



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

EPHESIANS

GROWING IN CHRIST



LYDIA BROWBACK

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“The brilliant and beautiful mix of sound teaching, helpful charts, lists, sidebars, and appealing graphics—as well as insightful questions that get the reader into the text of Scripture—make these studies that women will want to invest time in and will look back on as time well spent.”

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“As a women’s ministry leader, I am excited about the development of the Flourish Bible Study series, which will not only prayerfully equip women to increase in biblical literacy but also come alongside them to build a systematic and comprehensive framework to become lifelong students of the word of God. This series provides visually engaging studies with accessible content that will not only strengthen the believer but the church as well.”

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“Lydia Brownback is an experienced Bible teacher who has dedicated her life to ministry roles that help women (and men) grow in Christ. With a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological content, her Flourish Bible Studies are ideal for groups and individuals that are serious about the in-depth study of the word of God.”

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“If you’re looking for rich, accessible, and deeply biblical Bible studies, this series is for you! Lydia Brownback leads her readers through different books of the Bible, providing background information, maps, timelines, and questions that probe the text in order to glean understanding and application. She settles us deeply in the context of a book as she highlights God’s unfolding plan of redemption and rescue. You will learn, you will delight in God’s word, and you will love our good King Jesus even more.”

Courtney Doctor, Coordinator of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *Steadfast*

“Lydia Brownback’s Bible study series provides a faithful guide to book after book. You’ll find rich insights into context and good questions to help you study and interpret the Bible. Page by page, the studies point you to respond to each passage and to love our great and gracious God. I will recommend the Flourish series for years to come for those looking for a wise, Christ-centered study that leads toward the goal of being transformed by the word.”

Taylor Turkington, Bible teacher; Director, BibleEquipping.org

“Lydia Brownback has a contagious love for the Bible. Not only is she fluent in the best of biblical scholarship in the last generation, but her writing is accessible to the simplest of readers. She has the rare ability of being clear without being reductionistic. I anticipate many women indeed will flourish through her trustworthy guidance in this series.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

EPHESIANS



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**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

EPHESIANS

GROWING IN CHRIST

LYDIA BROWNBACK

■ ■ CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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With gratitude to God
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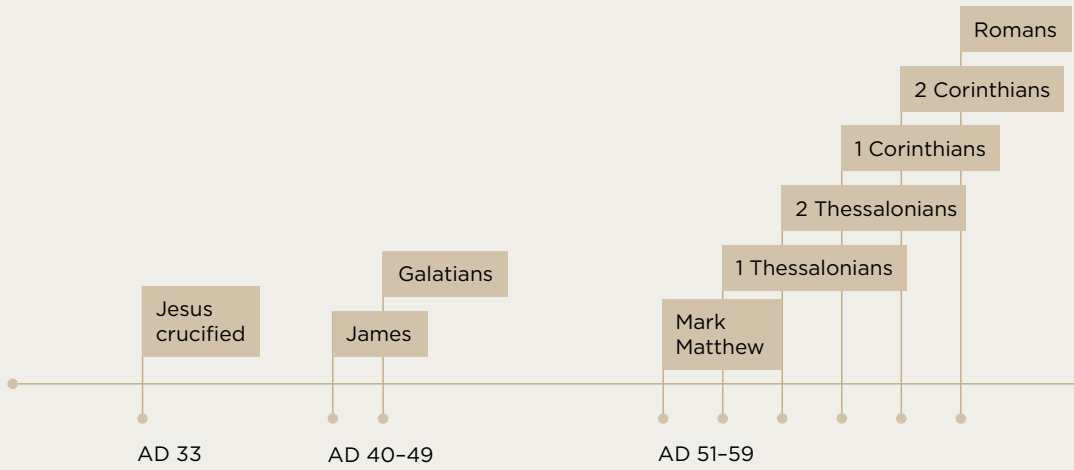
In countless ways you “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3).

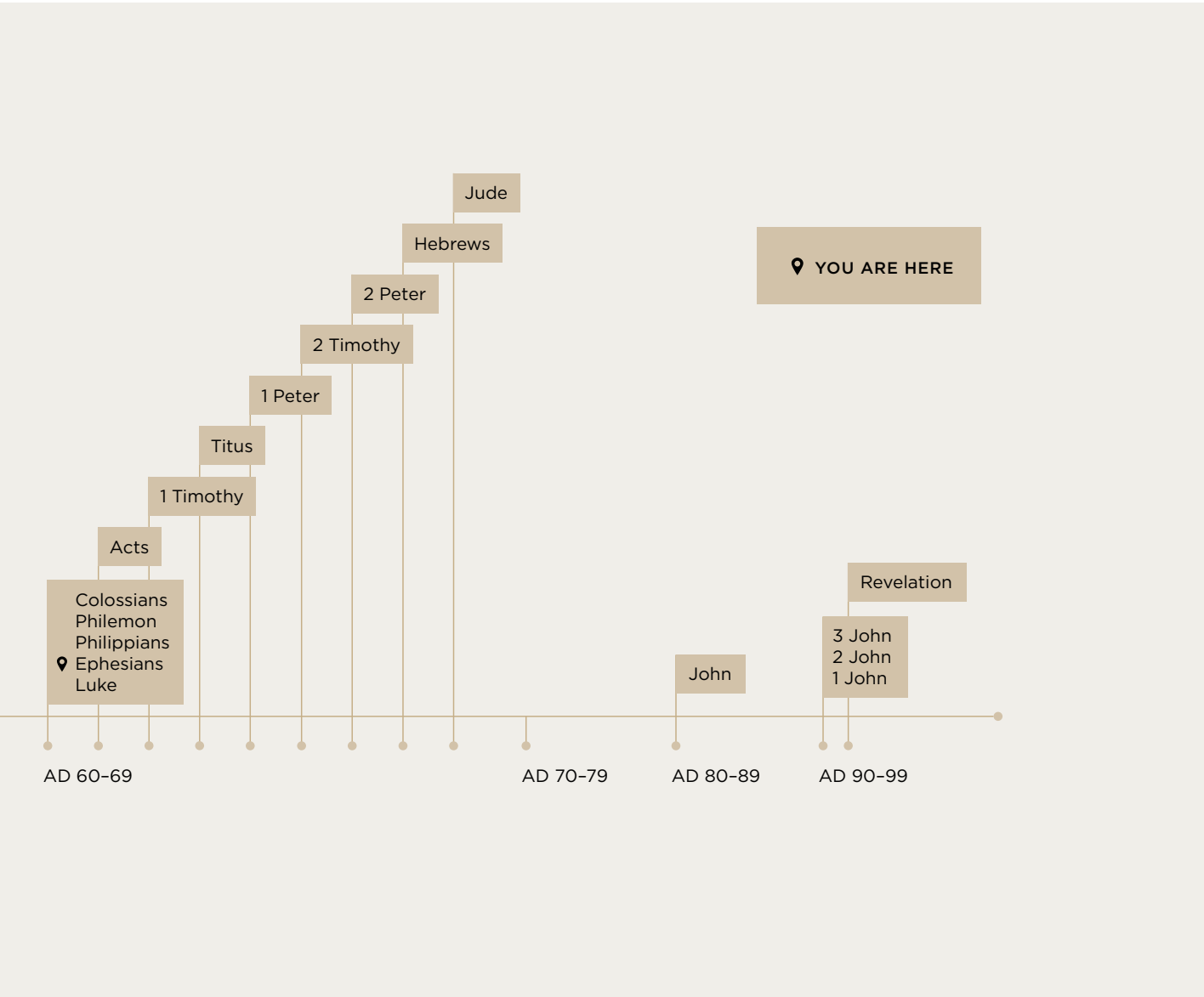
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THE TIMING OF EPHESIANS





INTRODUCTION

GETTING INTO EPHESIANS

“Let’s go for a walk.” Many of us eagerly jump at the suggestion, whether to the beach, deep in the woods, or across city blocks. Alone or with friends, setting out on a walk is typically a mood-lifting experience. Of course, a sudden storm or a wrong turn can quickly alter this simple pleasure into a rigorous adventure, and then we regret our haphazard preparation in failing to check the forecast or our GPS device. Many of us know from experience that a bit of advance preparation so often determines the quality of a walk. At a much more important level, the same principle applies to our spiritual walk. That’s how the apostle Paul describes our pursuit of a godly life—as walking. In this letter to believers in Ephesus, he shows us first that, through our union with Christ, we’ve already been given everything we need for this spiritual walk. And then he lays out the means by which we advance steadily while avoiding pitfalls. As we grow together as a spiritual family in thought, word, and deed, each one of us has a part to play as we live out our great spiritual privileges in our lives and relationships.



WHO’S WHO IN EPHESIANS

The apostle Paul is the author of the letter, which he is writing while in prison in Rome around AD 62. At an earlier time he had spent about three years in Ephesus doing ministry to establish a strong Christian presence in that city. Now, because of Paul’s confinement in prison, he is unable to visit them in person, so he sends his ministry associate Tychicus to give the Ephesian Christians an update on Paul’s condition and encourage them in their faith walk. Tychicus is mentioned near the end of the letter. Paul directs a good bit of the letter to Gentile Christians with encouragement to leave their old worldly Gentile ways in the past. Gentile Christians are people who had come to the faith having never been part of God’s people (Israel) until they were grafted in by Christ. Of course, the primary focus of the letter is our God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will see how each one plays a vital role in bringing us to faith, leading us along our spiritual walk, and getting us safely home to glory.

Pronunciation Guide

Ephesians: eff-EE-szunns

Gentiles: GEN-tiles

Ephesus: EFF-eh-suss

Tychicus: TICK-a-cuss



SETTING

Paul addresses his letter to “the saints who are at Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1). There is a lot of significance in those words because it wasn’t easy being faithful to Jesus in Ephesus during those days. Ephesus was a cultural and commercial hub of the ancient world. The temple of Artemis, the fertility goddess, was the heartbeat of the city, and the temple also served as a bank for merchants and city officials. Government officers met in the temple, as did business leaders, and wealthy families could even reserve dining space there to host private dinner parties. Trade guilds flourished in Ephesus, and for those desiring business success, inclusion in a guild was highly desirable. Ephesus offered games in the stadium, festivals, theater productions, and concerts, and there were beautiful wooded areas and gardens.¹ Because of Paul, the gospel spread through Ephesus, and many came to Christ as a result. This proved costly, however, because it led them away from their former corrupt lifestyles. These converts avoided civic and cultural activities with a pagan religious focus, which excluded them from some business practices that had formerly provided them income. Additionally, as Christianity spread in Ephesus and took root, it disrupted commerce and made inroads against the previously uncontested devotion to Artemis. As a result, Christians were increasingly isolated from mainstream society and sometimes violently opposed. We glimpse all this in the New Testament book of Acts when Demetrius, a greedy silversmith, was upset that Paul’s preaching was disrupting his business:

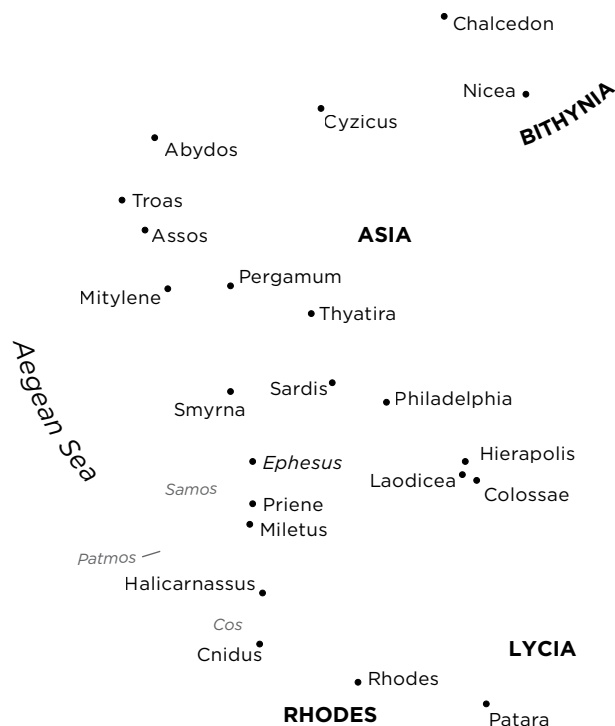
About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades,

and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:23–28)

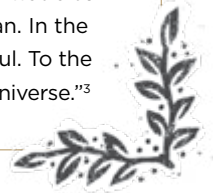
This is the world of the Ephesians to whom Paul writes.

The Setting of Ephesians (c. AD 62)²

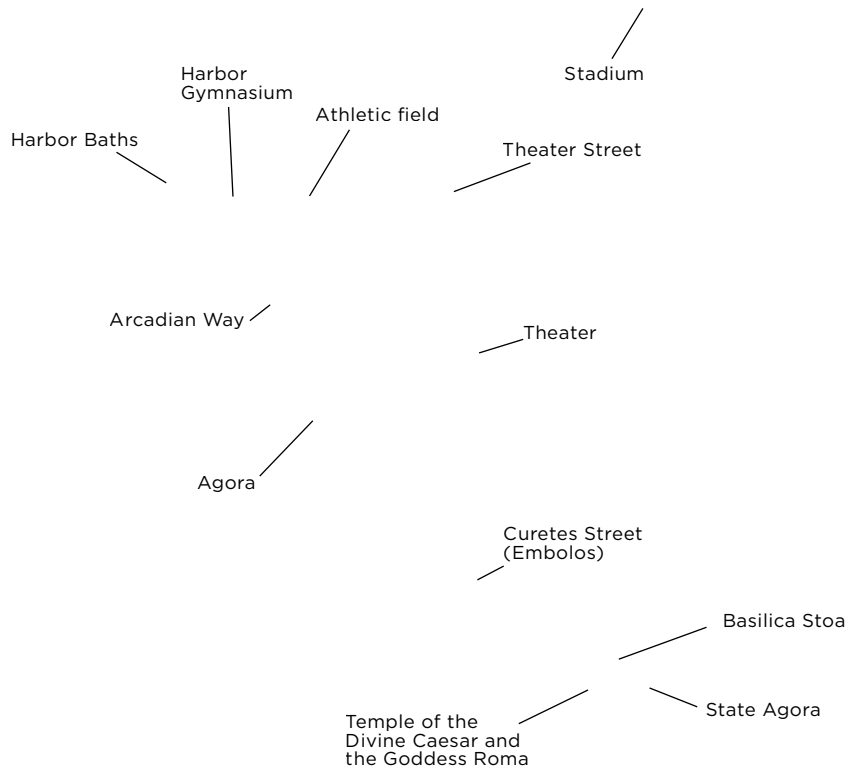


Artemis

“Artemis represented a form of the Asian mother goddess, . . . the goddess of fertility in man, beast, and vegetation. As the mother-goddess figure she represented more than fertility—also resurrection, the eternal return of life to earth. She had become the patroness of maidens of marriageable age, the helper of women in childbirth. She was also the moon goddess, the goddess of wild nature and of the hunter and fisherman. In the peasant’s mind such a divinity would ensure that his beasts and land were fruitful. To the intellectual, she presented the idea of an all-creating mother who sustained the universe.”³



Ephesus in the Time of Paul (c. AD 60)⁴





THEMES

All the themes in Ephesians should make our hearts sing for joy and gratitude. First and foremost, we find all the riches that come to us in and through our union with Christ. Another major theme is God's plan to gather his people together into one body, or family, which we call "the church." Springing from this is another important theme—unity. Paul is zealous that believers learn how to live together as a set-apart entity and encourage one another in the faith. Another emphasis is God's longtime plan to include the Gentiles as a vital part of his very own people. Sanctification, the process by which we are increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ our Savior, is another major focus. As we noted already, Paul pictures our Christian life as a "walk," and it includes how we live and love at work, at home, and in the church. Finally, we're going to learn about spiritual warfare—what it is and what it isn't.



STUDYING EPHESIANS

Ephesians can be divided into two main parts. Chapters 1–3 make up the first part, which is more doctrinal or theological. Here Paul unfolds for us the wonders of salvation—how Christ has reconciled us to God and to one another. We learn a lot in this section about God's gracious purposes in saving us and how Christ accomplished those purposes, one of which is to bring all kinds of people into a united family. The second part, chapters 4–6, is where we see how to live in light of the doctrine we learn from the first part.

At the beginning of each week's lesson, read the entire passage you'll be studying that week. And then read it again. If you are studying Ephesians with a group, read it once more, aloud, when you gather to discuss the lesson. *Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.*



GROUP STUDY

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you'll want to finish each week's lesson before the group meeting. You can work your way through the study questions all in one sitting or by doing a little bit each day. And don't be discouraged if you don't have sufficient time to answer every question. Just do as much as you can, knowing that the more you do,

the more you'll learn. No matter how much of the study you are able to complete each week, the group will benefit simply from your presence, so don't skip the gathering if you can't finish! That being said, group time will be most rewarding for every participant if you have done the lesson in advance.

If you are leading the group, you can download the free tips sheet at <https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY



The study is designed to run for ten weeks, but you can set your own pace if you're studying solo. And you can download the free tips sheet (<https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>) if you'd like some extra guidance along the way.

Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



Reading Plan

	Primary Text	Supplemental Reading
Week 1	Ephesians 1:1-14	Acts 19:1-10
Week 2	Ephesians 1:15-23	Philippians 2:1-11
Week 3	Ephesians 2:1-10	Psalms 2:1-12
Week 4	Ephesians 2:11-22	Genesis 17:1-14
Week 5	Ephesians 3:1-21	Genesis 12:1-3
Week 6	Ephesians 4:1-16	Ezekiel 34:1-16
Week 7	Ephesians 4:17-32	
Week 8	Ephesians 5:1-21	Genesis 8:20-22; Hebrews 10:11-14
Week 9	Ephesians 5:22-6:9	Genesis 2:18-24
Week 10	Ephesians 6:10-24	Isaiah 11:1-5; 52:7; 59:15-17





WEEK 1

THE BEST INHERITANCE EVER

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

A knock came on my office door one day. It was a courier with a package, and he needed my signature in order to complete the delivery. Despite the office delivery, I could tell immediately that the package was personal in nature. I was baffled as I struggled to open the box, and even more so when I saw what it contained—a heaping pile of jewelry. Stones of blue and green and what looked like diamonds sat atop gold-toned chains and bracelets. A brief note inside informed me that a distant relative, recently deceased, had bequeathed the box's contents to me in her will. On my lunch hour I took the box to a local jewelry store to inquire about the various pieces. I assumed most of it was costume jewelry, but I wanted to know if a piece or two might be genuine. The jeweler picked up piece after piece, examining each through a loupe magnifier. Finally he finished, and in answer to my question, he looked at me and said, "It's *all* real." I was stunned. Maybe you too have been the recipient of a totally unexpected inheritance. If so, when the shock was finally gone, you likely found yourself wondering, *Why me? Who am I that I should share in such abundance?* That's a small picture of what Paul gives us in this week's passage—the undeserved inheritance of salvation in Christ Jesus that brings with it riches beyond our wildest dreams.

1. GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU (1:1-2)

Paul begins with greetings to the recipients of his letter, "the saints who are in Ephesus" (v. 1). At the very least, this included Christians living in the city of Ephesus and those in the surrounding rural community. It might also have circulated to churches in other areas. (You can learn a bit about Paul's earlier in-person ministry in Ephesus by reading Acts 19:1-10.)

- ✦ Paul identifies himself as an apostle in verse 1. The apostles were the leaders of the early church. There were twelve initially, and Paul was added to their number later. According to verse 1, why is Paul able to number himself among them?

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- ✦ Paul calls the Ephesian believers “saints,” which is simply a way of referring to people who have been set apart by God for salvation. What else do we learn about them in verse 1?

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- ✦ Paul expresses his desire that the Ephesian Christians experience “grace” and “peace” (v. 2). Grace is God’s undeserved favor, and peace in this greeting has to do with a well-ordered life. According to Paul here, how do grace and peace come to God’s people?

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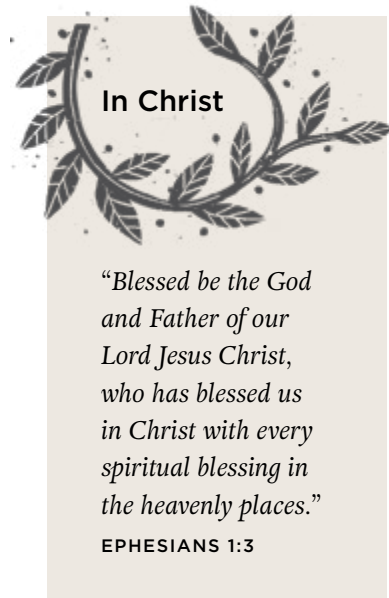
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2. BIG-PICTURE GLIMPSE OF A GLORIOUS PASSAGE (1:3–14)

We could easily spend our entire ten weeks studying what Paul says in verses 3–14. Here, Paul unfolds the riches of our salvation, how God redeems sinners. In the original letter, written in Greek, these verses are one long, flowing sentence, so we are going to look at the passage as a unified whole before we get into the details.

Our great God is actually three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even so, it’s important to understand that there is only one God, not three. He is one God in three persons. We as human beings can’t fully grasp this truth, but it is how he is revealed to us in the Bible. Paul shows us how all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—play a part in our salvation. In the chart that follows, note what Paul attributes to each divine person in verses 3–14.

Apostle

The apostles were specifically called by Christ and had seen the risen Lord Jesus. They established and governed the whole church, under Jesus Christ, and they had authority to speak and write the words of God, equal in authority to the Old Testament Scriptures.⁵



God the Father	Jesus Christ	The Holy Spirit



One of the most powerful takeaways from this epistle is what it means for us to be *in Christ*—the blessings that come to us as a result of being united to him by faith. From this passage, verses 3–14, identify the specific blessings or spiritual fruit Paul attaches to the term “in” or “through” Christ.

	Blessing Received
v. 3	
v. 4	
v. 5	
v. 6	
vv. 7-8	
v. 9	
v. 10	
v. 11	

	Blessing Received
v. 12	
v. 13	



3. A CLOSER LOOK (1:3-14)

We’ve seen how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work in concert for our salvation, and we’ve noted that every benefit of this salvation comes to us “in Christ.” Now we want to take a closer look at those benefits.

✦ What, according to verse 4, is God’s purpose for redeeming us, and what motivated God to choose us to receive this blessing?

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✦ In verses 4–5, Paul tells us that God “chose” us to belong to him in Christ, and he “predestined” (or predetermined) to adopt us into his family and make us his very own children. What does this show us about the part we play in coming to faith in Christ?

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- ✝ Paul tells us in verse 5 that God “predestined us for adoption.” In saving us, God adopts us as his very own children.

- ✝ God’s ultimate purpose in saving us goes beyond the blessings we receive. What, according to verse 6, is this overarching purpose?

The gospel, the “good news” of salvation, comes to us only in Christ:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (vv. 7–10)

In Christ, God redeems us from the iron-fisted grip of sin. Until such rescue happens, we are sin’s prisoners, held captive to both its power and its penalty, which is death. The truth is, before we’re united to Christ, we are *not* able *not* to sin. In other words, we’re doomed to suffer sin’s consequences now and forever. It’s a predicament we simply can’t get ourselves out of, no matter how hard we try, since we’ve inherited a sin nature from our ancestors Adam and Eve. Because God’s standard is absolute perfection, he would have been perfectly just in making us pay, and, in fact, the penalty *has* to be paid. That’s why, in saving us, God didn’t just sweep our sin under the rug. He had a better plan. God the Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth as a man and lived a perfectly obedient life for us in our place. And then, after never sinning even once, he gave up his life, dying on a

cross to pay for our sins. That’s why Paul says that “we have redemption through his blood.”

✦ Look again at verses 7–10 and jot down what Paul says concerning the *how*, the *when*, and the *why* of God’s plan for redemption.

• How:

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• When:

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• Why:

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The Holy Spirit as Seal or Guarantee

A *seal* in the ancient world was a mark of ownership. When we are united to Christ by faith, the Holy Spirit is given to us to signify that we now belong to God. A *guarantee* is a financial term that refers to a down payment or a deposit. We receive the Spirit as an installment, a pledge. The Spirit comes as God’s pledge to complete (“pay in full”) the final redemption of his people, which will happen at the end of the age, and the Spirit’s presence in Christians’ lives now is a reliable “sample” or foretaste of this future fullness.⁶



Paul says that in Christ, we have “obtained an inheritance” (v. 11). Most likely Paul is driving home the point that all the blessings we receive when we’re saved are an undeserved gift. That’s how the promised land is described in the Old Testament—it’s an *inheritance* that God gave his people (see Psalm 105:8–11). The land that Israel inherited from God in the Old Testament pointed forward to a much greater inheritance—being adopted into God’s family through our union with Christ. That’s how the apostle Peter uses the term when he writes that God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3–4). Some think that the inheritance Paul has in mind here in Ephesians 1 is actually us—*we ourselves* are the inheritance. In this sense, God actually inherits us, like back in the Old Testament when God freed his people from slavery in Egypt in order to make them “a people of his own inheritance” (Deuteronomy 4:20). Whichever way we understand the word *inheritance* here is okay because both ways are true. Even so, the first way—that we receive an inheritance—seems to best fit the context.

God’s Glory

“God’s glory is the revelation and manifestation of who he is: his essence, power, majesty, purity, and holiness.”⁷



✦ What does he say is the ultimate purpose for this inheritance in verse 12?

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✦ Not everyone who hears God’s word with their ears hears it with their heart, but those who do—the ones who truly believe—are given a seal, or sign. This seal, which always accompanies salvation, is “the promised Holy Spirit” (v. 13). Paul goes on to describe the Holy Spirit as the “guarantee” or down payment of our inheritance (v. 14). How do the following passages help us understand why Paul describes the Spirit, or Helper, as a seal?

• John 16:7

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• Romans 8:15–17

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• Galatians 4:6–7

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• 1 John 4:13



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LET'S TALK

1. Do you see the blessings of salvation as the richest, best inheritance you'll ever receive? In other words, regardless of whether you're new to the faith or have been walking with the Lord for a long time, do you share Paul's wonder at the riches of life in Christ? Discuss what can hinder the wow factor and how you can cultivate it afresh.

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2. What aspect of this passage about the riches of our redemption stood out most to you, and why? Discuss how a grasp of these spiritual riches can reshape how you see yourself (your identity) and therefore how you think and live in your present circumstances.

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