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## LESSON NOTES

EPHESIANS: A LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ASIA MINOR, AND THE CHURCH TODAY  
GROWING EV THE CHRIST

## OVERVIEW

Rationale & Background

## WHY STUDY EPHESIANS

One of Paul's most distinctive letters was his letter to the church at Ephesus. Unlike many other epistles where he was attempting to correct a heresy or ungodly practice, his message to the Ephesians is especially and particularly encouraging, rich in theology, and pragmatically wise. Thus, understanding Holy Spirit's message in Ephesians will go a long way—to help you persevere throughout the remainder of your days.

Even though Ephesians is a relatively short book within Scripture (6 chapters), its depth of encouragement, theology, and wisdom can not be fully explored in only 13 weeks. Hopefully, our survey of Ephesians will encourage you to study more, undergird your understanding of God, and most importantly, bring you closer to the God we serve.

Many of the subjects in Ephesians are covered in more detail in Romans, 1 Corinthians, or 1 Thessalonians. But, Ephesians gives a wonderfully rich view of the "grand scheme of the gospel." God's "mystery" is no longer mysterious. God's plan for all of history is now apparent. And Paul takes us to a higher, richer, & pragmatic good news about God's plan for His creation.

Ephesians staggers the mind of believer and unbeliever alike—Paul's goal is to get us to grasp "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (3:18). In doing so, Paul builds a theology for the Christian that rings out loud and clear (chapters 1-3), and then in chapters 4-6, teaches the Christian **how** we are to be changed. **We are indeed changed people with changed lives—this is *the* theme of Ephesians.**

### A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The success of any Bible study is entirely dependent upon three entities: you, your teacher and Holy Spirit. Therefore, He exhorts you to study—do your homework; encourage your teacher by prayer and active participation; most importantly, continually pray to Father God for Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn what He taught the writers of Scripture 1900+ years ago.

## AUTHOR, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING<sup>1</sup>

The author identifies himself as Paul (1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:7,13; 4:1; 6:19-20). Some have taken the absence of the usual personal greetings and the verbal similarity of many parts to Colossians, among other reasons, as grounds for doubting authorship by the apostle Paul. This letter, however was probably a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the one in Ephesus (see 1:1,15; 6:21-23).

Paul may have written it about the same time as Colossians, circa 60AD, while he was in prison at Rome (see 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

## THE CITY OF EPHEBUS

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor which at that time opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also at an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center. It boasted a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana (Greek *Artemis*); cf. Acts 19:23-31. Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for about three years (see Acts 19:10), and the church there apparently flourished for some time, but later needed the warning of Revelation 2:1-7.

## MESSAGE

Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and grace and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church.

The letter opens with a sequence of statements about God's blessings, which are interspersed with a remarkable variety of expressions drawing attention to God's wisdom, forethought and purpose. Paul emphasizes we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. The climax of God's purpose, "when the times will have reached their fulfillment," is to bring all things in the universe together under the Christ (1:10). It is crucially important that Christians recognize this reunion of power, so in 1:15-23 Paul prays for their understanding (note also the second prayer in 3:14-21).

Having explained God's great goals for the church, Paul proceeds to show the steps toward their fulfillment.

1. God has reconciled individuals to himself as an act of grace (2:1-10).
2. God has reconciled these saved individuals to each other, Christ having broken down the barriers through his own death (2:11-22).

But God has done something even beyond this: He has united these reconciled individuals in one body, the church. This is a "mystery" not fully known until it was revealed to Paul (3:1-6). Now Paul is able to state even more clearly what God intends for the church, namely, that **we** are the means by which He displays His "manifold wisdom" to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (3:7-13). It is clear through the repetition of "heavenly realms" (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) that Christian existence transcends an earthly plane. It receives its meaning and significance from heaven, where Christ is exalted at the right hand of God (1:20).

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV, © 1996.



Ephesians 1:1-14. *We are now adopted.* Paul extends the gift of God and His reconciliation (see *Appendix A: "Peace" in Scripture*) to readers from God the Father and God the Lord Jesus the Christ—

Praise to the God, the Father and our Lord Christ who has in turn praised us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual gift  $\epsilon\nu$  Christ. God chose us to be  $\epsilon\nu$  Him before the world was created, to be holy, to be blameless—by His standards.

It was  $\epsilon\nu$  love that He predetermined we would be adopted heirs via Jesus the Christ, all in accordance to His pleasure, to His purpose. This is done by the praise of His glorious gift, freely given in the One He loves.  $\epsilon\nu$  Him we have been redeemed by His blood sacrifice,  $\epsilon\nu$  Him we have been forgiven, and richly so with God's gift lavished on us with unbelievable wisdom and understanding.

The mystery of His purpose has been revealed because He found pleasure in doing so, and did so through the Christ. This will be effectuated when the time is fully ripe—bringing all things in heaven together with all things on earth under one authority—Jesus the Christ.

It was  $\epsilon\nu$  the Christ that we were made heirs, just as God planned, to work out everything to conform with His purpose so we who were the first to hope  $\epsilon\nu$  in the Christ the praise of His glory. You were also included when you heard the word of truth, the good news regarding your salvation. And? With your belief, God marked you with a seal of redemption—the Holy Spirit was as promised to be a visible deposit which guarantees and reassures you of your inheritance. You are now God's possession to the praise of His glory.

- Q Why did the Lord God choose us to be His adopted children?
- Q What role did the Christ have in this fulfillment of God's pleasure?
- Q Why is it better to be "adopted" by God than to be a "natural" child of God?
- Q How does Holy Spirit manifest your redemption deposit?
- Q To what extent is being God's possession problematic? Why do we dislike the notion of being "owned?"

### EPHESIANS 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God—to the saints in Ephesus [early mss do not have "in Ephesus"] the faithful [or *believers who are*] in Christ Jesus:  
<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

<sup>9</sup> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen [or *made heirs*], having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

## APPENDIX A: "PEACE" IN SCRIPTURE

There are four kinds of "peace" spoken of in Scripture. Let us consider each before claiming we truly understand "peace." Using four different language terms to delineate each of the four, we see:

- A. *pax*—the Latin word designating the absence of conflict. Peace is making sure the two parties do not war against each other as in "do war no more."
- B. εἰρήνην (ehray'nay)—the Greek word for equilibrium; i.e., putting things back the way they were. Peace is reconciling two parties to a previous state of balance and harmony, as in "now you give your brother back his toy."
- C. *islam*—the Arabic word for peace through submission. Peace is ensuring that all submit to the sovereign authority, as in "... a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter..."
- D. *shalom*—the Hebrew word designating a sense of holistic well-being. Peace is having everything together in its right place as in "God is in His heaven and all is right with the world."



### EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEACE IN SCRIPTURE—

#### "Shalom"

- ✓ [quoting the Lord God] "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. —Leviticus 26:6
- ✓ [speaking to Isaiah] "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime." —Isaiah 39:8

#### "Pax"

- ✓ [One of God's rules for war.] If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. —Deuteronomy 20:12

#### "Islam"

- ✓ At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not a man escaped. That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years. —Judges 3:29-30
- ✓ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are

many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. <sup>13</sup>He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. <sup>16</sup>On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.  
—Revelation 19:11-16

#### "Ehraynay"

- ✓ Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town. —1 Samuel 20:42
- ✓ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through Him [Christ] to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. —Colossians 1:19-20