longer spiritually significant. Paul describes the Jews as the “so-called circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands” (λεγομενης περιτομης εν σαρκι χειροποιητου). The circumcision that the Jews held with great pride was nothing but an outward act. The word χειροποιητος is used 6 times in the NT, and in every instance it is in contrast to something greater. “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple *made with hands* and in three days build another *not made with hands*¹²” (Mk. 14.58; cf. Acts 7.48; 17.24; Heb. 9.11, 24). Also, in the LXX χειροποιητος is connected to the worshiping of idols.¹³

In the NT, circumcision is seen in a different light than in the OT. No longer is circumcision seen purely as a physical and outward act, but also as a matter of inward change (Rom. 3.25-29; 1 Cor. 7.19; Gal. 6.15; Phil. 3.3; Col. 2.11). This is not to say that circumcision was not important (cf. Rom 3.1), but rather it is the change of a heart, and that caused inwardly that is of importance.

¹¹ I agree with Hoehner that “in the immediate context the contrast is between Jews and Gentiles as evidenced in their flesh or body”, Hoehner, 353. Furthermore, two participle phrases and the second εν σαρκι would lend further support to the first εν σαρκι referring to a physical circumcision.

¹² αχειροποιητον; cf. 2 Cor. 5.1. Also, Col. 2.11 says, “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (αχειροποιητω), by the removal of the fleshly body, that is the through the circumcision done by Christ”.

¹³ Χειροποιητος is used 12 times in the canonical books (Lev. 26.1, 30; Isa. 2.18; 10.11; 16.12; 19.1; 21.9; 31.7; 46.6; Dan. 5.4, 23; 6.28) and in the non-canonical books 3 times (Jdt. 8.18; Wis. 14.8; Bel. 1.5).

Therefore, in light of all of this, the contrast between the “uncircumcision” and “the circumcision in the flesh made by hands” is to show that while the Gentiles were separated from Christ and considered outside the promises given to Israel, the circumcision that was once considered to be an entrance into the kingdom is now shown to be unable to gain entrance.

2.12 Οτι ητε τω καιρω εκεινω χωρις Χριστου, απηλλοτριωμενοι της πολιτειας του Ισραηλ και ξενοι των διαθηκων της επαγγελιας, ελπιδα μη εχοντες και αθεοι εν τω κοσμω

With οτι, Paul “picks up the οτι of the previous verse and resumes the train of thought interrupted by the lengthy way of describing the readers.”¹⁴ The second content clause introduced by οτι¹⁵ contains five privileges that the Gentiles lacked. The phrase τω καιρω εκεινω is connected to the ποτε in v.11 and refers to a point in time before The Gentiles conversion and their participation in the five proceeding privileges.¹⁶

The first of the privileges that the Gentiles were excluded from is their separation from Messiah (χωρις Χριστου). It was to the Jews that the coming Messiah was promised (cf. Gen 3.16; 49.10; Deut 18.15; Ps. 2; Isa. 7.14). In Romans, Paul makes it clear that it is from Israel that the Messiah will come (Rom. 9.5). Because of their separation from the people of God, the Gentiles are also separated from the promised Messiah.

Next, they are “separated from the citizenship of Israel” (απηλλοτριωμενοι της πολιτειας του Ισραηλ). The Participle απηλλοτριωμενοι (a participle of manner describing how they were without Christ) is used three times in the NT (Eph. 2.12; 4.18; Col. 1.21), each

¹⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary*, (Word, 1990), pg. 136.

¹⁵ Hoehner calls the second οτι in v.12 a resumptive of the first one in v.11, Hoehner, 355.

¹⁶ cf. Hoehner, 355. “The temporal note *at that time* picks up the *formerly* of v.11 and points back to the time before the readers had been converted”, Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians: PNTC*, (Eerdmans, 1999), pg. 187.

time having the meaning of being “alienated” or “foreigners”.¹⁷ In Eph. 4.18 and Col. 1.21 the “separation” is from God. But here it is referring to a separation from the people of God, namely the “commonwealth of Israel.”¹⁸

The alienation that the Gentiles experience is “from the commonwealth of Israel”.¹⁹ This alienation from the people of Israel also means that they are “strangers to the covenants of promise” (ξενοι των διαθηκων της επαγγελιας²⁰). This is the third privilege that the Gentiles were formerly without. The word διαθηκη is used 33 times in the NT²¹, each time translated “covenant”.²² Among the list of blessings in Rom. 9.4, 5 that the Jews received were the διαθηκαι. As in Eph. 2.12, both occurrences of διαθηκη are in the plural, thus implying more than one covenant. But to what do these covenants refer? To say that the covenants refer to a specific covenant(s) cannot be clearly seen from the text. In light of the separation between Jew and Gentile, it would seem that the covenants being referred to here are the ones that God gave

¹⁷ BDAG, 96; cf. αλλοτριος, BDAG, 47.

¹⁸ The separation is not referring to a previous union between Jews and Gentiles, but rather it is to the state of separation itself. “Ordinarily the term ‘alienated’ refers to separation from someone or something to which one formally attached. This meaning hardly fits the case of Gentiles and Israel, since the Gentiles were excluded from the prior covenant”, PHEME PERKINS, *The New Interpreters Bible: XI*, (Abingdon Press, 2000), pg. 397; cf. Lincoln, 137; O’Brien, 188-189; Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapter 1-3: AB*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, (Doubleday, 1974), pg. 257.

¹⁹ της πολιτειας is a genitive of separation, Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Zondervan, 1996), pg. 108; cf. Hoehner, 356.

²⁰ τηω διαθηκων is a genitive of separation, with the following της επαγγελιας being expegetical, cf. Bruce, 292. Schnackenburg classifies της επαγγελιας as a modal genitive, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, Translated by Helen Heron, (T&T Clark, 1991), pg. 110.

²¹ 4 times in the Gospels (Mt. 26.28; Mk. 14.24; Lu. 1.72; 22.20), 2 times in Acts (3.25; 7.8), 9 times in Pauline writings (Rm. 9.4; 11.27; 1Co. 11.25; 2Co. 3.6, 14; Gal. 3.15, 17; 4.24; Eph. 2.12), 17 times in Hebrews (7.22; 8.6, 8, 9[2x’s], 10; 9.4[2x’s], 15[2x’s], 16, 17, 20; 10.16, 29; 12.24, 13.20), and 1 time in Revelation (11.19).

²² In the LXX, διαθηκη is the word that is used most often to translated בְּרִית (see Gottfried Quell and Johannes Behm, *TDNT*, vol.2, Translated and Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Eerdmans, 1964), pg.106-134. Also, it can mean last will, testament, compact, or contract depending on the context in which it is used, BDAG, s.v.1-3. For its usage in the Papyri, see James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, (Eerdmans, 1930), pg. 148-149.

to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.²³ The singular “promise” (επαγγελιας) is an eexegetical genitive that further defines the covenant. But with the singular “promise”, Paul is pointing to a specific aspect that is related in each of the covenants: the Messiah. All of the covenants that the Lord made with his people have the coming Messiah as the central focus. Schnackenburg comments, “The Singular points to a specific promise, namely that of the Messiah in whom total salvation is fulfilled”.²⁴

The forth privilege that the Gentiles were previously without was a lack of hope (ελπιδα μη εχοντες). Because they were without Christ and were alienated from the people of Israel, and were strangers to the covenants of promise, they were left without any hope whatsoever. In this clause, ελπιδα is fronted to add emphasis and enhance their hopelessness. Also, the present participle εχοντες is modifying ητε, and is speaking of a continuous action that was prior to their salvation.²⁵

The fifth and final privilege that the Gentiles lacked was any knowledge of God, thus leaving them without God in world (αθεοι εν τω κοσμω). The word αθεοι occurs nowhere in either the LXX or the NT.²⁶ It carries the basic idea of godless or one who denies god (we get our English word *atheist* from it). The Gentiles were without God in the sense that they had no relationship with God (1 Thess. 4.5). Instead of seeking the one true God, they instead turned aside to the gods of their own making, thus rejecting the God that is plainly made evident through creation (Rom. 1.18-32).

²³ See Lincoln, 137; cf. O’Brien, 189. Furthermore, in Rom. 9.4, the covenants (διαθηκαι) comes before the giving of the law (νομοθεσια), thus making the two different.

²⁴ Schnackenburg, 110.

²⁵ *Contra* Hoehner, 360.

²⁶ For usage outside the LXX/NT see *Ignatius to the Trallians* (3.2; 10.1) and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (3.2; 9.2[2x’s]).

The list of privileges that the Gentiles were without begins with them being without Christ and ends with them being without God. They were in hopeless condition, that without the intervention of Christ and his work of redemption, they would forever be separated from God.

2.13 νυνι δε εν Χριστω Ιησου υμεις οι ποτε οντες μακραν εγενηθητε εγγυς εν τω αιματι του Χριστου

With this verse there is a turn in the discourse. Paul has labored the point that the Gentiles were without a hope at all in the world. They were without Christ; they were alienated from God's people, thus without the covenants of promise; they lacked any hope at all; and worst of all they were without God in the world. But this is what use to be characteristic of them. Something has changed; they now have hope.

With the phrase νυνι δε, Paul brings his readers into the present. The contrast between ποτε, (v.11), ητε (v.12), and ποτε (v.13), with the νυνι δε in v.13 is one of huge implication. Paul is showing that the Gentiles are no longer in their prior predicament.

The dative εν Χριστω Ιησου, fronted for emphasis, indicates the location of the Gentiles and should be taken together with εγενηθητε εγγυς. Whereas in v.12 they were without Christ, they are in Christ, the separation having been taken care of by means of the Messiah's sacrificial death (εν τω αιματι του²⁷ Χριστου).

The prepositional phrase εν²⁸ τω αιματι is similar to the one used earlier in Eph 1.7, δια του αιματος αυτου. The means of redemption, as well as being brought near is through the death of Christ. Later in this pericope Paul again describes the work of Christ not only for the Gentiles, but also the Jews (2.16, 17). Christ has "reconciled them both in one body to God

²⁷ The article του is omitted in \mathfrak{P}^{46} and B (0278).

²⁸ Instrumental Dative, cf. Wallace, 162-163; Hoehner, 363.

through the cross, having killed the enmity in himself” (2.16). When Christ came, not only did he proclaim peace to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. It is the message of the sacrifice of Christ that brings one who is far off (μακρῶν), as well as one who is near (εγγυς) to God. Therefore, there is no longer a division between Jew and Gentile, “For there is no distinction between the Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call him” (Rom 10.12).

Sentence Flow Diagram (Eph. 2.11-13)

11. Διο μνημονευετε

οτι ποτε υμεις τα εθνη
εν σαρκι
οι λεγομενοι ακροβυστια
υπο της λεγομενης περιτομης
εν σαρκι χειροποιητου

12. [μνημονευετε]

οτι ητε τω καιρω εκεινω
χωρις Χριστου
απηλλοτριωμενοι
της πολιτειας
του Ισραηλ
και
ξενοι
των διαθηκων
της επαγγελιας
εχοντες
μη ελπιδα
και
αθεοι
εν τω κοσμω

13. νυνι δε

υμεις οι οντες μακραν
ποτε

εγενηθητε

εγγυς
εν Χριστω
εν τω αιματι
του Χριστου

Bibliography

Barth, Markus, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapter 1-3: AB*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, (Doubleday, 1974).

Best, Ernest, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians: ICC*, (T&T Clark, 1998).

Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction the New Testament*, (Doubleday, 1997).

Bruce, F.F., *The Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians: NICNT*, (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Zondervan, 2005).

Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed., (The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, (IVP, 1990).

Hoehner, Harold W., *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Baker Academic, 2002).

Holmes, Michael W., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, (Baker Books, 1999).

Lincoln, Andrew T., *The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2*, (Catholic Biblical Quarterly 49.4, Oct. 1987).

———, *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary*, (Word, 1990).

Metzger, Bruce M., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed., (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

Moulton, James H. and Milligan, George, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, (Eerdmans, 1930).

O'Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians: PNTC*, (Eerdmans, 1999).

Perkins, Pheme, *The New Interpreters Bible: XI*, (Abingdon Press, 2000).

Quell, Gottfried and Behm, Johannes, *TDNT*, vol.2, Translated and Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Eerdmans, 1964).

Schnackenburg, Rudolf, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, Translated by Helen Heron, (T&T Clark, 1991).

Stroup, Laney, *Exegesis of Eph. 4.7-16*, (Paper for Intermediate Greek, Master's College, 2005).

Wallace, Daniel B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Zondervan, 1996).

Wynn, J. Michael Jr., *The Scope of Personal Pronouns in Ephesians 1 & 2* (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003).