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Foreword

When I first began studying the Epistle to the Ephesians, I was struck by how Paul refuses to let the church think of itself as a loose gathering of individuals. Instead, he paints a picture of the church as an outpost of heaven—an embassy of Christ’s kingdom planted in a world estranged from God. That vision has shaped my preaching, my pastoring, and my writing for years.

This book, *Colony of Heaven*, grew out of my sermons, studies, and countless conversations with believers who want to understand their place in God’s plan. Like my first volume, *Building a Fireproof Church*, it is both a commentary and a call to action. My goal is not merely to inform your mind but to stir your heart and strengthen your walk with Christ. Each chapter follows a simple pattern—exposition, summary, application, and prayer—so that individuals, small groups, and entire congregations can grow together in their understanding and practice of Scripture.

As you work through these pages, you will find the recurring theme of “Colony of Heaven.” This is more than a title. It’s an identity. We are not waiting for the day we escape to a distant city; we are already citizens of that city now, called to bring its culture,

values, and beauty into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and families. My hope is that this book will help you see the grandeur of Christ's calling, the richness of His grace, and the power of His Spirit at work in you.

To my readers—pastors, parents, teens, and new believers alike—thank you for letting me walk alongside you through this letter of Paul's. May the Spirit of God open your eyes to the hope of His calling, deepen your roots in Christ, and give you courage to live as a citizen of heaven's colony, right where He has placed you.

— James J. Burke

Marinette, Wisconsin

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Preface: Colony of Heaven

In the ancient world, Roman colonies were remarkable outposts of civilization, planted in distant and often untamed lands. These colonies were not mere settlements; they were strategic extensions of the home city, designed to embody and express its culture, laws, and values amidst foreign territories. Cities like Philippi, Corinth, or Antioch were established as microcosms of Rome, carrying the prestige and identity of their founding metropolis. They stood as beacons of order and influence in regions often considered barbarian, transforming their surroundings by radiating the ethos of the home city.

For the citizens of these colonies, their identity was rooted not in a longing to relocate to the home city—a place most had never seen and likely never would—but in the privilege and responsibility of representing it. Their citizenship was not a ticket to a distant capital but a calling to live out the values, language, and customs of that city in their local context. They were ambassadors of a greater reality, tasked with making the home city's presence felt in every aspect of their lives, from governance to daily interactions.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the churches of Asia Minor, presents the church as a *Colony of Heaven*—a community of believers called to be an outpost of

God's kingdom in a world estranged from Him. In this epistle, Paul unfolds the breathtaking reality of our citizenship in Christ, not as a future hope of escape to a heavenly city, but as a present vocation to embody the culture of heaven here and now. As citizens of this divine colony, we are not merely waiting to "go home"; we are commissioned to represent our King, to live out His grace, truth, and love in a world that desperately needs to see His light.

This devotional commentary, *Colony of Heaven*, explores the Epistle to the Ephesians as a manifesto for living as God's outpost in the world. Through Paul's inspired words, we will uncover what it means to be rooted in Christ's redemptive work, equipped by His Spirit, and sent to display the beauty of heaven's kingdom in our relationships, communities, and daily lives. My prayer is that this journey through Ephesians will inspire and empower you to embrace your calling as a citizen of heaven's colony, faithfully representing our eternal home in a world longing for its hope.

1

Citizens of Heaven's Colony

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a treasure of divine revelation, a letter that unveils the grandeur of God's plan for His people and the world. It is not a letter addressing a single church's struggles or a specific doctrinal error, as we see in Paul's letters to Corinth or Colossae. Instead, Ephesians is an **encyclical**—a letter meant for multiple churches, carried by Tychicus with a blank space for the name of each recipient congregation (Eph. 6:21–22). Some ancient manuscripts address it to Ephesus, others to Laodicea, and some leave the destination blank, underscoring its universal message (Metzger, 1994). If any book in the New Testament could be said to be written to every church, including ours today, it is Ephesians. It is a timeless

Why This Letter Matters Everywhere

*Ephesians circulated as an **encyclical**, not a single-church letter. Because its message was meant for every congregation, this commentary emphasizes timeless truths over local Ephesian details, showing how Paul's call to live as a "Colony of Heaven" applies in any place and era.*

manifesto of the gospel's truth and its transformative impact on our lives.

The city of Ephesus was a hub of commerce, culture, and religion in the ancient world. Paul spent two years there, teaching in the school of Tyrannus and sparking a spiritual awakening that reverberated across Asia Minor (Acts 19:9–10). His ministry was so impactful that it provoked a riot from those who feared the gospel's threat to their idol-worshipping economy, shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28, KJV). Even after Paul's departure, Ephesus remained a center of Christian influence, hosting the Apostle John before his sojourn on Patmos (Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.23). Yet, despite Paul's deep connection to Ephesus, this letter contains no personal greetings or specific references to individuals, unlike Romans 16 or Colossians 4. Why? Because Ephesians was written not to address local issues but to proclaim the universal calling of the church as God's outpost in the world—a Colony of Heaven.

Written during Paul's imprisonment, likely in Rome in the early 60s A.D. (Bruce, 1984), Ephesians is a mature expression of his theology. Alongside Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, it forms the Prison Epistles, penned while Paul was under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar (Acts 28:30–31). Some scholars propose an earlier imprisonment in

Caesarea or even an unrecorded imprisonment in Ephesus (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.8), but the traditional view of a Roman origin best fits the historical and textual evidence (O'Brien, 1999). Carried by Tychicus, who also delivered letters to Colossae and Philemon (Col. 4:7–9), Ephesians outlines God's cosmic plan in Christ and the church's role in displaying it. The first three chapters are doctrinal, grounding us in the truth of our salvation; the last three are practical, showing how that truth shapes our lives.

Ephesians 1 is a breathtaking overture, introducing the theme that will resound throughout the letter: it's all about Christ, not us. As citizens of heaven's colony, we are not saved because of our merit or uniqueness but to display God's glory in Christ. This chapter unfolds the hope of His calling, the riches of our inheritance, and the incomparable greatness of His power, inviting us to live as representatives of our heavenly King.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he

hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:1-14 KJV)

The Hope of His Calling (Ephesians 1:1–14)

Paul begins, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:1–2, KJV). These opening words

establish the tone of divine grace and the centrality of Christ. The recipients are “saints” and “faithful in Christ Jesus”—terms that describe not only the believers in Ephesus but all who are united to Christ by faith. As citizens of heaven’s colony,

we are set apart, called to represent our King in a foreign land.

Saints

Saint is never singular in the New Testament, it always is used for the church collectively.

Verses 3–14 form a single, majestic sentence in the Greek, a cascade of praise for God’s work in Christ. Paul declares, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, KJV). Every spiritual blessing—redemption, adoption, forgiveness—flows to us through our union with Christ. This is the foundation of our citizenship: we are “in Christ,” a phrase Paul uses repeatedly to

emphasize that our identity and purpose are rooted in Him.

Chosen and Predestined for God's Glory

Paul then unveils the doctrine of election: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of

the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4, KJV). This verse has sparked much debate, but its meaning is not about God arbitrarily selecting some for salvation and others for condemnation. Rather, it affirms that all who are in Christ are chosen for a purpose: to be

holy and blameless. Holiness is sanctification—being set apart for God’s service. To be blameless is to live in a way that does not tarnish Christ’s reputation. As citizens of heaven’s colony, we are not chosen for privilege alone but for responsibility—to reflect the character of our King.

This choosing is not about excluding others but about equipping us for a divine mission. Paul continues, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5, KJV). Predestination is not a cold, deterministic decree but

For a deeper discussion of predestination, see Appendix A: Predestination: Privilege or Purpose?

a loving act of God's will, securing our place in His family. Adoption in the Roman world was a legal act, granting full rights as heirs (Sherwin-White, 1963). As God's adopted children, we are heirs today, not merely in the future. Our inheritance is our new position in His family, sealed by redemption: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7, KJV).

Chosen as Representatives

To grasp the weight of being "chosen in Christ," consider the ancient practice of establishing Roman colonies. These outposts, like Philippi or Corinth, were carefully planned to extend the home city's culture, laws, and influence into foreign territories (Boardman, 1980). Colonists were not chosen randomly; they were selected for their loyalty, skills, and ability to embody the home city's values. In Rome, veterans who had proven their allegiance through military service were often granted land in colonies, ensuring they would uphold Roman law and customs (Salmon, 1969). In Greek colonies, settlers were chosen for their agricultural or administrative expertise to sustain the settlement and reflect the mother city's glory (Graham, 1983). These colonists were not sent to assimilate into local "barbarian" cultures but to transform their surroundings by establishing the home city's institutions—temples, forums, and legal systems

—making places like Philippi a “little Rome” in Macedonia (Acts 16:12; Levick, 1967).

Crucially, these colonists did not dream of relocating to the home city, which most had never seen. Their citizenship was a calling to represent their city’s greatness where they were, living as ambassadors of its culture and authority. Likewise, God has chosen us in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4, KJV) not to escape to heaven but to represent His kingdom on earth. We are selected not for our inherent worth but for His purpose—to be holy and blameless, displaying His glory in a world estranged from Him. Just as colonists were equipped with resources and instructions to succeed, God equips us with “all spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3, KJV) and the Holy Spirit as the “earnest of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14, KJV), ensuring we can live out our calling.

This selection carries a responsibility. As Roman colonists were expected to live in a way that honored Rome, we must live in a way that honors Christ. People should look at us and see the beauty of His kingdom, not stumble over our inconsistencies and say, “You claim to be holy, but your actions say otherwise.” Our lives are to reflect the priorities of our King, transforming our communities through love, truth, and godliness, just as a colony transformed its region by radiating the home city’s culture.

Redemption underscores this transformative purpose. Imagine driftwood washed up on a lakeshore—some see it as trash, fit only for burning, but an artist sees potential for beauty. God takes us, broken and without inherent value, and assigns us worth through Christ's blood. He reshapes us into the image of His Son, crafting us for His purpose. Every trial, every correction, every blessing in our lives is part of His plan to display Christ's lordship. Paul writes that God's ultimate will is "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:10, KJV). Our lives, as citizens of heaven's colony, are display pieces of this cosmic plan, showing the world that Christ is Lord over all.

Three times in this passage, Paul emphasizes that our salvation is "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14, KJV). God did not save us because He needed us or because we were inherently special. He saved us to showcase His greatness. Our adoption, the revelation of His will, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit as the "earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14, KJV) all point to His glory, not ours. The Spirit is the down payment, guaranteeing our full redemption as God's

Dispensation

For definition of dispensation and other unfamiliar terms, check the glossary

possession. As citizens, we live not for our own acclaim but to reflect the splendor of our King.

The Riches of Our Inheritance (Ephesians 1:15–18)

Paul transitions to a prayer: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15–16, KJV). He prays that God would grant them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:17, KJV). This is not mere intellectual knowledge but a growing, experiential understanding of God’s character and plan. As citizens of heaven’s colony, we need spiritual insight to grasp our role in His kingdom.

Paul’s prayer focuses on three realities: the hope of God’s calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and the greatness of His power (Eph. 1:18–19). The hope of His calling is the certainty of our purpose—to be holy and blameless, representing Christ. The inheritance is not only what we receive but what God receives in us—His people, redeemed to display His glory (O’Brien, 1999). As a sculptor values a masterpiece not for the raw material but for the beauty crafted from it, God treasures us as His workmanship, shaped for His purposes.