

Ephesians

I. Greeting (1:1-2)

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus:

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, the son of Jew, was raised in a Greek-speaking city and therefore, had two names from birth - Saul and Paul (Kent, 13). He would naturally use his Roman name, Paul, when relating to those in the Roman world.

The words "apostle of Christ Jesus" signal the official character of Paul's communication (+ Kent, 13). He came as the authorized representative of the exalted Lord and his authority did not come from self-appointment to his office, but from God's appointment of him to it (*διὰ θελήματος θεου*) (Lincoln, 5).

The will of God is an important theme in Ephesians. The emphasis is not on Christians discovering God's plan for their lives, but speaks of God's purposes in relation to humanity. The point here is that Paul is an apostle because God wanted Him to be one (Snodgrass, 37). It expresses what was always on Paul's mind, that his mission was due to the special and undeserved providence of God, not to any merit of his own (Abbott, 1-2).

At the end of the first century, Ephesus was the largest province in the Roman Empire. It was designated as a free city so it was self-governed and had no Roman military presence, though officials visited there on occasion.

Originally, Ephesus was a prosperous seaport but the harbor began to slowly fill with silt from the Cayster River. Though efforts were made to keep areas dredged and accessible for vessels to enter, its importance slowly dwindled. Today Ephesus is in ruins because the accumulation of silt places the city 6 miles from the sea and its sandy beaches make it

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

unapproachable by ship. (Thomas, Revelation 1-7, 128-130). Highways also connected Ephesus with most of the important cities in Asia Minor. The chief drawing card, however, was the athletic games that were held there annually. The city's open-air theatre could seat 25,000 people (Kent, 14).

Religious life revolved around the Greek goddess Artemis (the Roman god Diana) and the temple dedicated to her was considered to be one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The image of Artemis, a grotesque, squat, black, many-breasted figure that had reportedly fallen from heaven was one of the most sacred objects in the ancient world.

Besides being a religious center, the temple provided asylum for criminals who came in droves to seek safety after they committed crimes. Prostitution also thrived because it was thought to be a sacred act. The prostitutes themselves were considered priestesses.

Paul visited the city in 52 A.D. while returning from Corinth to Jerusalem at the close of his second missionary journey. Priscilla, Aquilla and Apollos were there at the time. On his third missionary journey, Paul spent three years in Ephesus and had a close relationship with the believers. He wrote Ephesians to the church while imprisoned in Rome. John arrived about three years later (66 A.D.) and stayed there until he was exiled to Patmos (about 40 years had passed between the founding of the church and the writing of Revelation where the church is mentioned).

Three expressions describe believers. First, they are called "saints" or "holy people" in light of their relationship to God. The focus is on God's action and is a reference to God's saving work (Snodgrass, 38); God has set them apart for Himself. This is the same designation applied to Israel in the OT (LXX Exo. 19:6 also - I Pet 2:9; + Abbott, 2). Although they are not called saints because of the moral sanctity of their lives, there is a moral obligation upon those who are set apart by a holy God (Abbott, 2). The writer will expand upon this in 1:4 where he sees holiness as a result of God's election, and in 5:26-27 where he views it as an effect of Christ's death (Lincoln, 6).

Secondly, they are also called "faithful." "Faithful" is to be understood in the sense of "having faith", not as being trustworthy, for the

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

adjective *pistos* (πιστός) means "believing" (Gal 3:9) when it is used as it is here (i.e. as a substantive) and has a semi-technical sense as "believer" (II Cor. 6:15; Lincoln, 6).

Lastly, they are said to be "in Christ." The phrase is incorporative - i.e. it doesn't point to Christ as the one in whom they believe (the object of their faith) but means that believers are united in Him, partakers with Him of His new life (Bruce, 251). It expresses the oneness and identity the believer has with Christ. Paul uses "in Christ," "in the Lord," "in Him," or similar expressions 164 times in his writings, and Ephesians focuses more on being "in Christ" than any other letter he wrote (36 X) (Snodgrass, 39).

Grace (10X) and peace (6X) represent two major themes in the epistle (Lincoln, 6). Grace is God's unconditioned goodwill toward men and women, which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ (Bruce, 39). Peace is a state of life - a condition of being at peace with God (Col. 1:20) (Bruce, 39); it is the inner satisfaction that stabilizes the heart (Phil 4:7, Kent, 15). Paul desires that believers experience the undeserved favor and deep well-being which flow from God and Christ (God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are joined together, indicating equal rank in the mind of the writer - Kent, 15). Paul's thought from the very beginning is theocentric, focusing on God's activity through Christ (Snodgrass, 39).

II. Blessing of God for His Salvation in Christ (1:3-14)

This section (1:3-14) consists of three stanzas that all end with the repetition of the phrase "to the praise of His glory" (vv. 6, 12, 14). Each stanza emphasizes a different person of the trinity. In scope, they cover the entire sweep of redemption, from its beginning in the election by God, to its consummation in the receiving of our inheritance (Kent, 19). It also includes three perspectives on God's saving work in time: God's activity in eternity (3-5, 9, 11), His activity in human history - in Christ and in those who believe - (6-8, 11-14), and His acts at the end of history when all things are summed up in Christ (10) (Snodgrass, 45).

The section could also be structured according to three participles;

“blessed us” in 1:3;
“predestined us” in 1:5;
and “made known to us” in 1:9.

All three reveal the goodness of God in His desire to choose people.

A. Praise for Election and Adoption (1:3-6)

1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

Verses 3-4 function as the thesis of the whole letter; that is, the whole letter is about God choosing us and blessing us so that we might live holy and blameless lives before Him. God is not a distant being who waits to see what humans will do. God is the beginning, the one who works through Christ and the Spirit for humans and with humans (Snodgrass, 45).

Verse 3 is a call to worship. “To bless” means to speak well of, but when a man speaks well of God it becomes worship. When God blesses men, it denotes granting benefits upon them (Bruce, 253). When these blessings are received by men, it prompts their blessing God in worship (Kent, 19).

In Greek, God's blessing is summed up in three ways; literally, it is “in” every spiritual blessing, “in” the heavenly places, “in” Christ. These also set forth the reason that God is to be blessed.

1) The blessing is called “spiritual” because it is related to the believer's new nature and position. Bruce sees them as listed below, including election to holiness, redemption, forgiveness, instatement as sons, the gift of the Spirit and the hope of glory (Bruce, 253; + Snodgrass, 46).

2) The sphere of the blessings is in the heavenly realms.

"Heavenlies" does not just refer to heaven (Snodgrass, 46). "The heavenlies" occur 5 times in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) and from these occurrences we can glean:

1. It is a sphere in which believers even now participate (1:3; 2:6).
2. Christ is supreme in this realm (1:20).
3. Angels reside there (3:10).
4. Evil spiritual forces are there (6:12).

In other words, "heavenlies" does not refer to a physical location (+ Abbott, 5) but a spiritual reality where Christ is already exalted as Lord, where believers participate in His victory and where spiritual forces of evil are opposed. It is the way of saying that there is a bigger reality than this physical world. Though believers are on the earth, they receive spiritual resources and identity on a higher plane. The spiritual blessings we enjoy now come from God and what Christ has done in the heavenlies (Snodgrass, 47).

3) The blessings consist of God's saving activity in Christ.

Christ is the place where believers reside, the source in which they find their salvation and God's blessings and the framework in which they live and work. It is as if Christ were a vast repository holding the gifts of God (Snodgrass, 48). Believers experience the blessings in the heavenly realms because they are incorporated in the exalted Christ as their representative, who is Himself in the heavenly realms (Lincoln, 21).

Anything passing through God to us must pass through Christ, for He is the mediator between the infinite and the finite. Some seek blessings and miss Christ. Others seek Him and find both (Julien, 14).

1. God's purpose and election take place in Christ (1:4, 9, 11).
2. God's grace and redemption are found in Christ (1:6-7).
3. All things in heaven and earth are summed up in Christ (1:10).

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

4. People hope in Christ, hear the word in Christ and are sealed in Christ (1:12-13) (Snodgrass, 47).

According to verse 4, God has blessed the believer (v.3) because He has chosen the believer. One could also say that God has blessed the believer to the extent that He has elected them.

Election means that *God* chooses people. This cannot be turned around to mean that men chose *God*. A "people of *God*" only exists because of *God's* character, plan, and action, not because of the quality of the people (Snodgrass, 48).

The fact that *God* chooses a people for Himself is a concept familiar to the OT (Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2), however, the idea is not primarily "selection" but the end for which the choice was made (Abbott, 6). *God* had chosen Israel so that in her, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Israel's election was not for her own self-indulgence, but for the blessings of the nations; it was a privilege, but it is also a summons for service (Lincoln, 23). *God* has chosen us to live holy and blameless lives (Snodgrass, 49).

Being chosen is related to being in Christ. In Galatians 3 Christ fulfills Israel's election. He is the offspring of Abraham *par excellence* (3:16). In Christ, the blessing of Abraham has come to the *Gentiles* so that they too become Abraham's offspring (3:29) (Lincoln, 23).

The time of *God's* gracious choice is said to have taken place "before the foundation of the world." The same concept is not found in the OT, but is used of *God's* love for Christ (Jn. 17:24) and His purpose for Christ (I Pet. 1:20). But of believers, II Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 1:9; and the concept of to "foreknow" in Ro. 8:29 is that of preceding time (Lincoln, 23). Salvation was not some accident or afterthought of *God* (Snodgrass, 49).

Such language gives us assurance of *God's* purpose for us. *God's* choice of the believer is not based upon temporal circumstances, but is rooted in the depth of *God's* nature. To say that *God's* choice of us in Christ was before the foundation of the world emphasizes that it was not contingent upon human merit but solely upon *God's* sovereign grace (Lincoln, 23).

It is also significant that the language of election before the foundation of the world is in the context of thanksgiving. It is part of the expression of gratitude for God's inexplicable grace, not a logical deduction made from God's immutable decrees. And unlike Ro. 9:13, 18, and 22, makes no comment about the negative side of election. Overwhelmed by the blessing of being in Christ, He makes no attempt to explain but only gives praise to God who is the source of such blessing (Lincoln, 23-24).

The goal of God's election is that we would exhibit a lifestyle of holiness. God desired to secure men whose lives would demonstrate His power in overcoming sin. "Saints" or "holy ones" in 1:1 denoted primarily a status; here, it denotes the moral condition that belongs to such status. That which is separated to God, like a sacrificial animal, must be without defect (cf. Ro. 12:1-2). Holiness is the absence of moral defect or sin; blamelessness is moral perfection which conforms itself to the will of God. Moral separation from sin and active love are qualities which provide a good summary of the exhortations in the last half of the book (Lincoln, 24). The perspective is the same as in Colossians 1:22. The "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14) is progressively wrought within the lives of believers on earth by the Spirit.

A God-centered perspective dominates. A life of holiness and blamelessness has its source in a gracious God and is a response to being elected by a gracious God. Our lives are lived in this way before Him, that is, they are lived being conscious of the fact that God's approval and presence are one's ultimate environment (Lincoln, 25).

In love

**1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,
1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**

The focus is still God centered. He has predestined us for adoption to Himself, for His good pleasure. We bless God because His choice of us is intended to bring us into a relationship with Him. This theocentricity is also emphasized with the word "predestined", drawing attention to God's initiative in salvation (Lincoln, 25).

If something is predestined it is determined in the mind of God to come to pass (Acts 4:28; Eph. 1:5, 11). When God selected which men He would save, we call it foreknowledge. Then when He causes those who are selected to arrive at an appointed end we call it predestination. The words "having predestined" could be modal (explaining the method of electing) explaining that God marked some out for salvation even before they existed. This was the manner God used to select some to receive adoption as sons (Kent, 20).

The emphasis on adoption in 1:5 shows that the purpose of election is relational. God, for no other reason than that He is a loving God, chose to adopt people into His family (Snodgrass, 49).

"Adoption" (huithesian - υιοθεσίαν) is also found in Ro. 8:15, 23; 9:4 and Gal. 4:5 and is from Greco-Roman law (it didn't exist in Jewish, Abbott, Kent, 21; Bruce, 256) where it referred to adoption of sons who were not sons by birth. This is the same privilege extended to Israel - Ro. 9:4. By God's free predestining choice, He adopts people into His family and establishes them as His children and heirs. God is blessed because we were once "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath" (2:2, 3) but now through Christ (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), receive the benefit of sonship and salvation (Gal. 3:26; 4:4, 5; Ro. 8:29) (Lincoln, 26). God's election was not based on anything inside of man or anything outside of God Himself; it was an act of His own goodness (Kent, 21).

"According to the kind intention of His will" re-emphasizes that God is the source. It is all in accordance with His sovereign good pleasure (Lincoln, 26). Luther said, "God's will has no 'Why'" (Bruce, 257).

The redemption which originated from God has His own glorification at its end. The predestination, which is the product of His grace, resounds to the praise of the glory of His grace (Lincoln, 26).

The idea isn't that God wants to praise Himself, but that His election reveals His character as a loving, saving God (Snodgrass, 50).

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

Grace is undeserved bounty (Abbott, 10). God has given tremendous privileges to totally depraved men, and this bestowal is all one-sided. In the Bible, "Sinners are compared to dead men, or even to dry bones in their entire helplessness. In this they are all alike. The choice of some to eternal life is as sovereign as if Christ were to pass through a graveyard and bid one here and another there to come forth, the reason for restoring one to life and leaving another in his grave could be found only in His good pleasure, and not in the dead themselves. Hence the statement that we are foreordained according to the good pleasure of His will, and not after the good inclinations of our own; and in order that we might be holy, not because we were holy (Ephesians 1:4, 5)" (Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*)

Literally, verse 6 reads, "His grace with which He graced us." Salvation, which is the subject of this whole opening section, can be equated to the grace mentioned in this verse. So intensely does God favor the believer with his grace that both their existence and their worship become a paean of praise to the splendor of that grace (Lincoln, 26).

"In the Beloved" expresses how the grace has come to the believer and is already found "in Christ" (1:3), "in Him" (1:4) and "through Christ Jesus" (1:5).

In the LXX, "the Beloved" denotes Israel (Deut. 33:12; Isa. 5:1, 7; Jer. 11:15; 12:7). In the Pauline epistles, it denotes believers (I Thess. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13; Ro. 9:25; Col. 3:12). Here it is used of Jesus (Mk. 1:11; 9:7; cf. Col. 1:13 for a similar idea). In any case, it makes clear that Christ is the specific chosen one, His beloved Son. The predestination of believers is inextricably tied to being related to Christ. Being highly favored by grace means for us that we participate in the divine love with which the Father loved the Son, though we participate through adoption (Lincoln, 27).

In Psalm 66:2 the whole earth is summoned to give God glorious praise. If this was fitting for the deliverance in the national and personal life that the Psalmist celebrates, it is supremely fitting for the delivering act of Christ (Bruce, 258).

God has graced us but this grace was not received by our own right but in Christ: God's grace is freely bestowed on them "in the Beloved." This designation marks Christ out as the supreme object of the Father's love (Bruce, 258).

B. Praise for Redemption and Final Reconciliation (1:7-10)

**1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,
1:8 which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight.**

In verses 7 and 8, the way in which we have been blessed in the Beloved One (i.e. Christ) is elaborated upon in terms of our salvation (Lincoln, 27). We have been blessed because in Him we have redemption and forgiveness.

The concept of redemption is found both in the OT and in the Greco-Roman world. To redeem means to buy or purchase. It is the act of freeing someone, whether a slave, a prisoner, or someone in debt through the payment of a price.

In the OT, "redemption" is used when God delivered His people from foreign domination, either when they were in exile, or when they were first delivered from their slavery in Egypt. It is also used in a spiritual sense as well.

In Roman culture, freedom from slavery could be purchased by the slave himself or a benefactor by depositing money into the treasury of the temple of a god or goddess. A portion of the money would be kept as a gift by the temple, and the rest would be taken and given to the slave's master to purchase the slave. Once redeemed, the slave was treated as a free man in society, but would then be considered a slave to the god or goddess of the temple. This transfer of ownership was a legal fiction that, for all intents and purposes, didn't have any ramifications in daily life. That is, the slave received his freedom but didn't really have any obligation to the temple gods (Jobes, 116, Carson, Commentary on the NT use of the OT, 1018). In the

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

Bible, however, this is not a fiction. When the believer is freed from sin he becomes a slave to God.

Redemption is also a term used when a slave was on the market and was being auctioned off to the highest bidder. The purchase of the slave by a new owner is called redemption. Christ has purchased us by substituting His own life for ours (i.e we have been bought with a price; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:15; I Pet. 1:18; Rev. 5:9-10, etc.). We have become His possession and are under His care.

Through His sacrifice we have been rescued from the powers which aimed to subjugate us and isolate us from the life of God (Ro. 6:17-18) (TDNT II, 275). We have been freed from the power of sin (Titus 2:14), the flesh (Ro. 8:23), and the power of Satan (Heb. 2:14-15). We have also been redeemed from law (Gal. 3:13; 4:5) - the bondage to the law, the obligation to satisfy its demands (Gal. 4:5; Ro. 7:4), as well as the penalty of the law (Ro.7:6).

Redemption results in righteousness (Ro. 9:16), holiness (I Thess. 3:13), and newness of life (Ro. 6:4).

"Riches" is repeated in this letter with reference to God's attributes; in 2:7 it is used of God's grace, in 1:18 and 3:16 of His glory. In Romans it is used of His kindness (Ro. 2:4), glory (Ro. 9:23) and of His wisdom and knowledge (Ro. 11:33). Paul also speaks of a *superabundance* of God's grace in Romans 5:20.

We bless God (v. 3) because His grace not only supplies redemption and forgiveness but also supplies the wisdom and understanding that is needed to live in Christ. There is no true wisdom outside of grace in Christ (Lincoln, 30).

1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

1:10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth..

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

A mystery is something that has been previously kept secret but now has been made known. God's mystery can only be known if He chooses to reveal it (cf. notes on 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Lincoln, 31).

The mystery of God's will has two aspects to it: (1) that which has been revealed and can be experienced now and (2) that which is yet to come. Presently, we can see the mystery of God's will expressed in the fact that Gentiles have become fellow-heirs of the blessings of the gospel in Christ (3:2-6). The future aspect of His will includes the glory of God's people (Col. 1:27) and the unification of creation (Ro. 8:21; Col. 1:20).

Verses 4 and 5 said that God foreordained the believer's salvation "according to the good pleasure of His will"; now verse 10 informs us that the uniting of the alienated and fragmented universe is also foreordained according to His kind intention. God is "administering" human history in a way that His purposes are being worked out.

The word "administration" (*oikonmian* - οἰκονομίαν) speaks of God directing history so that eventually all things will be summed up in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

In Romans 13:9 the words "summed up" are used of the law being "summed up" in one commandment, "love your neighbor". What Paul means is that this commandment is the central, unifying theme of the law (cf. Matt. 22:34-40 for a similar idea). In Ephesians 1:10 all things are summed up, or unified, in Christ. This is "the mystery of His will" spoken of in verse 9 (summing up and mystery are appositional - Lincoln, 30). In other words, the mystery of God's will is that He is directing history so that the universe, which is now fragmented by sin, will become a coherent totality in Christ (Lincoln, 33; Bruce, 261). This will take place in "the fullness (plaromatos - πληρώματος) of the times."

The "fullness of times" is the object of what God is administrating. In other words, the sequence of time periods (note: "times" is plural) in history is under God's control and will come to a climax when God unites the universe according to His purpose. In Gal. 4:4 God sent His Son into the world "when the fullness of time had come," that is, He sent His Son when the time was ripe for His coming. In the same way, God will direct every era to climax in a

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

period when the mystery of His will is to be revealed (Lincoln, 32), namely, the reconciliation of all things to Himself in Christ (v. 10; Bruce, 261).

Presently, God's masterpiece in reconciliation is seen in reconciling Jews and Gentiles (3:9), but eventually, all mutually hostile elements in creation will be united as well (Bruce, 261-262).

The things in heaven include the spiritual forces, both good and evil, which compete for the allegiance of humanity (cf. 1:21-22). At His exaltation, God has placed all things under Christ's feet. Christ is now head of all things (1:22) and fills all (1:23; 4:10). He is Lord of heaven and earth, which enables all things in the cosmos to be summed up in Him.

The NLT (a paraphrase) says it simply: And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ--everything in heaven and on earth.

Discovery of this mystery is through God's good pleasure. We bless God for His goodness.

NOTE: Note the repeated emphasis on the divine initiative in salvation as seen in the vocabulary related to God's will or purpose or plan: "according to the kind intention of His *will*" (v. 5), "the mystery of His *will*" (v. 9), "His kind *intention* which He *purposed*" (v. 9), "according to His *purpose*" (v. 11), "the *counsel* of His *will*" (v. 11). Indeed, no fewer than 11x in these verses do we find vocabulary reflective of divine sovereignty: He *elected* us (v. 4), He *predestined* us (v. 5), His *good pleasure* (v. 5), God's *will* (v. 5), God's *will* (v. 9), His *good pleasure* (v. 9), His *purpose* (v. 9), He *foreordained* us (v. 11), His *purpose* (v. 11), His *counsel* (v. 11), His *will* (v. 11).

C. Praise for Assurance of the Believer's Heritage (1:11-14)

In Him

1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

The believer is now related to the cosmic Christ in whom all things are summed up. Verse 11 returns to the blessings given us.

Verse 11 states that we have "obtained an inheritance" (*eklerothamen* - ἐκκληρώθημεν) which is a fairly poor translation. Literally, the word means to be appointed or chosen (NIV) by lot and is used of dividing the Promised Land by lot (LXX Num. 26:55-56). In other Greek literature, it can simply mean, "to be destined, or chosen." Israel is called "God's lot" or "portion" (Deut. 9:29). The believer's allotment is in the sovereignty of God (we are predestined), that is, we *have been* appointed by lot by Him (Lincoln, 36). It is our destiny to be assigned as God's portion, as His inheritance.

Being chosen by God is linked to the purpose of His plan in accordance with His will. God is carrying out His will and part of His will is that we become His. The reason why follows in verse 12.

We have been made His allotment for the praise of His glory. In verse 4 we saw that we were chosen to be holy and blameless and in verses 5 and 6 we were predestined to be brought in a relationship to Him and to the praise of the glory of His grace (God's grace is glorified by choosing sinners for the blessings of salvation), and in verses 11 and 12 it is to the praise of His glory. In the end, God's working in the church results in His own glorification. The idea of God working for His own name's sake or for His glory is an integral part of OT thinking (Deut. 32:9-9; Isa. 43:7, 21; 48:9-11; Jer. 13:11, etc.). The praise of God's glory is not just an act of worship; it is the glory of the church's entire existence.

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

Those "who first hoped in Christ" refers back to "we" in the same verse (they are in apposition). The word translated as "first" is a participle that only appears once in the Greek NT. It stresses the notion of "ahead of time", "beforehand," or "already." This participle ("the first to hope") appears in the perfect tense indicating that the action is completed and the results still continue. To put these ideas together, we could say that the believers have already hoped in Christ. Their hope came into existence when they believed and it continues even as Paul wrote.

[It is debated who "we" refers to. If Paul is speaking of the Jews as those who first hoped in Christ, then the "you also" of verse 13 includes the Gentiles. Although both Jews and Gentiles have been chosen and both are destined for the praise of His glory, that is not the point being made here.]

1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

The truth of the gospel accomplishes salvation. Paul refers to the gospel as the message of truth because he is focusing on the *reality* of God's saving purpose. This message is not limited to Jewish believers but is for Gentiles as well ("you also").

Believing forms the link to receiving the Spirit. We are sealed by the Spirit when we believe (The aorist participle "having believed" [πιστεύσαντες] indicates action occurring at the same time as that of the main verb "were sealed" [ἐσφραγίσθητε] cf. Acts 19:2). A seal carries the notions of ownership and protection. Cattle and slaves were branded with their owner's seal identifying them as their own property. In the OT it is a sign on God's people to protect them from destruction (Ezek. 9:4-6), and is also significant in Rev. 7:1-8 and 9:4. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is a sign to believers that they belong to God. The Holy Spirit Himself is a seal that marks believers out until the day of redemption (4:30). He is the Spirit promised in the OT, i.e. "the Spirit of promise" (Gal. 3:14; Acts 2:17 cf. Joel 2:28-32). The sealing of the Spirit is another specific blessing for which God is to be blessed (1:3 - Lincoln, 39-40).

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as the guarantee or pledge (deposit) of our inheritance. Just as a down payment is a first installment and a guarantee that the full payment is coming (Gen. 38:17-18 of items Judah gave to Tamar), so the Holy Spirit is an installment and guarantee that our salvation (i.e. our inheritance) will be complete at the end of the age. This too reveals Paul's "already/not yet" eschatology. The Spirit is given ahead of the consummation, but as only the guarantee of what is yet to come -the completion of our salvation (Lincoln, 40-41).

The concept of believers having an inheritance is found throughout Paul's letters (Gal. 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30; 5:21; I Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Ro. 4:13-14; 8:17).

The NASB translation "with a view to the redemption of God's own possession" is very difficult to understand. The meaning is "until the redemption of the purchased possession" (I Pet. 2:9; Exo 19:5; Acts 20:28; Ps. 74:2 - Bruce, 267). In other words, Paul is saying that God has redeemed us for His possession and has given us the Holy Spirit now as a down payment that we will be purchased in full (redeemed). If God makes a down payment, we have absolute assurance that we will become God's possession, His inheritance, in a total sense.

So we find two ideas of inheritance in these verses. First, we will become God's possession in an absolute sense. That is, we will become His inheritance. But our salvation is also our inheritance as well. And all of this is to "the praise of His glory." Believers were chosen to bring glory to God.

Isaiah 43:21: "This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise."

Conclusion:

"In one sense the language is exalted and extravagant and yet, in another, the very repetition of phrases reveals its poverty and inadequacy to do justice to its subject - salvation on the grandest scale and broadest canvas" (Lincoln, 43).

Christ is clearly the mediator for every blessing we have (the blessing we have are "in Christ" - 1:1, 3, 10, 12; "in Him" - 1:4, 7, 9, 13; "through Jesus Christ" - 1:5; "in the Beloved" - 1:6). "Yet for all the centrality of Christ's mediation, His work has God and His purpose as its source and God's glory as its object. The theocentric perspective remains dominant. God's electing purpose shapes past, present, and future. Salvation comes from Him, and its object is not simply that human needs may be met, though it accomplishes that, but that God Himself may be glorified; hence the variously worded refrain - "to the praise of *His glory*" (Lincoln, 43).

God is working out all of history to accomplish His purposes and our salvation is part of God's overall plan to unite all things in Christ. That is, believers are blessed, but they must realize that to be in Christ is to be part of God's comprehensive plan for the universe.

III. INTRODUCTORY THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (1:15-23)

A. Thanksgiving for Faith, Love and Prayer for an Increase in Knowledge (1:15-19)

1:15 For this reason I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

1:16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

Paul had received news of the believers' love and faith and recognized these characteristics as evidence of God's work of grace (cf. Col. 1:3-4; Bruce, 268). Their love and faith are "in the Lord" which does not indicate the object toward which they are directed, but the sphere in which love and faith live and act (O'Brien, 128).

"For this reason" probably points back to the whole preceding section (Lincoln, 54). Because of the work of salvation that God had accomplished (1:3-14), Paul was both thankful and motivated to pray.

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

First, Paul tells the Ephesians that he does not cease giving thanks for them. This does not mean that there is never an interrupted moment when he is not giving thanks, but that he regularly intercedes and thanks God for them (Lincoln, 55; O'Brien, 128).

Paul not only thanks God for the fruit that is being born in their lives but he also prays in their behalf. Verses 17-19 give the content of Paul's prayers (note the introductory "that" of verse 17 - often in Greek this word [ὅτι - *hina*] when following verbs of asking, requesting, speaking, etc. spells out the content; O'Brien, 129, n. 156).

1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

Paul addresses his prayer to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." There is a distinction made between the Father and Christ, the latter being subordinate. "The Father of glory" is a Semitic phrase. "Glory" denotes the divine splendor and power (Lincoln, 56). Since God is the source of glory, He may be called the Father of glory (Bruce, 269). Often, the designations for God that Paul uses in prayer are appropriate to the request being made. In the opening chapter of Ephesians, He is clearly a God of glory.

In 1:3-14 God is blessed for giving every spiritual blessing that He gives believers and in 1:8 for giving wisdom and insight. Now Paul prays that the implications of what has been given will be fully grasped and that these ideals would be realized in the Ephesians' experience (Bruce, 269). Unlike many modern Christians, Paul does not pray for fresh spiritual blessings as if they needed more than what God has already given them. At the same time, he doesn't want them to be complacent. He assumes that even though God has given them every spiritual blessing, they will continually need to grow in their appreciation and understanding of what they have.

Paul prays for God to give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." A similar request is made in Colossians 1:9. "Spirit" could be a reference to the believer's own spirit to which God will impart

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

understanding or to the Holy Spirit. Since the "revelation" word-group always describes a disclosure given by God, the Holy Spirit is more likely intended (O'Brien, 132). In Ephesians when "revelation" and related terms are used ("revelation" 3:3, 5 and "to make known or disclose" - γνωρίζω -1:9, 3:3, 5, 10; 6:19), they are often connected to the various aspects of the mystery of what God has done in Christ. Ephesians 3:5 specifically links this revelation with the Spirit. I Corinthians 2:6-16 also speaks of the revelation that takes place through the Spirit in making what God has revealed about Himself known to us (see my notes on these verses).

Divine revelation that came through the prophets was truth that was foundational in priority and authority (2:20; 3:5), but the same Spirit also reveals things to all believers so they can understand their salvation and live in light of it. This is not new truth, but an ability to understand what has already been revealed so that we can know Him (Col. 1:9, 10). Growth in the knowledge of God is a work of the Spirit who reveals truth to the believer.

To know God means to have a close personal relationship with Him. It begins with a fear of Him, is linked to His demands, and is often described as knowing His will (O'Brien, 133). There are both moral and intellectual dimensions to the knowledge of God. In the context, the knowledge of God is grounded in a life of faith and love, is produced by the Spirit, and is explained in Eph. 3:18-19 as that which allows us to "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Lincoln, 57, 58). In Colossians 1:10 Paul prays that the believer is "*fruitful in every good work*" and increasing in the knowledge of God (Bruce, 269).

The rest of Paul's prayer is for a threefold enlightenment. These are three different aspects of salvation that believers should be experiencing (Lincoln, 58).

1:18 I pray that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know (1) what is the hope of His calling, (2) what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

1:19 and (3) what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

Paul desires that the eyes of the believer's understanding be enlightened (Psa. 13:3; 19:8). In II Corinthians 4:6 he conveys a similar idea where he speaks of the "light creating God" who has shone in people's hearts to give them illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (the word "illumination" is formed from the verb "enlighten" used here). The result of such knowledge is the ability to understand His ways and purpose, (especially how He has dealt with His people), the hope to which He has called them, the rich inheritance which He possesses in them, and the mighty power with which He energizes them (Bruce, 270).

Lincoln sees the perfect tense of "being enlightened" as something that began with their conversion. Prior to this they were darkened in their understanding (4:18) and in a state of darkness (5:8). But the transformation of life and illumination of the Spirit have affected their hearts (Lincoln, 58; + Kent). Paul now prays that this state of enlightenment will continue.

First, he desires that we know the hope of God's calling. To know "the hope of His calling" is to enjoy the hope we possess as a result of being chosen by God before the foundation of the world. "Hope" in the Bible is not wishful thinking but the assurance and anticipation of experiencing God's future promises (I Thess. 5:8; Gal. 5:5; I Cor. 15:52-55; Tit. 1:2; 3:7). The believer is to hope for the consummation of his salvation, the summing up of all things in Christ (1:10). He should know the significance of what God's call has for the future (Snodgrass, 75). Once we were separated from Christ and had no hope (2:12), but now through the working of the Spirit we can have an increasing knowledge of the hope into which God has brought us by His call (Lincoln, 59).

Secondly, he prays that we know what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in us are.

The inheritance spoken of is us being God's inheritance, not the inheritance we will receive. In the OT, God's inheritance is used as a synonym for His people. Here, His inheritance involves both Jews and Greeks for it is "among the saints." (Lincoln, 59-60). God has made us His treasured possession and will redeem us completely on the final day.

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

"The riches of His glory" is the glory that the believers share with Christ (Bruce, 270). The inheritance in the saints has been alluded to in 1:11 where God has claimed us as His portion in Christ and in 1:14 where God will redeem us as His possession. The fact that God places such a high value on sinners who bear many marks of imperfection is explained in that He sees us in Christ, and as chosen in Him from the beginning. Christ holds a supreme place in the love of God. Being united with Christ and being made partakers of His resurrection life makes God's love for us consistent with His love for Christ. Paul's prayer is that the readers may appreciate the value which God has placed on them and His eternal purpose through them as the first fruits of the reconciled universe, and that they may accept with grateful humility the grace and glory He has lavished upon them (Bruce, 270-271).

Thirdly, Paul also wants us to know of the greatness of God's power that is working on behalf of the believer. He piles up expressions in order to convey it adequately. He calls it "*the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power.*" This is the same power "**which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**" (1:20).

The exceeding greatness of God's power is seen in relation to Christ. If the death of Christ is the supreme demonstration of the love of God (Ro. 5:8), then His resurrection is the supreme demonstration of His power (1:20). This power was also evident when Christ was seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places after He had risen from the dead.

Two aspects of Christ's victory over death are expanded upon in the NT- His resurrection and His exaltation to power (Ro. 8:34; Acts 2:32-35). In the OT the right hand of God indicated the position of favor and power (Psalm 110:1). Paul longs for us to know that this same life-giving power is at work in the people of God. We simply need to realize and appropriate it (Lincoln, 61).

The primary reference to power is the power of God to save and transform our lives, as the preceding context and the context that follows demonstrate. The union of the believer with Christ is tied to Christian faith and life. The power that works in us is the power with which He raised Christ from the dead (Bruce, 272-273). The indwelling Spirit that supplies the hope

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

of our resurrection (Ro. 8:11) also supplies the ability to live in newness of life (Ro. 6:6-11; 8:12-14).

Though this is descriptive of the power of God, it also prepares the way for 2:4-7; by mentioning the raising and enthronement of Christ, we can move to the raising and enthronement of His body, the church (Bruce, 272).

In the view of the history of salvation as a cosmic drama, the exaltation of Christ to heaven means that the shift in the center of gravity has moved from earth to heaven, for that is where the central figure of salvation has moved. This is crucial in understanding the writer's perspective in the letter, for what has happened to Christ becomes determinative for the church in relationship to the heavenly realm (Lincoln, 62).

Christ's exalted position is said to be **"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come."** (1:21).

Various designations are used to express the supremacy of Christ. There is evidently a succession of levels in the heavenly spheres (Eph. 3:10; 6:12). The same powers are mentioned in I Cor. 15:24 and in Col. 1:16 and are the enemies which God has placed under His feet (Lincoln, 63). But whatever levels of authority there are in the universe, they are all inferior to Christ. He has ascended high above all the heavens (Eph. 4:10) (Bruce, 273).

The scope of the victory that God has secured in exalting Christ is made clear in the enumeration of the cosmic powers. As in Philippians 2:6-11, He is far above every name. "Every name" doesn't mean personal identity as much as designation of rank or honor. Universal homage will be offered to Christ. The same idea is found in the expressions "the firstborn of all creation" and "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:15-18) (Bruce, 275).

1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

"He put all things under His feet" is a quotation from Ps. 8:6, which repeats the language, used of the creation of man (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). The Psalmist is contemplating the honor that God has bestowed upon man, giving

Ephesians 1:1-23 (rev. 2/3/14)

him dominion over all the works of His hands. In the NT the words are applied to Christ here and in I Corinthians 15:27 and Hebrews 2:6-9 as well. The principalities and powers, insofar as they are hostile toward Christ, are subjugated, put down by force, and are placed at Christ's feet. On the other hand, the church as being one with Him receives Christ's supremacy by means of sanctification and love (Bruce, 275).

Christ is not just given a position of authority, He is now exercising universal lordship and is the head of the church (Phil. 3:21; Col. 2:15). Someday when Christ returns, His Lordship will be exercised over all creation. However, it will not reach complete fulfillment until death has been abolished and God is all in all (I Cor. 15:23-28; Heb. 2:8).

"Head" is understood in the sense of supremacy. He is head over every principality and power (2:10), and is head of the church.

The supremacy and power of Christ over the universe is seen to be for the benefit of believers (O'Brien, 145), for Christ was given to the church. In this way, the church is seen to have a special role in God's purpose for the cosmos (Lincoln, 69-70).

1:23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The further sense of the word "head" comes into play, as the church is His body. The organic union between head and body suggests the vital union between Christ and the church (Bruce, 275).

Lincoln deals with the idea of "fullness" from 72-78. His conclusion is that it is Christ who is the One who fills the cosmos, but at the present, only the church can actually be called "His fullness".