

MAN WITH A MISSION • APOSTOLIC SPIRIT



WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

READ EPHESIANS 3:1-13

In this section of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is explaining the special mission to which God called him, in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Often Paul writes with several purposes in mind. While he explains this amazing new turn in God's plan to include both Jew and Gentile in one body, the church, he has an eye on a current division in the Ephesian church that is taking place along Jewish and Gentile lines. In highlighting God's salvation plan to join Jew and Gentile in Christ, and therefore, the church, Paul is also underscoring the need for both groups within the church to get along.

Ephesians 3:1-2

The study highlights one point in this section, and that is Paul's attitude toward the ministry. He sees this ministry as God's "grace" to him. In Ephesians 3:8, Paul again refers to this ministry as God's "grace" to him, and states how unworthy he feels for the task.

Ephesians 3:3-6

Paul here discusses that God's plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles was a mystery. Thus, he means it was not revealed in the Old Testament.

What was revealed in the Old Testament is that, somehow, God would use Israel as a means to bring salvation to the Gentiles. How that would happen was not disclosed. In Genesis 15:1-3, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, which was fulfilled in Israel. He further stated that all of the nations would be blessed through Israel. Other recurrences of this message appear throughout the Old Testament. Over time, however, the Jews became more nationalistic and began to despise the Gentiles for their godlessness. They refused to be a vehicle of blessing to the nations; they wanted Messiah to return, vindicate Israel, and bring judgment on the Gentile nations.

Ironically, what took place was that Jesus came, was rejected by Israel, and the gospel message was sent forth to the nations as Israel herself was judged for her unbelief.

God's salvation plan took an unexpected turn, a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament. Now God's plan for salvation is not through the nation of Israel, but the church—which is a new "body" made up of believing Jews, as well as

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

The study examines some of the elements of Paul's mission to the Gentiles, but gives specific focus to the "apostolic" spirit of being a personal and willing ambassador to a specific people group.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to Materials@ImpactMovement.com

believers from all nations. The church is a multi-ethnic kingdom whose only qualification for membership is faith in Christ.

Again, Paul's other motivation for mentioning all of this, is to spur the Jewish and Gentile believers in the Ephesian church to function together lovingly as one unified body. Paul anticipated that showing them God's amazing plan in putting Jew together with Gentile, would help.

It is interesting to note that God chose Paul, a devout Jew, who had actually, in his zeal, persecuted Christians to be the bearer of this message to the Gentiles. Paul's fanatical Judaism made him, once converted, a perfect ambassador: one who understood, better than anyone, the Jewish Law and Jewish prejudice toward the Gentiles.

Ephesians 3:8-12

The main point of this section is demonstrating how the church reflects the wisdom of God in fulfilling His purposes. In Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul says that God's great plan has always been to bring "all things on earth" under the kingship of his Son. With the less than impressive spiritual life of the tiny nation of Israel, God's plans for global worship must have seemed to the world, as well as the heavenly host, as floundering. Worse still, when Jesus the Messiah does come, Israel actually rejects her savior.

Then, in a stunning turn of events, the Lord is resurrected and the gospel is propelled out to the nations, bringing worship to the true God from points all over the globe. This was a mystery, something that no one foresaw, which displays the manifold wisdom of God.

Ephesians 3:13

As this section of Scripture began with Paul stating he was a prisoner for Christ (verse 3:1), it closes with Paul returning once again to the subject of his suffering as an apostle. Suffering that among other things, included imprisonment.

Jesus says in John 12:24, "that unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Obviously, the major referent for the Lord's words was Himself. But, it was clear to Paul that these words had implications for all those who were willing to be apostles (sent ones) reaching new groups of people with the gospel. Suffering and sacrifice serve as fertilizer for the new life that springs up wherever the gospel goes. Paul gladly embraced this part of his missionary task, and found joy in participating in the sufferings of Christ.

All those who have a heart to be used as "sent ones" of the gospel must see it as an enormous privilege, for which they are completely unworthy. They must also embrace the hardship that accompanies the mission "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

It should be noted that this study makes a distinction between the office of Apostle and the functioning of an apostle. The Lord gave the office of "Apostle" to a certain few who were the foundation of the church. However, the word "apostle" itself means "sent one," and it is appropriately used for all Christians who go as ambassadors to reach certain groups of people with the gospel. In this sense, we are all potential "apostles," but not "Apostles." "Apostles" are at the foundation of the historical church to which their number cannot be added.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

We can all be apostles. God can use us as ambassadors to reach a group of people with the gospel. To which groups are you currently, or could you become, an ambassador to.

Second, honestly consider what sort of suffering you might encounter if you were to assume this apostolic role.

Third, contemplate what initial steps you could take in order to act as an apostle to a certain group. You might begin by praying for them, or plan a specific outreach targeted at appealing to this group. Brainstorm ideas and see how the Lord leads you.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 3:8 “Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. ...”

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Paul refers to this ministry as God’s grace to him, and states how unworthy he feels for the task. He saw the ministry as an honor and a privilege.
2. Ministry is a gift from God. It is an opportunity to express our love and gratitude to Him. A wrong attitude is when we feel we are doing God a favor, and when we feel fully competent to handle the task on our own.
3. Now God’s plan for salvation is not through the nation of Israel, but the church—which is made up of believing Jews, as well as believers from all nations.
4. They thought Messiah would return, vindicate Israel, and judge the nations (Gentiles). Ironically, Jesus came, was rejected by Israel, and the gospel message was sent forth to the nations, as Israel herself was judged for her unbelief.
5. They became prideful and began to look down on the pagan nations. They became judgmental and lost their compassion.
6. Christians, too, can become condemning of sinful behavior, and disdain can replace compassion. Rather than reaching out in love, we try to protect ourselves from the evil of the world.
7. Paul’s fanatical Judaism made him, once converted, a perfect ambassador to the Gentiles: one who understood, better than anyone, the Jewish Law and Jewish prejudice toward the Gentiles.
8. Paul would have had to wrestle with his own ingrained prejudice, as well as hostility for transgressing the boundaries between Jew and Gentile.
9. Take time and write down some thoughts.
10. God’s overall plan is to bring all nations under Christ’s kingdom. The church does this by its inclusiveness of all the Gentile nations.
11. Take time to look up the passages and summarize some of Paul’s sufferings.
12. While Christ’s death accomplished our forgiveness, Paul’s suffering was necessary to bring them the message of Christ’s death for their sins.
13. There would certainly be the possibility of ridicule and embarrassment.
14. Refer to “What’s Your Point” above.

MAN WITH A MISSION • EPHESIANS 3:1-13

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

1. Look at verses 1-2 and 7-8. What was Paul's attitude toward his ministry?
2. What does this teach us about proper motivation and attitude in ministry? What would a wrong attitude toward ministry look like?
3. Read verses 3-6. What are the contents of this mystery?
4. What was the expectation of Jews concerning the Messiah, and what did they think would happen to the Gentiles when He came? What happened instead?
5. Read Genesis 12:1-3. These verses mention that the Jews were supposed to be a vehicle of blessing to the Gentiles. However, over the course of time the Jews became very hardened toward the Gentiles and began to despise them for their ungodly way of life. How do you think this happened?
6. How can this attitude manifest itself in a community of Christians toward the world? Toward unbelievers?
7. Look at verses 7-8 and then read Philippians 3:4-7. An apostle is one sent to reach a specific group or people. Why do you think God chose Paul to reach the Gentiles? Would you have sent Paul?

8. What would have been some of the personal and cultural issues Paul would have had to wrestle with in preaching to the Gentiles?
9. As you reflect on your background—interests, athletics, school major, and even the lifestyle from which God rescued you—to what group on campus do you feel you would make a good apostle?
10. Read 3:8-12. How does God's purpose for the church fit within His overall plan found in Ephesians 1:9-10?
11. Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:24-29. Summarize the suffering Paul is referring to in verse 13 that he endured in his apostolic mission.
12. Related to the suffering he endured, Paul states in Colossians 1:24, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions." What does he mean by this?
13. What might be some first steps in beginning to act as an apostle to a group on campus?

Memory verse

Ephesians 3:8 "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. ..."