



Ephesians - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Paul identifies himself as the author and, in this translation, the churches in Ephesus as the intended recipients. However, many early manuscripts omit this and there are those who believe it was a general letter to the region rather than just the city churches.

Paul then offers an extended prayer for his readership. The first part of the prayer is one of praise for, adoration of and worship to God (vv.3-14), announcing that everything God has done, he has done through his Son.

This is followed by Paul's thanksgiving for the faithfulness of his readers, asking that God may grant them power, wisdom and an understanding of the grace that has been poured out upon them (vv.15-23).

I Ephesians 1:1-14 - Introduction

Paul opens his letter with greetings (vv.1-2), and a lengthy blessing of praise to God (vv.3-14), where he expresses the two main themes of the letter: Christ has reconciled all of creation and has united the church in himself.

I.a Ephesians 1:1-2 - Salutation

This salutation is briefer than in many of Paul's letters. Paul saves his richest introductory remarks for the long prayer of thanksgiving to God in vv.3-14.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 1:1

Paul. As discussed in the introduction to this letter, there have been some scholars in recent times who have disputed Pauline authorship of this epistle. It is quite different in style to letters like Galatians, Corinthians and Romans; there again, it was written for quite a different purpose. Once the reader starts to understand Paul's thinking they can see something quite unique, but genuinely Pauline, in this

letter. It provides a spectacular view of one theme after another within early Christian reflection: God, the world, Jesus, the church, the means of salvation, Christian behaviour, marriage and the family, and spiritual warfare. The reader who comes to Ephesians after reading the rest of Paul's letters will get a new angle on the way in which his thinking holds together.

Apostle indicates Paul's authority as one commissioned by God and equipped to represent him. Apostle literally means 'one who is sent'; Paul was therefore entrusted with the sacred deposit of the Gospel. On apostleship, refer to the comments made on Matthew 10:2 and Romans 1:1. Paul expresses his authority simply but powerfully: he is an apostle of Christ Jesus.

The saints are 'holy ones' or 'consecrated people', and are the faithful members of God's people: <<*Love the Lord, all you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily*>> (Psalm 31:23). It is a reference to all who belong to God and not just those canonised by the human church. In Ephesians, Paul clearly uses the term for all members of the church who are directly called to be holy and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesus. It is best to accept these words as original even though they are missing in several early manuscripts. The reading 'saints who are also faithful' in such manuscripts, is less likely because it is clumsy in Greek and because the phrase 'saints who are' normally expects a place name like 'in Ephesus', rather than 'also faithful'. Some scholars, who believe Ephesians is a circular letter, suggest that the words 'in Ephesus' were deleted in the copies that were sent to places outside of Ephesus. Information on the city is provided in the section 'The Ancient City of Ephesus' in the series introduction.

There is evidence that Paul did write letters that were meant to be shared with other churches, such as that to Laodicea, which is now missing, and the one he sent to Colossae at the same time Ephesians was delivered: <<*And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea*>> (Colossians 4:16). There are some who believe this is that missing letter but there is no evidence to support this claim.

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

Ephesians 1:2

Grace to you and peace is a favoured method of greeting used by Paul: <<*To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 1:7), <<*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 1:3), <<*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 1:2), <<*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:2), and: <<*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Philemon 3). It appears in other letters, including: <<*May grace and peace be yours in abundance*>> (1 Peter 1:2b), <<*May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God*>>

and of Jesus our Lord>> (2 Peter 1:2), and: <<*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love*>> (2 John 3).

Grace means God's unmerited favour. Peace is not just the absence of conflict but echoes the OT concept of *shalom*, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually, and 'all is well in one's life and relationship with God'. It was Paul's prayer that the people of Ephesus would receive this special gift and blessing from God.

From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was fully aware that Jesus and God are one and the same in essence. However, his theology also acknowledges that the three persons of the trinity are individual and unique: <<*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you*>> (2 Corinthians 13:13).

I.b Ephesians 1:3-14 - Spiritual Blessings in Christ

In the original Greek, this section is one long, elegant sentence. Paul shows that the triune God initiated and accomplished cosmic reconciliation and redemption for the praise of his glory.

The entire prayer, all eleven verses of it, is woven through and through with the story of what God has done in Jesus the Christ. He has blessed believers in the king (v.3); he chose them in him (v.4), foreordained them through him (v.5), poured grace on them in him (v.6), gave them redemption in him (v.7), set out his plan in him (v.9), and he is intending to sum up everything in him (v.10). Believers have obtained their inheritance in him (v.11), because they have set their hope on him (v.12), and have been sealed in him with the Spirit as the guarantee of what is yet to come (vv.13-14).

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

Ephesians 1:3

Blessed be. The blessing that opens Paul's prayer is similar to those that began 1st Century Jewish prayers that were commonly recited throughout the day, such as the *Shema*: <<*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*>> (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NIV).

The rightful object of Paul's praise and worship is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom Paul never tires of glorifying: <<*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation*>> (2 Corinthians 1:3), as did Peter: <<*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*>> (1 Peter 1:3). Unlike the pagan gods of Ephesus, he is the one true God, the creator and sustainer of all things.

In Christ. Paul's praise emphasises the mediation of Christ for all God's blessings by repeating that these good things are given to believers 'in Christ' (v.4, v.9 and v.11), 'in the Beloved' (v.6), or 'in him' (v.7 and v.13).

With every spiritual blessing is an indication of just how magnanimous God is in bestowing his love upon his created beings: <<*put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing*>> (Malachi 3:10b).

Spiritual, Greek *pneumatikos*, here communicates that the saving gifts of God are conveyed by the Holy Spirit, Greek *Pneuma*, whose personal presence throughout this age is the guarantee of future heavenly blessings and, among other things, enabling the faithful to sing 'spiritual songs' (5:19), which Paul confirms in a contemporaneous letter: <<*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God*>> (Colossians 3:16). Hence, these blessings are in the heavenly places, since that is the Christian's future abode in imperishable glory when he is resurrected in a spiritual body through the 'last Adam', the 'life-giving spirit'. Refer to 1 Corinthians 15:40-50 and the associated comments.

⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

Ephesians 1:4

He chose us in Christ means that the Father chose Christians in the Son by his will and grace alone: <<*But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and this took place in eternity past, i.e. before the foundation of the world, which was confirmed by Jesus: <<*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*>> (Matthew 25:34). This confirms that salvation can never be earned but is always a free gift.

This statement by Paul also indicates that for all eternity the Father has had the role of leading and directing among the persons of the Trinity, even though Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity and attributes. God's initiative in redeeming the believer from sin and death was not an arbitrary or whimsical decision, but something God had planned all along in Christ. Since God chose his people in his love, they can take no credit for their salvation. God was determined to have them as his own; refer to comments on Ephesians 2:8. This was Plan A before Creation; there has never been any other!

Holy. God chose them with the goal that they would be holy and blameless before him. This goal is not optional for Christians – it is the purpose of election. Holiness here expresses moral purity, while blamelessness expresses freedom from the guilt of trespasses and sins in which the Christian formerly walked (v.7, Ephesians 2:1 and 2:5).

In love, at the end of v.4, properly belongs to v.5, describing predestination, although in love can also be taken with the preceding phrase - the world to be holy and blameless before him in love: <<*For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy*>> (Leviticus 11:44a), <<*I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt*>> (2 Samuel 22:24), <<*Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart*>> (Psalm 15:2), and: <<*he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him*>> (Colossians 1:22). Versification was introduced into Bibles in the 16th Century AD for convenience and is not part of the original inspired text and can lead to debate over where one thought ends and another begins.

What this verse is also saying is the source of salvation is God's love. The key to an unselfish way of living is also love. This must be the motive, the guide, and the power of believer's lives - love for God and for other people: <<*He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself'*>> (Luke 10:27).

⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Ephesians 1:5

Destined or predestined means to be previously ordained or appointed to some position. God's election of Christians (v.4) entails his predestining them to something – in this case to adoption as his children: <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified*>> (Romans 8:29-30). Hence, election and predestination in this context refer to God's decision to save someone. All Christians, male and female, are 'sons' in the sense of being heirs who will inherit blessings from their Father in heaven.

Destined is originally a geographical word meaning a decision determined before that sets a limit or boundary. It is applied here to describe God's fixed purpose and plan. It was his predetermination to include the Gentiles in the grace and blessing of the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ. In a similar way, God had planned and set the boundaries of the Promised Land even before the giving of the Law. These things were planned before the foundation of the world. Now God was bringing to pass these eternal purposes of his will, according to the good pleasure of his will. Just as the Jews claimed great privileges in being chosen by God and their direct inheritance of the land of Israel, with each portion given specific detail as to location and boundaries for each tribe, Paul is saying that God had also predetermined the calling and salvation of the Gentiles, which the Jews should recognise and accept as equally in God's original plan.

Words like foreknew and predestined seem to contradict the idea of humans having free will to choose God and then how to live their lives for God in response but with some element of their own input. I personally believe that

God has given us free will to make choices, right or wrong, and then live with the consequences. God, of course, has a plan for our lives but he can also accommodate the choices we make; in fact, he probably foreknew them too.

To understand this we need to try to think of it from God's perspective, which for humans is impossible of course. Unlike humans, God is not bound by any of the dimensional constraints, especially time. We tend to think in terms of time as the past, present and future; then perhaps on into eternity - a long time. But try to imagine that eternity is not a long time - just an instant. As God is outside of time he sees everything in that instant. Therefore, he knows what choices we make long before we make them and therefore it can be said that he foreknew them.

There are Christians who believe this process of selection means that God does choose some people and reject others, and are shocked at the thought that a loving God would do things in that way. If this is the case, what we must remember is that our salvation in Christ is a vital stage, but only a stage, on the way to the much larger purpose of God. God's plan is for the whole cosmos, the entire universe; his choosing and calling of us, and his shaping and directing of us in Christ, are somehow connected with that larger intention. Therefore, the point is that we are not chosen for our own sake, but for the sake of what God wants to accomplish through us. Our response should simply be one of thanks.

The Greek word for sons is translated children here, and is a legal term used in the adoption and inheritance laws of 1st Century Rome. As used by Paul here and elsewhere in his letters: <<*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God*>> (Romans 8:14-16), and: <<*in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God*>> (Galatians 4:5-7), this term refers to the status of all Christians, both men and women, who, having been adopted into God's family, now enjoy all the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights of God's sons, his children: <<*He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*>> (John 1:11-13).

Paul qualifies and stresses God's plan and initiation of redemption with the phrase according to the good pleasure of his will here and with similar phrases elsewhere in the passage, i.e. v.9 and v.11. God cannot be constrained by any outside force, and his inexorable will for believers is to pour out his grace and goodness on them in Christ Jesus.

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:6

God's ultimate purpose is not redemption as such but the praise of his glorious grace and name through redemption. This theme is repeated at key junctures in the argument (v.12 and v.14).

The Beloved is the Son of God: <<And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'>> (Mark 1:11), and: <<For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'>> (2 Peter 1:17).

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

Ephesians 1:7-8a

Redemption denotes ransoming someone from captivity or from slavery. The supreme OT example was the Exodus, where God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt: <<In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode>> (Exodus 15:13), <<It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt>> (Deuteronomy 7:8), <<Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out before his people nations and their gods?>> (2 Samuel 7:23), and: <<For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam>> (Micah 6:4).

Jesus' death during the Passover festival was not coincidental. The original Passover was established when God displayed his power in Egypt, and on that occasion too, the blood of the lamb played a vital role: <<Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it>> (Exodus 12:5-7). The angel of death then passed over the houses marked with this blood and all their firstborn would not die as did those of the Egyptians as recorded in Exodus 12:19-22; thus God could redeem them with blood.

In him we have redemption is a specific reference to the work of Jesus on the Cross: <<But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed>> (Isaiah 53:5 NIV), <<He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins>> (Colossians 1:13-14), and: <<But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this

creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption>> (Hebrews 9:11-12).

The forgiveness of our trespasses explains the nature of redemption; Christians are freed from slavery to sin and guilt. This was effected by Christ's blood, which means his death as an atoning sacrifice: <<For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus>> (Romans 3:22b-24), <<But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ>> (Ephesians 2:13), and: <<For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant>> (Hebrews 9:15).

That he lavished on us. Again, Paul highlights the overwhelming generosity of the one true God.

^{8b} With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

Ephesians 1:8b-9

Mystery, Greek *mystērion*, as used in Scripture refers to the revelation of something that was previously hidden or known only vaguely but now is more fully made known: <<Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages>> (Romans 16:25). The mystery does not refer to something mysterious or to a secret ritual. Rather, Paul is speaking of God's unfolding plan for the world and, above all, his plan of redemption through Christ. The mystery of God's will, now revealed in Christ, is: <<to gather all things in him>> (v.1), including the Gentiles; refer also 3:3-11.

¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:10

Just as the father of any well run household would have a plan to manage his family and property, so too God had a dispensation or plan to provide salvation for a lost and dying world. This includes both Jew and Gentile in one body, the Church of Jesus Christ, who is the head and governing authority.

The fullness of time means 'when the time was ripe', that is, the time for the fulfilment of God's plan: <<Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'>> (Mark 1:14-15).

To gather up all things in him. This is the central theme of the passage, God has effected cosmic reconciliation in Christ: <<*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*>> (John 10:16). The work of Christ on the Cross is the central axis for the history of creation, whether in heaven or on earth - refer also to Colossians 1:15-20 - since he has redeemed his people and silenced all hostile powers: <<*so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*>> (Ephesians 3:10).

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:11-12

Obtained an inheritance seems the best rendering of the Greek verb that normally means 'to allot (a portion)'. Some believe the meaning is that God has claimed his own portion - the believing Jews (v.14).

In the previous verses Paul gave a Christian retelling of the Exodus to indicate the freedom from slavery that is found in Christ. For the Jews, the Exodus afforded them the opportunity to take their inheritance of the Promised Land, a promise God had made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Paul's prayer now continues with a retelling of the Christian inheritance that comes through Christ alone. That is, the renewal of all things to the way God originally intended it to be.

Destined refers to making those who believe in Christ heirs with him was not an ad hoc event; God had planned it from all eternity. By definition God is sovereign, directing all things freely according to his royal counsel. This is in sharp contrast with the pagan gods of the time, who were understood to be often fickle or bound by an inscrutable and arbitrary fate. God's predestination gives his people tremendous comfort, for they know that all who come to Christ do so through God's enabling grace and appointment: <<*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life*>> (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will is best understood to mean that every single event that occurs is in some sense predestined by God. At the same time, Paul emphasises the importance of human responsibility, as is evident in all of the moral commands later in Ephesians chapters 4-6 and, indeed, in all of Paul's letters. As Paul demonstrated in all of his remarkable efforts in spreading the Gospel, as recorded in Acts 13-28 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, he believed that personal evangelism and making conscious choices to obey God are also absolutely essential in fulfilling God's plan. God uses human means to fulfil what he has ordained. With regard to tragedies and evil, Paul and the other biblical writers never blame God for them: <<*Therefore, just as sin came into*

the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned>> (Romans 5:12), and: <<Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds>> (2 Timothy 4:14); something seen also from antiquity: <<He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing>> (Job 1:21-22). Rather, they see the doctrine of God's sovereignty as a means of comfort and assurance: <<We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose>> (Romans 8:28), confident that evil will not triumph and that God's good plans for his people will be fulfilled. How God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together in the world is a mystery no one can fully understand.

We, who were the first to set our hope on Christ. Paul is indicating those Jews that had come to believe in Christ first had obtained an inheritance. This inheritance was promised to Abraham and his spiritual seed by faith.

So that we might live for the praise of his glory. It is God's desire that his creation, especially humankind, should bring him praise and honour simply for who he is and because of their love for him and his love for them: <<*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another*>> (1 John 4:10-11).

¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;

Ephesians 1:13

In him you also is an indication that the Gentile believers also inherit the promises made to Abraham and the Israeli nation that preceded the revelation of God's Son.

When you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him. Paul, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos had all come to share the Gospel truth with the Ephesians. They accepted what they heard and received their salvation through their faith in the message of the Cross.

The seal of the promised Holy Spirit can mean either that the Holy Spirit protects and preserves Christians until they reach their inheritance: <<*But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment*>> (2 Corinthians 1:22), <<*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption*>> (Ephesians 4:30), <<*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*>> (1 Peter 1:3-5), and: <<*I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the*

living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, 'Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads'>> (Revelation 7:2-3); or that he certifies the authenticity of their acceptance by God as being genuine – they bear the 'royal seal': <<Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true>> (John 3:33), and: <<While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'>> (Acts 10:44-47). The first interpretation seems best here, although both ideas are biblically true.

A seal was a recognisable and legally binding mark to show that something was authentic and official: <<Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests>> (Nehemiah 9:38), and: <<You may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring; for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked>> (Esther 8:8), or as in irrevocable bond of love: <<Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame>> (Song 8:6).

It was Jesus who had spoken of the promised Holy Spirit: <<And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you>> (John 14:16-17).

¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:14

God pours out his Holy Spirit on all of his children as the pledge, or to provide a 'down payment' or deposit: <<He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee>> (2 Corinthians 5:5), which guarantees their share in his eternal Kingdom because he applies to them all God's powerful working in redemption.

Our inheritance is not about a future life in heaven. It is about the eternal rewards of righteousness both in this life and throughout eternity: <<And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified>> (Acts 20:32).

Towards redemption as God's own people. This phrase can also be rendered 'until God redeems his possession'. In that case it means that, like the Levites in the OT, believers are the Lord's specially treasured possession: <<Thus you shall

separate the Levites from among the other Israelites, and the Levites shall be mine>> (Numbers 8:14), and: <<*The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their heritage*>> (Joshua 18:7a).

The redemption is the time when body and soul are changed into incorruption, the glorified body, even as Christ. The purchased possession refers to their being bought from the grip of sin and death by Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross. When this redemption takes place, it will be the height of glory and praise to Christ for his infinite love for his people, from the beginning, continuing now and then on into eternity with Jesus and God the Father.

II Ephesians 1:15-23 - Paul's Prayer

This section, like vv.3-14, is a single sentence in the original Greek. Although some translations have this as a new section, Paul's prayer continues and he prays that the church will gain deep insight into the Lord's powerful working and rich gifts in Christ.

Power is one of the great themes of Ephesians. Perhaps this is because Ephesus itself, and the surrounding area, were seen as a place of power. Certainly in social and civic terms the city was powerful and was set to become more so. It was a major centre of imperial influence in Paul's day. The Roman emperors were keen to establish and maintain places where their rule could be celebrated and enhanced.

It was also a centre of religious power. All sorts of cults and beliefs flourished, and frequently they focused on power: the power of what might be called magic, power to make things happen in the world, to influence people and events, to gain wealth or health or personal influence, and to bring about the downfall of others. Their world, in other words, was dominated by the 'principalities and powers', the various levels of rulers and authorities from local magistrates up to internationally recognised gods and goddesses, and all stages in between.

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

Ephesians 1:15-16

I have heard. Some commentators cite this phrase in their argument that Paul could not be the author for it seems to indicate that he did not know those he was writing to, which did not seem possible for he had spent three years in the city: <<*Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears*>> (Acts 20:31). However, there is historic evidence to suggest that the word spread out from Ephesus to other towns and villages in the surrounding countryside administered by Ephesus, and it seems it is these new converts that Paul is particularly referring to here.

Your love towards all the saints indicates they had faith in the Lord Jesus and were following his command: <<*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another*>>

(John 13:34), and: <<*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*>> (John 15:12).

Do not cease in my prayers. Paul was a prolific prayer warrior and the members of the church were always uppermost in his mind: <<*For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers*>> (Romans 1:9), <<*For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect*>> (2 Corinthians 13:9), <<*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now*>> (Philippians 1:3-5), <<*In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints*>> (Colossians 1:3-4), <<*We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers*>> (1 Thessalonians 1:2), and: <<*To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,

Ephesians 1:17

To name the Father of glory as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ: <<*Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”’*>> (John 20:17), <<*and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*>> (Revelation 1:6), is not to deny Christ’s deity but to affirm his true incarnate humanity. Further, it expresses that Christians know God through the Lord Jesus as their mediator.

A spirit of wisdom may refer to the Holy Spirit’s secret working in Christians to give them insights into God’s word and the saving knowledge of him, refer to 1 Corinthians 2:6-12. Alternatively, it could be the way God aligns the human spirit to his will through Christ. The prophet had given insight to this many years earlier: <<*The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord*>> (Isaiah 11:2), and Paul had requested this for one of his other churches: <<*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight*>> (Philippians 1:9).

The source of all blessings in Christ is God. He had the plan and brought it to pass. Paul prays for them to receive the Holy Spirit to instruct them in all the great truths that God has provided through the Gospel. All the details will bring understanding and wisdom concerning what Christ has done, and how they are to mature in response to that knowledge.

A spirit of revelation. The Ephesians, like many Christians throughout history, do not seem to understand the power that God has bestowed upon them through

Christ Jesus. Paul's prayer includes this request that as they come to know him more and more, they will realise the potential he gives to each individual believer through the power of his Holy Spirit. Not necessarily to perform signs and wonders, but power that will work silently and unseen to advance the Kingdom of God. All they need to do is to pray to God so that he will reveal the purposes of that power in their own lives.

¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Ephesians 1:18-19

With the eyes of your heart enlightened. Just as the eyes let in the light, so the understanding brings enlightenment to the soul: <<*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you*>> (Job 42:5). This takes place only through the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart and brings knowledge of the great hope of God's calling. It also includes the glorious abundance of spiritual gifts and blessings which are provided by God for those who have faith, now adopted as his children, the inheritance for eternity.

Paul prays that believers will comprehend the blessings that are theirs in Christ:

1. Their future hope.
2. God's inheritance among the saints.
3. Their power in Christ.

The inheritance here is not the Christian's inheritance but his, i.e. God's. This indicates how precious his people are to God. They are, so to speak, what he looks forward to enjoying forever.

Paul piles up power words to express the immeasurable greatness of God's power, and the working of his great power toward believers. Power over supernatural forces through magic and the occult was of great concern in ancient Ephesus: <<*A number of those who practised magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins*>> (Acts 19:19), but the power of the living God in Christ surpasses all competing authorities: <<*So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*>> (Acts 19:20).

²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

Ephesians 1:20-21

God put his power to work. The greatest example of power and purpose is seen in his raising Christ from the dead as an eternal work, and set Christ at his right
New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Ephesians1-14

hand in heaven: <<David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’”>> (Mark 12:36). He is now the mediator between God and man: <<For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human>> (1 Timothy 2:5). The right hand is the highest place of honour, friendship and authority next to God.

Although there are biblical accounts of people being restored to mortal life, such as Elijah reviving the widow’s son (1 Kings 17:17-24), and Elisha raising the Shunammite’s son (2 Kings 4:8-37), and indeed Jesus raised Lazarus from his tomb after four days as recorded in John 11:38-44, no one has ever been raised to immortality except Jesus by the power of God. Therefore, this is the most powerful display in human history since Creation itself.

Far above all rule and authority. His place includes authority over all entities on earth that govern, all dignitaries and leaders that exercise power over others. Some have suggested this includes authority over angels, both good and evil ones: <<And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day>> (Jude 6). Not only this world, at the time of this letter, but also through that which is to come, i.e. in this age ... in the age to come, the full age of human history, until eternity without end.

²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:22-23

Put all things under his feet. Paul quotes from Psalm 8:6 as being fulfilled by Christ’s exaltation over all creation and as head over the church.

The head over all things for the church. Like a present-day head of government or state, this term points to Christ’s pre-eminence as Lord. It is sometimes said that the term head, Greek *kephalē*, means ‘source’, but in over 50 examples of the expression ‘person A is the head of person(s) B’ found in ancient Greek literature, person A has authority over person(s) B in every case. Therefore, it is best to understand head here as referring metaphorically to authority, as is its use in: <<For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour>> (Ephesians 5:23), and: <<For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority>> (Colossians 2:9-10).

Christ has so identified himself with his church that it is said to be his very body, such as Adam described Eve as: <<bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh>> (Genesis 2:23b), and as God declared man and wife to be ‘one flesh’. Refer to the comments on Ephesians 5:28-30.

The fullness of him who fills all in all. The church, filled by Christ, fills all creation as representatives of Christ.