

Ephesians 1:1-14
God's Plan to God's Glory

1:3-6 *The Father Predestined Us*
1:7-10 *The Son Redeemed Us*
1:11-14 *The Holy Spirit Sealed Us*

Eph 1:11-14 [11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We left off last time at 1:6 where Paul says all the credit, all the glory, all the praise go to the Father—because of His predestined, pre-planned purpose and will—
1:6 *“to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us **in the Beloved**”*
And His Beloved is also Our Beloved.

Paul's prayer and Praise is a celebration of a story that begins with the Exodus from Egypt and moves on to tell that larger story of the cross of Jesus in a way that we can hear, underneath it, the Jewish story of Passover, which is God's miracle rescue at the Red Sea, and the Power of God living among His people and leading them in the wilderness.

In 1:7-10 Paul tells us that it is the Son who redeemed us and saved us by His death. Deliverance from our own death comes through His resurrection, then He leads us into the inheritance that the Father predetermined for us as adopted sons.

Let's look at these verses again—

*[7] In him (**in the Beloved**) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his (**the Father's**) grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (**His Anointed Beloved**) [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, (**and here is the purpose for the plan**) to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

This redemption is the *GIFT* Paul describes in 1:6. The GNB actually puts it that way, *“Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for **the free gift** he gave us in his dear Son!”* Paul will talk about this *Free Gift* again in Chapter 2.

In Jesus we have redemption, and redemption is the whole package, all paid for by His death on the cross. It means being set free from bondage into a whole new life of liberty. God forgives all debts and trespasses and this forgiveness has been lavished upon us, poured over us like the finest oil. It is grace that knows no bounds. If we could measure the richness of God's grace, weigh it on scales, or measure it with a very long ruler, then we would have some idea how fully He has forgiven us. But we cannot measure it. His grace is infinite! His forgiveness is infinite!

Next we see the gifts of wisdom and insight. The Father has taken us into His confidence and has revealed the mystery of His will to us. The GNB calls this the *Secret Plan*, known only in the mind of God until now. It is that plan for the future that is

the dominant theme of Paul's letter... found in v. 10, that *"all things in heaven and on earth will be summed up in Christ."* Paul calls him "Christ" because he is the Redeemer-King, the Savior of the World, the One who is right now being rejected and disowned by the world will be the preeminent One, the Lord of all, meaning the entire universe. This is the Kingdom He will bring to us. *HE* is our inheritance,

So Paul is telling us about Jesus in a new way because he is really revealing the mystery of Jesus as the New Adam, Jesus as a new kind of human. Jesus, in his life and death and resurrection, is the fulfillment of the Exodus story. Year after year the Jewish nation looked back and celebrated the goodness of God at Passover. They also looked forward. But they could never quite see beyond the horizon. God's plan was hinted at in Isaiah 53 in the Suffering Servant, and in Daniel 7 as the Son of Man coming on the Clouds of Glory, but they could not see Jesus. The Psalms cry out, *"When will God come and deliver His people again? Will you ever forgive us?"* And now God is telling Paul to tear the cover off and reveal His plan for all to see—the Jewish nation, the Gentile nations, even the powers and authorities and rulers in the Heavens. All will see! All brought together in the Lamb of God, because Exodus is fulfilled in Jesus. And right now we Christians, the Church of this Risen Lamb, worship God by *telling our story* of what God has done.

Paul moves our story along from the Exodus and the Red Sea deliverance to the promise of an inheritance, but this is a newly revealed version of a Promised inheritance. Coming out of Egypt, Israel was going into the Land of Canaan—but now, we are on our way to the Glorious Kingdom that will never end. Or as the writer of Hebrews tells us about Abraham when he first entered Canaan back in Genesis *"... he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."*[Hb 11:10] Even Abraham was looking beyond to the Exodus to a far greater inheritance. Let's look at this idea more closely—

In 1:11-14 Paul says the Holy Spirit of God is indwelling us and has sealed us for future delivery. Because this future inheritance is guaranteed. The Holy Spirit's guarantee is like making a down payment on a property we are going to buy. We can say we are already landowners in the glorious age to come. We own a piece of Glory right now! That is what Paul says in 1:11-14—

[11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him (that is, the Father) who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we (by "we" Paul means the Jewish people, his brothers in the flesh) "we" who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory (that is, "God's glory", which I think refers to all 3 persons because they are all in unity and agreement with the plan and its accomplishment). [13] In him you also ("you" meaning Gentiles), when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, (you also, meaning along with the Jewish people) were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it (or, until our possessed inheritance is fully redeemed) to the praise of his (again, God's) glory.

We think of inheritance as money — or something that can quickly be turned into money. But in Paul's Jewish world an inheritance meant land that was to be passed on. Land was not meant to be sold off and turned into cash. It was meant to be cared for, built on, and left as a legacy for the future. Notice the word *predestined* comes up

again in verse 11. And why wouldn't it? Even in our modern culture when it comes to inheritance we use experts called "inheritance planners". What do they do? They set up a plan—they *predestine* what is going to happen to the assets left by a very wealthy father to his children. God is not only very rich, he is a careful planner, and He has the power to carry out the plan.

The inheritance that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the land of Canaan. All the time that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, this was the hope that kept them going—that God would free them and give them the inheritance He promised. Not cash—but land—*"a land flowing with milk and honey."* But why the whole Egypt thing? Part of the Plan! Look at what Psalm 105 says:

23 Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham. 24 The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, 25 whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants.

Do you see that? Verse 25 says that *The LORD turned the Egyptians hearts to hate His people!* And they were doing just fine! Then suddenly Pharaoh decided to hate them and that became the new national policy!

Here is what Tim Keller says about this passage:

The Egyptians came to hate the Israelites), yet it was part of God's plan. God used the Assyrians to punish Israel, and still held the Assyrians responsible for their violence. Jesus's death was the result of God's foreordination (pre-planning), but the people who killed him were guilty. Here are two crucial biblical truths that must be held together—God is sovereign and I am responsible—everything we do is part of God's plan, yet we are never coerced...and we are completely responsible for our actions. If I don't believe God is sovereign, I may become frozen by the fear that I could somehow ruin His plans for me. If I don't believe I am still fully responsible, I may become passive and even cynical.¹

After the Exodus God's people were free to claim the inheritance God had planned and promised. They simply had to walk out of Egypt over to Canaan and take possession of what was rightfully and divinely theirs. It is about a 3 week journey on foot. It took them 40 years. Why? They found out that having the One Holy God in their midst was dangerous! The first thing God did was to lead them down to Mount Sinai where He made a covenant with them. The Lord God did not want to send Israel back into Canaan simply as another tribal family. He formed them into a new nation among nations. But this nation of Israel was a unique nation. It is a nation that would represent God! Israel would be God's witness to the world. And His plan was to bless Israel so they could be a blessing to others. Which is what he had told Abraham 400 years earlier. *"Go—and I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you so that you will be a blessing."* God gave Moses the Law at Sinai. The Law was the constitution of the new nation, and the Law promised blessing for their faithfulness and obedience to their Lord as God. But the Law was also a warning: *"...curses will come upon you if you are disobedient"*, God said. God is saying, *"Please be faithful to Me, the One who saved you, and do not defile My Name before the nations. I want to bless them through you."* God NEVER said, "If you keep all these laws, then I will save you." He had already saved them! He saved them with a spectacular show of power and might far beyond anything the world had ever seen! And now, He was actually living

their midst. And there is the danger! As I mentioned before, there was the meandering 40 year trip in the wilderness—going this way and that—led by the Lord who was visible to them as a cloud by day and a fire by night. A 40 year journey that should have been a journey of no more than 3 months, even with the side trip to Mount Sinai. We often think to ourselves how foolish they were. Look at what they had just witnessed! And they were foolish! They grumbled and rebelled and refused to trust Moses and the Lord. They turned to false gods, and they paid the price. They found out how dangerous God could be. They experienced a walking, living, death. They learned a lesson we all have to learn—God’s unconditional Grace and Mercy does not absolve of the consequences of our own stupidity. But the Lord never left them, and He made good on the promise that His nation would get to Canaan. And they did. They just did it the hard way—not God’s way.

That is what makes this ancient story our story. That is what Paul wants us to see. This long Greek sentence is his opening act of worship and praise that he pours out, barely leaving a chance to catch a breath. Paul is praising the new Exodus, our new inheritance, and, yes, even our new wilderness wandering through what he calls this present evil age. This is one of Paul’s favorite themes. He sees the church in the present age doing what Israel did in the desert. A people called by the Lord coming out of the slave market of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messianic King who is taking us to our new promised land. What is this promised land—this inheritance? We call it Heaven, or more simply “the place we go when we die.” But is that all there is to it? A place we go to, or is Paul looking forward to a King and His Glorious Kingdom returning to us? In reality, it is both things. When we die, and are removed from the midst of this evil age, we do go to be with the Lord to await His return, His “coming back”. But the “waiting place” is not the inheritance that the Holy Spirit guarantees for our future. The new world we inherit will be in a time and a place when heaven and earth are joined together, and the Dwelling of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is actually with man. We can read this in Rev 21:2-3 *“And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God.”* And this great city? It is the city that Abraham saw from a great distance. And he kept looking and going forward, and the writer of Hebrews is telling us to do the same.

We do not want to forget that Paul is revealing a mystery here in these verses. Jews and Gentiles who trust this New King have a share together in this New Heavens and New Earth. In vv.11-12 he says this is the inheritance always promised to the Jewish people. But in v. 13 he says, “also YOU...” you Gentiles... *“were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”*. Then in v. 14 he says, *“the guarantee of OUR inheritance”*. Everyone is together. We are One, whether Jew or Gentile—it no longer matters. The secret mystery being revealed here is not that Gentiles will be part of God Kingdom. It is clear in the Old Testament that they always have been included in God’s plan. The mystery being revealed is the *WAY* this is being done, and through *WHOM* it is being done. The mystery is Christ Himself. The mystery goes back to v. 10. The whole cosmos, after it’s been renewed by a fresh act of God’s power, will be brought together in Christ—everything in heaven and earth. I love the way Tom Wright puts it: *“God, as the creator of the cosmos He loves, is not leaving earth to rot and then making do for all*

eternity with only one half of the original creation. God intends to flood the whole cosmos, heaven and earth together, with his presence and grace, and when that happens the new world that results, in which Jesus himself will be the central figure, is to be the 'inheritance' for which all Jesus followers are longing." When Jesus came and tried to tear off the blinders that covered the eyes of His own people, to show them the marvelous secret, they resisted and rebelled. They could not trust the Lord who had led them all this way. They missed it. They could not see that their share in this inheritance is not based on their national privileges, but solely on their faith in Jesus as their Messiah.

The role of the Holy Spirit is a big part of this revealed mystery. He is a seal and a sign and a foretaste of the whole renewed universe, not just heaven, and not just the earth, but everything! All things in the entire cosmos are united under the New King, Jesus. This is what awaits us as and this is what we are waiting and longing for, and yes, as Romans says, groaning to see. Knowing where we are going should change our whole view of life today. And we are the signs, the beacons, to the rest of the world that a glorious future is on the way. We hold forth the guarantees that the Holy Spirit seals inside of us, sealed in the vault of our hearts. The Holy Spirit is to the church in the world today what the cloud and fire were to Israel in the wilderness. The Spirit of God that indwells the Body of Christ in the world is the powerful, personal presence of the living God, a holy God, who is leading us, guiding us. He is certainly not to be taken lightly. Because God is holy and powerful God is also dangerous. Dangerous because we are often a foolish and grumbling and rebellious people. Yes, we are in the wilderness now. The wilderness is confusing us, it is evil, it is scary for us as pilgrims on the journey. But look where we are going and who is leading us! He's there, just a prayer away, always ready to give grace and mercy in the time of our many needs, whether great or small. Today, when you hear His voice, do not turn away to a wandering death. Rather, listen and hear the promise and join Paul in his hymn of praise, echoing the great Shema of Deut 6, which he prayed many times in his life. Only now he prays "*Hear! Oh Israel, the Lord our God is One—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*"—the One true God as three persons. He sees no contradiction, and he never tries to explain it. He accepts it and proclaims it as naturally as if the Torah had said it.

It is in that spirit that Paul turns his prayer of praising and blessing God to prayers of gratitude and supplication to God on behalf of his people in Ephesus.

And that is where we will look next time—

God our Father we praise you that You have taken the initiative to save us. You have done all that is necessary, at great cost to Yourself. You, Father, sent Jesus to buy Your entire creation—and us—back from the grip of the evil one, from the slave-pits of sin and death. Jesus has defeated all of our enemies completely. So now we praise You Father Son and Holy Spirit—our Great God. Let us keep your name holy in this world. Amen.

¹ Keller, Timothy; Keller, Kathy. *The Songs of Jesus* (p. 268). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.