










SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

For We Are
God's Handiwork

EPHESIANS

DOUG WARD

Contents

	Introduction to the <i>Shaped by Scripture</i> Series	4
	Introduction to the Book of Ephesians	7
	Week One: A Chosen Family (Ephesians 1)	16
	Week Two: Unity in the Church (Ephesians 2)	30
	Week Three: The Indwelling of the Spirit (Ephesians 3)	45
	Week Four: Maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:1–24)	58
	Week Five: Walking in the Light (Ephesians 4:25–5:20)	71
	Week Six: Relationships in the Kingdom (Ephesians 5:21–6:9)	85
	Week Seven: Fighting the Battle with Eternity in Mind (Ephesians 6:10–24)	99



Week One: A Chosen Family

EPHESIANS 1

Paul understood that the future viability of the church rested on whether it would be a unified body of believers. The question that Paul faced was how to get the Jewish believers to accept these new gentiles, and how to convince the gentiles to appreciate the Jews. It would not be an easy task. Paul takes these opening words in Ephesians and guides gentile readers on a history lesson of God's work with the Jews.

Paul wants to convince the readers that the Jews are not children of God by their own effort; rather, they were chosen by God, but not for their own sake. God chose them to be a priestly nation that would bring blessing to the whole world. This purpose becomes most clearly evident in the person of Jesus. Non-Jews gained direct access to God because of Christ. Paul wants his gentile readers to know they are fully included in God's family, but he also wants them to appreciate that they are part of a family that started with the Jews.

WEEK 1, DAY 1

Absorb the passage in Ephesians 1 by reading it aloud several times until you become familiar with its verses, words, and phrases.

WEEK 1, DAY 2

EPHESIANS 1

The Setting

In chapter 3 Paul explicitly states that he is in chains, so scholars believe that this letter was written during his confinement in Rome. Paul was not in a prison, but he was under guard, not free to come and go as he pleased. It would be similar to a type of house arrest. For two years Paul was in Rome awaiting his chance to present his case before Caesar, which was his right as a Roman citizen.

The arrest that led to this imprisonment happened years before, when Paul was in Jerusalem. The mistrust from years earlier had not gone away, and Paul had been the focus of unrest because he was suspected of appeasing gentiles. After all of his journeys and all of his work, the Jews and gentiles were still suspicious of each other, even in the church. As Paul sat quietly in his place of confinement, his mind probably wandered to the churches he started and other churches he did not begin, and he worried about their survival. While he could not visit these churches personally, he decided to write a letter that could be read to them.

18

The Message

Part of our struggle as modern readers is to correctly determine the intent of the author. Whenever we read one of Paul's letters, we realize that we are only reading half of the conversation. We must do our best to determine the rest of the conversation from clues within the letter. Ephesians is not an exception to this rule. Reading one of Paul's letters is like listening to a phone conversation in our world; we try to understand the context even as we realize there is another person in the overheard conversation that we do not see or hear.

This letter is intended for a number of churches in Asia Minor that are dominated by gentiles. Paul had never seen many of these churches, so we can assume they were started by people in Paul's other churches. Paul wanted to help these new believers appreciate the value and history of their faith. While Paul was grateful for every gentile believer, he also wanted to ensure that these believers appreciated the Jewish roots of their faith. Such an appreciation, Paul believed, would help unite Jew and gentile and develop a unity in the faith as an example for the world.

WEEK 1, DAY 3

What's Happening in the Passage?

As we read through these passages there are certain ideas and words that were familiar to the original readers but are not as familiar to us. Two thousand years and a vastly different culture obscure some of these ideas from us today. You may encounter some of these words and ideas in your study today. Some of them have been explained in more detail in the **Word Study Notes**. If you want even more detail you can supplement this study with a Bible dictionary or commentary.

1. Ephesians 1:1-2

This is Paul's typical greeting in his letters. Paul always greets his fellow Christians by calling them saints, or designating them as holy. Today we tend to reserve that kind of terminology for only those special people whom we think rise above other believers, but for Paul, holy people or saints are simply people who are set apart for the mission of God.

Paul always ends his greetings by wishing his people grace and peace. By extending grace, Paul is wishing them unmerited favor and kindness from God. It is a gentle reminder that we are not deserving of God's grace. He also wishes them peace, which is a grounded settledness, regardless of circumstances, that God alone can provide. It is a fitting and uplifting greeting.

2. Ephesians 1:3-10

This is a passage that introduces us to the word "predestined."¹ As we approach this passage, we must remain grounded in the historical context of Paul and his letter. We might be tempted to start any conversation about predestination with our modern arguments, but Paul lived 1,500 years prior to the Reformation, so we must try to ascertain what Paul meant in his time.

In Asia Minor people were used to hearing the word "mystery" in relation to religious thought, so Paul imported this word into

WORD STUDY NOTES #2

¹We tend to notice the big words, and in this section the big word is "predestined." Yet we often fail to see the smaller words and the historical context that stands behind the passage. Notice the use of the first- and second-person plural throughout this passage. Each time words like "chosen" and "predestined" are used, it is within the context of the "we" group (first-person plural). Paul identifies that group as the Jews—the first to hope in Christ. Yet this is also the group that is rejecting Christ while the gentiles are accepting Christ. So in Ephesians, the "predestined" are not a limited group of people for whom salvation is selectively possible; the word "predestined" is instead a simple reference to the history of the Jewish people.

WORD STUDY NOTES #3

¹ This is language that we are familiar with today. The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is more than a present help, but a look toward our future. We still live in a world dominated by sin, but the presence of God in us reminds us of what is coming. In the midst of struggle today, we can see the fullness of his kingdom at least in part. We do not see it perfectly, but we can catch a glimpse of God's kingdom. The Spirit helps us but also gives us hope of what is to come.

WORD STUDY NOTES #4

¹ We live in a day where prayer has been relegated to asking God for a miracle, requesting that all of our dreams might be realized. Some people view God as a means to gain the things we want. This is a good place to notice the prayer of Paul for these Christians. He prays that we might know God more deeply and intimately. He also prays that these believers might realize the content of our hope, not more and better stuff here and now. Paul also asks for wisdom and revelation. These words ask that God will show himself and that we will have the discernment to see God when he does.

his letter. After centuries of rigorous law observance and the memory of his own experience, Paul has reoriented his thinking. Paul starts this letter by guiding the readers through this divine plan that has been made known.

This plan began with the Jews, who were chosen to be adopted into God's family. This process started with the obedience of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet this adoption was not accomplished just so the Jews could enjoy special favor. The Jews were chosen so that, at the proper time, all things would be brought to unity, starting with the many times that Jews in the Old Testament were called to be hospitable to strangers and foreigners in their midst, and continuing in the New Testament with the inclusion of gentiles in the plan of God. This is what Paul has spent the previous years fighting for—full acceptance of the gentiles into the church.

3. Ephesians 1:11-14

Paul continues to explain the content of God's plan, and he expands his thoughts about the Jews, yet it is at this point that Paul turns his attention to the gentiles with the words "you also." Now Jew and gentile are united in God's family. After a life dedicated to the performance of the law, a new marker has replaced the law, and it is the Spirit.¹ Paul realizes the gentiles are equal because he has seen the Spirit being poured out on both Jew and gentile, just as Joel 2:28 promised. The Spirit has been given to both Jew and gentile as a guarantee that we are united together in God's kingdom.

Create your own brief summary or description of the reality portrayed in verses 15–19a.

4. Ephesians 1:15-19a¹

5. Ephesians 1:19b-23^{1,2,3}

Christians can ask God daily for wisdom, knowing they will not be shamed by God for asking and that God will give the wisdom needed.

WORD STUDY NOTES #5

¹This passage lifts our awareness beyond our issue and raises our vision to a cosmic level. "Heavenly realms" is shorthand for the place where God lives. Ancient Jewish cosmology saw the world as concentric circles with humanity living on earth, with three (or sometimes seven) levels of heaven. We live in the first, earthly layer, while God occupies the highest level. Paul referred to his own experience on the road to Damascus as being taken to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2. These words are a cultural way for Paul to say that what happened to him could not be described in a normal way. He had to have been in the presence of God.

² Paul reminds Christians that Rome, and every other earthly power, lives far below the power of Christ. These powers combined together and willfully participated in the death of Christ. Earthly powers rendered him guilty, the law was used as a catalyst for his death, and dark forces supported them, but with the resurrection, all of these powers have been soundly defeated. Now Jesus stands above everything for the benefit of the church. Even when things look the darkest, Christ is the head of everything.

³ Paul is simply acknowledging the reality of earthly forces, political forces, and even evil forces that might stand behind their earthly allies. In a time when Rome and Nero reigned, no one needed convincing that dark and sinister forces were at work. In Asia Minor people feared these powers. The simple message is that, even at their most powerful, these forces pale in comparison to the resurrection of Christ and are never the equal of Christ. In our own world, "the devil made me do it" must never be the excuse for any Christian.

Discoveries

Let's summarize our discoveries from Ephesians 1.

1. We have learned that Paul is speaking specifically to Jews and gentiles in different parts of this letter.
2. We know that the Jews were the chosen people, but that chosen status was so that all people may come to know Christ.
3. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the central sign that God is working in the midst of his people.
4. We see that Paul takes seriously the powers and forces that stand opposed to the church.
5. Even though the church's opposing forces are real, we serve a Christ who has already defeated them. Therefore we can have confidence.

WEEK 1, DAY 4

A Chosen Family and the Story of God

Whenever we read a biblical text, it is important to ask how the particular text we are reading relates to the rest of the Bible. As we have already discussed, Paul’s ministry was about overcoming the divisions between Jews and gentiles and spreading the good news to the gentiles. When the gentiles came into the church it created issues, especially for the Jewish believers who had already believed in God for years. However, God working through unexpected people is not a new storyline. There are other places where God moved in unexpected ways and used unexpected people.

Places in Scripture where these themes are notably present include but are not limited to Genesis 25:19–34, Ruth 4, Jonah 3, Luke 7:1–10, and Acts 8:26–40. **In the space given below, write a short summary of each passage, identifying how these stories illustrate the theme of God acting in a manner that others may not have expected.**

Genesis 25:19–34

Ruth 4

If you have a study Bible, it may have references in a margin, a middle column, or footnotes that point to other biblical texts. You may find it helpful in understanding how the whole story of God ties together to look up some of those other scriptures from time to time.

Jonah 3

Luke 7:1 10

Acts 8:26 40

WEEK 1, DAY 5

Ephesians and Our World Today

When we look at the themes of God's chosen family and the riches of Christ in Ephesians 1, they can become the lens through which we see ourselves, our world, and how God works in our world today.

1. Paul calls the believers "holy" or "saints" in his greeting. This is a word we typically use today only for a select few. Do you think God views believers in the way Paul describes?

It is clear that Scripture calls all believers saints because saints are those whom God sets apart to actively seek after God and to participate in the mission of God in the world. God also looks at our potential and what we have become in Christ instead of looking at our every weakness.

Following the above example, answer these questions about how we can understand ourselves, our world, and God's action in our world today.

2. If there were a pre-chosen few who were the only ones to be redeemed, how would that make you feel?

3. If everyone is the focus of God's salvation, how should that change our behavior?

4. In Paul's first prayer in Ephesians, he asks that we may know God better and more deeply. What if we prayed that way? What might change about our lives if we did?

5. How does the thought that Jesus is above every power on earth make you approach the routine days of life? How does it affect your confidence?

6. Paul knows there are evil forces at work but quickly places them beneath Jesus. How do many Christians envision Christ and evil powers today? How about you?

Invitation and Response

God's Word always invites a response. Think about the way these themes of God's chosen family and the riches of Christ speak to us today. How do they invite us to respond?

God's Word invites us to embrace God's plan for his chosen family, which includes both Jews and gentiles. We can choose to celebrate and be grateful for the inheritance he offers all of us through Christ.

What is your evaluation of yourself based on any or all of the verses found in Ephesians 1?

Paul understood that the future viability of the church rested on whether it would be a unified body of believers.