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REFORMATION
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**THE
REFORMATION
STUDY BIBLE**

English Standard Version

R.C. SPROUL

General Editor

RT *Reformation Trust*

A DIVISION OF LIGONIER MINISTRIES

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

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421 Ligonier Court
Sanford, FL 32771

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ESV Text Edition: 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Theological notes adapted from R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Tyndale House, 1992), used with permission. Some notes in the New Testament adapted from: G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2011), used with permission. G.K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2012), used with permission. D.A. Carson and G.K. Beale, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2007), used with permission. G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), used with permission. G.K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), used with permission. G.K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), used with permission. G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans, 1999), used with permission. Topical article “Creeds and Confessions” adapted from Burk Parsons, *Why Do We Have Creeds?* (P&R, 2012), used with permission.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Interior design by Metaleap Creative.

Styles

Hard Cover, White
Hard Cover, Crimson
Leather-Like, Light Gray
Leather-Like, Light Brown
Genuine Leather, Black
Genuine Leather, Burgundy
Luxury Leather, Montana Cowhide, Black

ISBN

978-1-56769-440-6
978-1-56769-441-3
978-1-56769-443-7
978-1-56769-444-4
978-1-56769-445-1
978-1-56769-446-8
978-1-56769-447-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014958828

Printed in the United States of America.



R S B S A M P L E

Topical Article

“The Church” from Ephesians

'that you were at that time separated from Christ, ^malienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to ⁿthe covenants of promise, ^ohaving no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were ^pfar off have been brought near ^qby the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For ^rhe himself is our peace, ^swho has made us both one and has broken down ^tin his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ^uordinances, that he might create in himself one ^vnew man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might ^wreconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and ^xpreached peace to you who were ^yfar off and peace to those who were ^znear. ¹⁸For ^athrough him we both have ^baccess in ^cone Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer ^dstrangers and aliens, ^ebut you are ^ffellow citizens with

¹²ⁱ 1 Cor. 12:2; [ch. 5:8; Col. 3:7]
^m ch. 4:18; Col. 1:21; [Ezek. 14:5; Gal. 2:15, 4:8]
ⁿ See Rom. 9:4
^o 1 Thess. 4:13; See ch. 1:18
¹³ ^p ver. 17; Acts 2:39 ^q [Col. 1:20]; See Rom. 3:25
¹⁴ ^r Ps. 72:7; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 9:10; [Col. 3:15]; See Luke 2:14 ^s See Gal. 3:28 ^t Col. 1:21, 22; [Rom. 7:4]
¹⁵ ^u Col. 2:14, 20
^v See Rom. 6:4
¹⁶ ^w Col. 1:20-22; [1 Cor. 12:13]

¹ Or *sojourners*

¹⁷ ⁱ Isa. 57:19 ¹⁸ ^j ver. 13 ² Deut. 4:7; Ps. 148:14 ¹⁸ ^k [John 14:6] ^h ch. 3:12; [John 10:7, 9]; See Rom. 5:2 ^c ch. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13; [John 4:23] ¹⁹ ^d ver. 12; [Heb. 11:13; 13:14] ⁴ Phil. 3:20; [Heb. 12:22, 23]

THE CHURCH

The church refers to all the people who belong to the Lord, those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ. Various other images and expressions are also used to define or describe the church. The church is called the body of Christ, the family of God, the people of God, the elect, the bride of Christ, the company of the redeemed, the communion of saints, the new Israel, among others.

The New Testament word for church, *ekklesia*, means “those called out.” The church is viewed as an assembly or gathering of the elect, those whom God calls out of the world, away from sin and into a state of grace.

Because the church on earth is always what St. Augustine called “a mixed body,” it is necessary to distinguish between the visible church and the invisible church. In the visible church (consisting of those who make a profession of faith, are baptized, and enrolled in membership of the institutional church), Jesus indicated there would be tares growing along with the wheat. Though the church is “holy,” it always, in this age, has an unholy mixture within it. Not all of those who honor Christ with their lips honor Him with their heart as well. Since God alone can read the human heart, the true elect are visible to Him, but in some measure invisible to us. The invisible church is transparent but completely visible to God. It is the task of the elect to make the invisible church visible.

The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The church is one. Though fragmented by denominations, the elect are united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. The church is holy because it is sanctified by God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The church is catholic (the word *catholic* means “universal”) in that its membership extends across the earth including people from all nations. The church is apostolic in that the teaching of the apostles as contained in sacred Scripture is the foundation of the church and the authority by which the church is governed.

It is the duty and privilege of every Christian to be united to the church of Christ. It is our solemn responsibility not to neglect the gathering together of the saints in corporate worship, to be under the nurture and discipline of the church, and to be actively involved as witnesses in the mission of the church.

The church is not so much an organization as it is an organism. It is made up of living parts. It is called the body of Christ. Just as a human body is organized to function in unity by the co-working and codependence of many parts, so the church as a body displays unity and diversity. Though ruled by one “head”—Christ—the body has many members, each gifted and endowed by God to contribute to the work of the whole body.

2:12 at that time. Contrast with “But now” in v. 13; see also 5:8. In Rom. 9:3–5, Paul lists the privileges of Jews. Here he lists five disadvantages of Gentiles.

alienated . . . strangers to the covenants of promise. They were not citizens of the nation with whom God was in covenant relation. Though God’s relationship with Israel included a promise to bless the nations (Gen. 12:3), Gentiles had no awareness of that hope.

without God in the world. God has revealed Himself to all humanity in nature and in the conscience. Yet this general or natural revelation is insufficient to save, and apart from the Lord’s act of regeneration, all people suppress the truth that this revelation gives them (4:17, 18; Acts 17:22–31; Rom. 1:18–2:16). The Gentiles whom Paul addresses in Ephesians were particularly bad off before Christ because they had no access to the Lord’s special revelation to Israel, which reveals the plan of salvation, and so

they turned to idolatry. It remains true today that all those who are strangers to the covenants of promise and have no access to special revelation (the Bible) are without hope and without God in the world. They have no way of knowing His plan of redemption.

2:13 in Christ Jesus . . . by the blood of Christ. There are two dimensions to Gentiles’ being brought near to God. The first is their experience of spiritual union with Christ (vv. 4–10); the second is the historical basis of that experience in Christ’s sacrificial death (vv. 14–16; 1:7).

far off . . . near. See v. 17.

2:14–16 See 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–12 and notes.

2:14 the dividing wall of hostility. This refers to the courts of the temple in Jerusalem. A wall separated Gentiles and Jews, and signs were posted excluding Gentiles from the inner courts where sacrifices for sin were performed. Paul interprets it

as emblematic of the law’s function of keeping Israel separate from the surrounding pagan peoples.

2:15 abolishing the law of commandments. Christ offered in His own body the final sacrifice to which the temple’s sacrifices merely pointed. The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament that separated Jews and Gentiles are no longer appropriate for God’s people after their fulfillment in Christ.

create in himself one new man. Paul repeats the “creation” theme of v. 10, implying now that the age-old division between Jew and Gentile has been overcome in the reconciling death of Christ on the cross (v. 16). As the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45; cf. Rom. 5:12–21), Christ is the head of a new human race, which is distinguished not only by unprecedented unity but also by His “true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).

2:17, 18 Isaiah prophesied a day when God’s peace would be proclaimed to Jews “far” and “near” (Is. 57:19). Through the gospel of Christ, the Spirit

R S B S A M P L E

Book of the Bible Introduction

Ephesians

The EPISTLE of PAUL the APOSTLE to the

Ephesians

TITLE AND AUTHOR

The title of the book comes from the salutation (1:1). The author is Paul, as evidenced by the letter itself (1:1; 3:1). Themes and language common in Paul's earlier letters appear frequently in Ephesians, and the verbal similarities with Colossians are especially striking. However, modern scholarship has challenged both the traditional view on the authorship and recipients of this letter.

In the modern era, Pauline authorship of Ephesians has been questioned. Some scholars say Ephesians appears to be too dependent on Colossians. Although the letter seems like Paul's writing, its phrases tend to build and multiply more than in his earlier letters. The letter strikes some as less instructional and more prayerful. Ideas that are only implicit in his earlier letters (e.g., that beyond local churches there is one worldwide church) become explicit here. The author describes "hearing" of his readers' faith rather than having witnessed its evidence in person, although Paul had ministered for several years in Ephesus (cf. Gal. 4:13, 14; Col. 1:9; 2:1). Such considerations lead many to say that Ephesians was written by one of Paul's students who was attempting to develop some of Paul's ideas, especially those in Colossians.

The language and style of Ephesians differ in some respects from Paul's other letters. Still, they are so similar to Paul's that even if the letter did not bear his name, it is difficult to imagine the church crediting it to anyone else. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that a student of Paul would be so eager to imitate his teacher that he would transcribe verses from Colossians word for word, and yet be so daring as to move dramatically beyond Paul's theology of the exalted and reigning Christ to one of a universal church.

The verbal similarities with Colossians are most easily explained by assuming that Paul wrote Ephesians shortly after completing Colossians. Paul's devotional and prayerful tone reaches its height as he contemplates the eternal and universal significance of Christ's church. In this way, he continues his reflections on the subject that dominated his correspondence with the Colossians—the eternal and universal significance of Christ. Because some early manuscripts lack "in Ephesus" at 1:1 (see Date and Occasion below and ESV text note on 1:1), some have proposed that this epistle was a circular letter addressed not only to Ephesus but also to other churches in Asia (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1; Rev. 1:4, 11). This wider audience could explain not only Paul's mention of "hearing" of his readers' faith but also the fact that his tone is more meditative and less directed to specific local crises.

DATE AND OCCASION

The identity of the letter's original audience has also been questioned. This letter may have had a broader audience than the church at Ephesus alone. Some of the oldest Gk. manuscripts do not include "in Ephesus" in the address of the letter (1:1), reading instead: "to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus." Several early Christian writers seem unaware of a specifically Ephesian address. The letter lacks the personal references and greetings Paul almost always included in his correspondence, and there are other details about which Paul writes that seem to conflict with what we know about his ministry in Ephesus (e.g., 3:1–13).

At the same time, no manuscripts name any other city as the address of the epistle. Many scholars believe Ephesians was written as a general letter to a number of churches in the region, which would be in keeping with the sweeping contents of the letter as a whole. It is possible that Paul originally sent the letter to Ephesus, but as the letter was sent from church to church the address was omitted because the contents had little to do with Ephesus in particular. Or, it may be that the letter was originally in two forms, one for the Ephesians that contained "in Ephesus" and one for general circulation that did not.

Questions about to whom Paul wrote this letter also lead to questions about when he wrote the letter. The imprisonment mentioned in 3:1 and 6:20 is the same as that in Colossians 4:3, 10, 18, and is probably Paul's two-year house arrest in Rome (A.D. 60–62), recounted in Acts 28.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It lay between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire and was among the five most prominent cities in the empire during the first century. During Paul's unusually long stay in Ephesus, it became the center for evangelizing the western part of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). Paul's affectionate ties with this church are evident in his farewell speech to its elders (Acts 20:16–38).

Ephesus's most prominent civic monument, the temple of the goddess Diana, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city is described in one inscription as the "nurturer" of

the goddess, and the goddess in turn makes Ephesus the "most glorious" of the Asian cities. People from the area would have appreciated the irony of Paul's words about Christ's nourishing His own body, the church (5:29). They would have appreciated the point of contrast when Paul describes Christ's church as a glorious or radiant bride (5:27). It was also in Ephesus that Paul's preaching of Christ came into dramatic conflict with an important trade dependent on pagan worship (Acts 19:23–41) and that the gospel inspired a great turning away from the occult (Acts 19:17–20). Paul's call to expose the deeds of darkness (5:8–14) and prepare for war against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12; cf. 1:20, 21; 3:10) would have struck the original readers with special force.

GENRE

Because of its style, some have suggested that the book of Ephesians should be classified as a written sermon or a theological essay. The book, however, generally follows the standard epistolary conventions of the first century (see Introduction to the Epistles). It contains a standard letter opening (1:1, 2), body (1:3–6:20), and conclusion (6:21–24). It should, therefore, be classified as an epistle. As he does in his other epistles, Paul adapts the standard conventions to his own purposes in his letter to the Ephesians. For example, instead of moving immediately from his opening greeting to thanksgiving and prayer as he does elsewhere, he introduces in Ephesians an extended rhapsody (1:3–14) immediately after the greeting and before the thanksgiving. This has resulted in some disagreement concerning whether the body of the text begins with 1:3 or with 2:1. However, because 1:3–3:21 is a coherent unit, it is preferable to identify the beginning of the body of the letter at 1:3.

LITERARY FEATURES

The most striking feature of this book is how it reflects a deeply and thoroughly Pauline approach to thinking about the Christian life. Chapters 1–3 build up the "indicatives," the glorious statements of fact that undergird Christianity. Here Paul lays out the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus through

His work of redemption. Chapters 4–6 then offer the “imperatives,” the commands regarding how we are live in light of our calling and the riches that are already ours in Christ.

Another important structural feature of this letter is the repetition of the verb “walk.” Believers formerly “walked” in trespasses and sins (2:1) but now have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Chapters 4–6, the applicatory section of this epistle, are structured around the Christian’s “walk,” or way of thinking and living. Paul begins this section by urging us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1). He later summons us “no longer [to] walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds” (4:17). We are to be “imitators of God, as beloved children. And [to] walk in love” (5:1, 2a). We are to “walk as children of light” (5:8) and “look carefully then how [we] walk, not as unwise but as wise” (5:15). Paul picked up “walking” as a metaphor for one’s pattern of conduct from OT precedents (e.g., Deut. 5:32; 10:12; Ps. 1:1; 119:1).

Although the letter does not frequently quote the OT in a formal manner (see Eph. 4:8), it alludes to it and engages it in other ways. Terms such as “redemption,” “forgiveness,” “adoption,” and “inheritance” evoke specific covenant blessings mentioned in the OT (1:5, 6, 11). Paul invokes such familiar old covenant realities as “circumcision,” “the commonwealth of Israel,” “the covenants of promise,” and “temple” in order to help believers understand the nature and identity of the new covenant people of God (2:11, 12, 21). Furthermore, the phrase “the helmet of salvation” directly picks up terminology from the OT (6:17; cf. Is. 59:17). Other pieces of the “armor of God” allude to weaponry wielded by the Lord, His Messiah, or His messengers in the OT (Ps. 144:1–2; Is. 11:5; 49:2; 52:7). No small part of the literary craft of this epistle is the way in which Paul has seamlessly incorporated OT motifs.

CHARACTERISTICS AND PRIMARY THEMES

One of the key words in this letter is “mystery,” which appears seven times (1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32;

6:9). The first statement is the most important: Paul tells us that God is now revealing the “mystery of his will,” which is the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. The great evidence that this cosmic redemption is happening is the church, the body of Christ, His new humanity (1:23, 2:15). In the church, God is uniting Jew and Gentile, reconciling them and tearing down the “wall of hostility” between them through the cross (2:14). This “mystery of Christ” was hidden in past times (i.e., before the coming of Christ), but is now seen clearly: “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel” (3:6).

That means, then, that the church is central to God’s purpose in the world because it is a sign of the final reconciliation of all things in Christ. The church is God’s precious possession, a colony in which the Lord of history has begun to fashion the renewed humanity after His own image (1:10–14; 2:11–22; 3:6, 9–11; 4:1–6:9). The church is a community where God’s power to reconcile people to Himself is experienced and shared in transformed relationships (2:1–10; 4:1–16; 4:32–5:2; 5:22–6:9). It is a new temple, a building of people, grounded in the sure revelation of what God has done in history (2:19–22; 3:17–19). The church is an organism in which power and authority are exercised after the pattern of Christ (1:22; 5:25–27), and its stewardship is a means of serving Him (4:11–16; 5:22–6:9). The church is an outpost in a dark world (5:3–17), looking for the day of final redemption. Above all, the church is the bride preparing for the approach of her lover and husband (5:22–32).

THEOLOGY OF EPHESIANS

Ephesians is a summary of Paul’s gospel. In ch. 1, Paul reflects on the triune God’s accomplishment of our salvation: God the Father chose His people before the foundation of the world (1:3–6); God the Son accomplished redemption for His people (1:7–10); and God the Spirit applies redemption to us and assures us that the inheritance is ours (1:11–14). Throughout this epistle, Paul reflects on salvation in personal and individual terms (2:1–10), in corporate terms (2:11–22), in cosmic terms (1:9–10; 6:10–20), and in historical terms (3:1–6). Redemption is both individual and cosmic; as such, it has profound implications for the way in

which God's people understand themselves and live together (4:1–5:21). In particular, Paul uses the plural pronouns “we” and “you” (1:12, 13; 2:1–3, 11–22) to emphasize God's dismantling of the dividing wall between Israel (His ancient covenant people) and the Gentiles through the sacrificial death of Christ, by which the two have been made one and given access to God the Father by the Spirit (2:14, 16–18). In summary, this letter impresses upon us how comprehensive and far-reaching the gospel is.

The gospel also transforms the way we conduct ourselves in marriage, in parenting, and in the workplace (5:22–6:9). Paul prefaces these commands regarding our relationships and roles with two significant points: (1) We are to walk in love as Christ loved and as He gave Himself for us in His atoning death and in His active obedience (5:1). (2) We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21). Love and submission then serve as the foundation to our roles as spouses, parents, children, employers, and employees. We are also kept from moralism by remembering the cross and our redemption as that which enables to live the lives to which Paul calls us in 5:22–6:9.

EPHESIANS IN THE LARGER STORY OF THE BIBLE

In 1:9, 10, Paul tells us that God's purpose, “set forth in Christ,” is “a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.” All of history, including the history recorded throughout the OT (4:8, quoting Ps. 68:18), moves toward this goal and destination—the bringing together of all things under the sovereign rule of the crucified and exalted Christ (1:19–22). Christ's mediatorial reign is most visible in the church (1:22; 4:7–14), through whom “the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places . . . according to the eternal purpose that [God] has realized in Christ Jesus” (3:10, 11).

Even so, under the new covenant, “the mystery of Christ” was first made known by the Spirit and through Christ's “holy apostles and prophets” (3:5). This mystery, whose fulfillment was not yet

visible during the era of the OT, was that Jews and Gentiles would be fellow members of the people of God, on equal terms and without distinction (3:6; cf. 2:14, 15). (Although “hidden” in the sense of “not exhibited in history,” the inclusion of the Gentiles by faith in a coming Messiah was also foretold in the OT, as Paul argues elsewhere; cf. Rom. 3:21, 22; 4:1–17; 15:8–12; Gal. 3:5–14.) Christ's universal reign is now on particular display in His church, drawn from all people and nations who stand alongside one another as spiritual equals in Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IN EPHESIANS

This epistle helps us to understand the critical biblical doctrine of union with Christ. The importance of this doctrine is evident from the opening verses of the book. It is “in Christ” that the Father “has blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3) and that in whom He “chose us before the foundation of the world” and “predestined us for adoption” (1:4, 5). It is “in the Beloved” that we have been “blessed” by the Father's “glorious grace,” and in Christ that we have “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (1:6, 7). In Christ “we have obtained an inheritance” (1:11), and “in him . . . you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13).

Furthermore, it was by being united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection that we were saved by the grace of God (2:1–10). In Christ, the whole church is “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:22) and is the bride of Christ (5:25–33). We are joined to Christ, as the body is to the head, and thus grow into maturity (4:15, 16).

In this letter, Paul particularly emphasizes Christ as raised from the dead as well as our union with Christ in His resurrection. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead made us alive together with Christ (2:5), presently indwells us (3:16, 17), and is at work in us presently “according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (1:19, 20a). Paul's point is plain—in Christ and by the Spirit of the risen Christ, believers have all the resources they need to walk with God in this age.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Paul's teaching on slavery (6:5–9) has been the occasion of both discussion and controversy, particularly within the last two centuries. For further discussion of this issue, see Introduction to Philemon: History of Interpretation. Ephesians 1:3–14 has played a long and crucial role in the Reformed tradition's understanding of the gospel. This pas-

sage is a concise and at the same time comprehensive statement of the gospel that gives expression to the distinctively Reformed approach to the doctrines of grace. Furthermore, Eph. 2:8–10 is one of the most concise and complete presentation of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone that can be found in all of Scripture. Ephesians 6:10–20 has often been emphasized in discussions of spiritual warfare.

R S B S A M P L E

Creeds and Confessions

Apostles' and Nicene

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven;
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;
The holy catholic* church; the communion of saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body;
And the life everlasting. Amen.

*The word "catholic" refers to the universal church.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And we believe in one holy catholic* and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

*The word "catholic" refers to the universal church.

R S B S A M P L E

Maps

Galilee in the Time of Jesus

GALILEE IN THE TIME OF JESUS



