

# Ephesians Overview

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A letter from prison

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**9/23/2009 to 10/14/2009**

## **How to Do an Overview**

The basic first steps for studying a book of the Bible (other than historical books) is to complete an Overview of the entire book in order to establish context. This booklet contains the basic steps for completing an Overview, along with hints and suggestions for your Overview of Ephesians. An Overview can be basic or it can be very thorough, depending on the time allotted for study and the needs of the bible student. The more thorough it is, the more it will benefit your interpretation of the book. Establishing context, understanding background information about the book and the writing of it, finding overarching ideas of the entire book, and examining any pertinent historical and cultural background in order to interpret the scriptures within that context is the goal of the Overview.

# Observation is the Key: What do I see?

**Pray before beginning each day and ask for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit to see clearly what God's holy words of Scripture actually say. Pray for better observation skills:** "Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things in your law," Psalm 119: 18 (NIV).

**Useful hint:** You can make your own working copy by copying and pasting the biblical text from an online bible site such as biblegateway.com. Use wide margins and double-spacing so you have plenty of room to write, or use a software program that allows you to mark up a text on your computer. **Marking the text allows you to write what you see as you see it.**

## Why complete an Overview?

**Scripture should be interpreted according to its context**, not by pulling out random verses in order to "interpret" them according to our own intentions. The context of each verse, paragraph, and chapter must be determined in order to make correct interpretation. We must put each verse within the context of its paragraph, each paragraph within the context of its chapter, each chapter within the context of the book, and each book within the context of the events surrounding its writing and the historical and cultural events which also served as the catalyst or background information for the writing. Following a method of study steps done in a certain order helps us to guarantee that we interpret according to context.

## What is the foundation of an Overview?

**"The more time you spend in observation, the less time you will need to spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your results. The less time you spend in observation, the more time you will need to spend in interpretation, and the less accurate will be your results."**<sup>1</sup>

**Thorough Observation is the key to establishing context.** To do this ask **who, what, when, where, why,** and **how** of the text both during Step One: The Overview and during Step Two: the search for the theme ("big idea") and interpretation of each Section/Paragraph. Always look for the obvious. Slow down to see what is actually there in the text, not what you *think* is there. Repeated significant words and phrases which are key to understanding the text are always important. A key word or phrase is one that is crucial to what the author is communicating and unlocks the meaning of the text.

**Historical/Biblical Setting:** Though it is tempting to find this background information in a reference tool, it is far more useful and will be retained in your memory better if you do the work of discovery yourself by focusing on the people mentioned in a letter/epistle. Think of it as an intriguing mystery which you must solve. Examining all the cross references of each

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<sup>1</sup> Howard G. & William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 43.

person mentioned, including the author and/or specific recipients, will usually reveal to you the historical/biblical setting or background of a book. **Ephesians: Read Acts 18:18 – 21:1 and note the significant events that occur. Take careful note of opposition to the church there and conflicts involving the occult. Carefully examine Paul’s farewell to the Ephesians elders. This will inform you of the challenges the Ephesians church is facing as Paul writes this letter to them soon afterward.**

**Geographical & Cultural Background Information:** As you complete any of this investigation, if it becomes obvious that you need to know some cultural or geographical information in order to understand what is going on in the passage, then pause to examine reputable reference material about cultural, extra-biblical, and geographical background information which affects this particular book. Compare this with what you find as you make your own observations. Good sources: “The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,” Eerdmans and “The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary,” Moody Press. **Ephesians: Research the historical significance of Ephesus as a pagan religious center. This sheds light on the type of spiritual warfare the Ephesians church is facing.**

**Determine the type of Literature:** History, Poetry, Prophecy, Letter, Biographical, Doctrinal, or a combination of several of these. To find how the type of biblical literature you are studying is classified use a bible reference tool if you are unsure. A handy reference tool is “How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth,” by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, or “The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition,” Zondervan, Barker & Kohlenberger III.

## **WEEK ONE – Sept. 23 - 30, 2009**

**To Begin: First reading of the book. Read thoughtfully. Read like you’ve never read it before. Use the margins.**

1. **Read through the entire book thoughtfully and determine what the key words and phrases are for the entire book.** A key word or phrase is one that is crucial to understanding the meaning of the text. It is usually repeated in the book. Jot down key words in the margin as you come to them.
2. **Also notice the people mentioned and make note of them in the margin.** These people do not have to be referred to by their specific names, but can be a group or type of person, such as “unbelievers” or “believers,” “Jews” or “Gentiles,” etc.
3. During this initial reading of the book, **write your questions to investigate further in the margins.**
4. **Notice things you want to study in greater detail later and make a note in the margin.**
5. **(See the information on outlining, pg. 5)**

**Now, take apart the text further to observe more. Your focus: What do I see?**

## WEEK TWO: Sep.30-Oct.7 Use any of these suggestions that you find helpful; skip the rest

### Key People:

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#### Mark people with unique marks for each person or group of people

- Read through the entire book again and as you do mark specific people, each in a separate way
- What people? Who is the author? Who are the recipients? Are some people praised (the “good” guys)? Are there people in opposition (the “bad” guys)?
- Write these people in your notebook or in the margin of your working copy with space to make a list about them
- **For Ephesians: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the devil (any reference to him), Paul (including pronouns), Tychicus (for understanding the workings of the church at this time and how Paul conducted ministry from prison), “believers” vs. “unbelievers” (any term or phrase referring to each including what we were like then vs. what we are like now), Jews & Gentiles, husbands, wives, children, fathers, masters, slaves**

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#### Make a simple list of all you observe about each person

- These lists should include chapter and verse for future reference
- Examine other places in scripture that these same people are mentioned. Use a concordance to find them. Add this to your information about each person. This helps you determine the biblical/historical context of the book.
- What do you already know about the people mentioned?
- Is there any instruction given to a person that tells more about the purpose of the letter?

### Key words or ideas:

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#### Mark Key Words

- Read through the entire book again and as you do mark key or significant words or phrases, each in a different way
- What key or significant words? Repeated words or phrases you noticed which are significant or very important for understanding the meaning of the text and are used **throughout the entire book**. These repeated ideas, words, or phrases will tell you the theme the author intends to get across in the book. Find the most important terms and concepts.
- **For Ephesians: mystery; body/church; in the heavenly places/heaven; riches; references to the second coming; formerly/at one time/used to/once were; grace; power; redemption; walk; love; words related to God’s purpose, choosing, will, desires, pleasure, predestination; what we are to do/how we are to live as believers**

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#### Make a simple list of all you observe about each key word

- These lists should include chapter and verse for future reference
- Identify teaching (doctrine) from these lists and note the doctrinal sections in the margin of text, or in your notebook, for future study.
- Always jot down any possible application to your own life to investigate further.
- The list of “how we are to live as believers” can be numbered right into the text.

## WEEK THREE: Oct.7-14, Use any of these suggestions that you find helpful; skip the rest

### Organize your thoughts:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Assign preliminary titles to each Paragraph/Section. Assign a Big Idea for each. What's your hunch?** These can contain as few or as many words as are necessary for you to feel you can look at the title and know what is contained within that particular chapter. You can alter these titles after you actually study each section.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Assign a preliminary Theme which summarizes the entire book. What's your hunch?** This can be a few words, or as long as a paragraph and should include the author's intended theme or purpose. The key words you discovered should help you figure out the key theme of the book

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Organize all your work on the Overview by summarizing the book**

- Make a section in your notebook listing:
  - The theme of the entire book
  - The theme of each chapter
  - Author – what you learned about him
  - Key Words
  - Purpose of the book
  - Historical Setting of the book
  - Section Themes: In your own words a summary of the theme of each section of larger books.
- **Outline:** Some people find that making an outline opens the text up for them. A simple outline based on your Chapter Themes/Titles could be made at this point.
  - **Some find it helpful to complete a word-for-word outline of each chapter as they move through each chapter study.** If you are the type of person who benefits from this type of structural work, prepare this initial outline skeleton by filling in the theme of the entire book with your assigned themes for each chapter as Roman numerals under the theme of the entire book. Then you can add each chapter word-for-word under the Romans numerals, with each new paragraph being categorized by a letter of the alphabet.
  - **Other people find that it helps them to break down the text from the first day they begin to study a book or section of the Bible.** Experiment with outline forms or simply breaking down the text in a way that makes grammatical structure more obvious to see if this helps you.
  - **Example:** Acts 1:8 (NIV)
    - But you will receive power
    - when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
    - and you will be My witnesses
    - in Jerusalem,
    - and in all Judea
    - and Samaria,
    - and to the ends of the earth.

**Continue to the next page....**

## **Wrap it up to head into the individual studies of each Paragraph/Section:**

**Examine reference tools** such as bible dictionaries or commentaries for additional historical and background information about the book. Do not examine interpretative information or commentary on the meaning of the text at this point in your study, instead only verify the historical and background information you were able to discover in your Overview, and gather any additional information you find helpful.

**This completes Step One: The Overview.** You are now ready to move on to Step Two: the search for the theme (“big idea”) and interpretation of each Section/Paragraph. You will complete an in-depth study of each Section, beginning with observation of that particular Section while keeping in mind the framework and context established during the Overview. This will then move you on to Interpretation within the context of the book and its setting.

### **Ephesians Information from “The Complete Word Study New Testament,” edited by Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D.:**

Ephesus was the capital of the chief province of Asia. It was located about one mile from the Aegean Sea. The temple of Diana (Artemis) was important to the commerce of the city because the Mediterranean world considered it to be such a sacred and impeccable institution that it became the chief banking establishment in all of Asia Minor. The great number of pilgrims that came to worship at the temple also bolstered the economy in Ephesus. In fact, the population is believed to have exceeded a quarter million.

Paul came to Ephesus during his second missionary journey with Aquila and Priscilla but journeyed on to Jerusalem by himself not long afterward (Acts 18:18-21). On his next missionary journey, Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 19). He had so much influence on the people there that the craftsman who manufactured silver shrines for Diana incited a riot against him, concerned that his trade would become obsolete (Acts 19:24-29). As a result, Paul left Ephesus, traveling to Macedonia (Acts 20:1). Upon a return trip to Jerusalem, he requested that the elders of the Ephesians congregation meet with him at Miletus, a city located thirty-five miles to the north, so that he could bid them his last farewell (Acts 20:16-38).

The words “in Ephesus” (Eph. 1:1) do not appear in several important Greek manuscripts. Consequently, many believe that this letter was not originally sent to the congregation at Ephesus but was meant to be a letter that would be circulated to many gentile churches in Asia. This would explain why he would completely omit any personal greetings to believers with whom he had spent three years. Scholars believe that it eventually became known as the Epistle to the Ephesians because the church in Ephesus would have been the mother church from which the letter would have been distributed to the other churches in Asia.

The book of Ephesians was probably written by Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 60-64) about the same time that he wrote Colossians and Philemon. The content of the Book of Ephesians is very similar to that of Colossians; both stress doctrine and give instruction in practical Christian duties. One difference between them, however, is that Colossians portrays Christ as the head of the Church, while Ephesians goes on to display Jesus as the ascended, glorified Christ. Also, in Colossians Paul attacks the Gnostic heresy; but in Ephesians, Paul examines the splendor of Christ in glory.

The major theme of this letter is that the Church (*ekklesia* (Strong’s #1577) is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:15, 16). Paul also metaphorically spoke of the Church as a building of which Christ is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20-22) and compared the Church to a bride who will soon be united with Christ (Eph. 5:21-33). The key idea is that a body has individual parts that must operate as a unit. God’s plan is to bring all believers together (Eph. 1:10) with Christ as the head (Eph. 1:22, 23).