

Study Guide: What is God's Ultimate Plan for Humanity and the Cosmos? Ephesians 1 - 3:7

- **THE PLANTING** Acts 19
 - How might Paul's 2.5 to 3 years residency and teaching in Ephesus (Acts 19) have contributed to that congregation's long term health and stability?
 - What impacts might the dramatic events associated with the planting of this congregation have contributed to its long term identity?
- **THE CHOSEN** Ephesians 1:1-8
 - What does it mean to be united with Christ/in Christ (1:3)? How often does this phrase occur in Ephesians?
 - Does 1:4-8 impact your view of how God feels about those he's chosen? Your congregation? You?
 - v. 4 **Chose us**; (Inspirational focus? Doctrinal focus?)
 - v. 5 **adoption**; (NLT: "into **his own family**... what he **wanted** to do", ...)
 - v.5 **good pleasure** of his will : (NLT "gave him **great pleasure**" (Strong's: "**delight**"?))
 - v. 6 his **glorious** grace...**bestowed on us**: (NLT "**poured** on us") bucket challenge ☺
 - v.7,8 **riches** of his grace ... **lavished** on us. (NLT "**showered** his kindness on us")

Bonus Section for the Chosen: Ephesians 2:4-7 (NRSV)

⁴ But God, who is **rich in mercy**, out of the **great love** with which he loved us

⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and **raised us up** with him and **seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the **immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**.

- Who are the **dead "we"** and how does God show his love for them?
- What are the **"heavenly realms"** and how are the "raised" seated there?

Consider making an appointment in your calendar this week to soak your spirit in the verses above?

- **THE MYSTERIOUS PLAN FOR THE COSMOS** Ephesians 1:9, 10
 - What is the mystery that Paul refers to in 1:9? How often does this term occur in Ephesians?

Though the Greek word "mysterion" is commonly rendered "mystery/mysterious" in many English translations, what word might be more accurate to current English speakers?

John Stott: "*Mystery... (in modern English) means: "dark, obscure, secret... mysterious... inexplicable, ... incomprehensible... Greek word (mysterion)... is different... still a secret, (but now) it is no longer closely guarded but open..."*" ¹

¹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity. 1979) 116.

Benjamin Gladd: "A favorite term of St. Paul is the word "mystery" (*mystērion*), occurring some twenty-one times in his corpus. Two of his epistles in particular demonstrate a special awareness of mystery—1 Corinthians and Ephesians. Both letters employ the term six times, connecting the term to precious doctrines such as the crucifixion (1 Cor 2:1, 7), Paul's stewardship of the gospel (1 Cor 4:1), spiritual gifts (1 Cor 13:2; 14:2), resurrection (1 Cor 15:51), the unity of the cosmos (Eph 1:9), the unity of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 3:3, 4, 9), marriage (Eph 5:32) and the gospel itself (Eph 6:19)." ²

- What word do many commentators use to describe what is meant by "all things in heaven and earth"?

"Using the word cosmos rather than the word universe implies viewing the universe as a complex and orderly system or entity; the opposite of chaos. [1]... Religious and philosophical approaches may include in their concepts of the cosmos various spiritual entities or other matters deemed to exist outside our physical universe. In theology, the cosmos is the created heavenly bodies (sun, moon, wandering stars, and fixed stars). The concept of cosmos as the created universe and its arrangement has been important in Christendom since its very inception, as it is heavily used in the New Testament and occurs over 180 times." ³

- Considering Paul's other writings, in addition to humanity, is there some way the rest of the created order is included in God's plan? (Romans 8:21?)

- **THE MYSTERIOUS PLAN FOR THE COSMOS INCLUDES A NEW HUMANITY Ephesians 2:14-16**

John Stott; "Old Testament" did not reveal God had a purpose for the Gentiles". Stott p. 117, it revealed a theocracy with the Jews and Messiah in charge...but Paul shows that it was to make the Jews and Gentiles as one.... Christ destroyed the God-man barrier and Jew-Gentile barrier." ⁴

Bonus Section: Ephesians 2:19-23

- What are two additional analogies for Gentile inclusion and equality?

- **THE NEW HUMANITY INCLUDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NATIONS Ephesians 3:3-5**

John Stott: "Jews didn't know that Gentiles would eventually be fellow heirs with them...it was a secret until now....by the end of v. 6 mystery is equated **with Gospel**... virtually." ⁵

Benjamin Gladd : "Both people groups share in Christ's rule as **complete equals** (3:2-6). A key result off the fall is deep-seated division between people groups (Gen 10-11), but Christ's success has torn down all ethnic barriers that divided humanity for so long...Our goal here is to grasp a great deal of Paul's theology of Ephesians through the rubric of three mysteries—the **unity of the cosmos** (1:9), the **unity of Jews and Gentiles** (3:3, 9), and the unity of man and woman in marriage (5:32)." ⁶

² <https://credomag.com/2019/10/how-to-read-ephesians-theologically/> accessed 210416

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmos>, accessed 210414

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity. 1979) 114,117

⁵ *Ibid.* 118

⁶ <https://credomag.com/2019/10/how-to-read-ephesians-theologically/> accessed 210416

Ken Boa: *“God’s redemptive plan is to restore relationships on every level—with God, self, others and creation—so that we will experience and express the shalom (peace, love, unity, harmony) of the Trinity.”*⁷

- Which metaphor might best describe the new humanity: 1. A giant smoothie? 2. The opening ceremonies of the Olympic games? Or? (Revelation 21:24?)
- Did Paul consider it a great privilege and responsibility to share God’s Mysterious Plan? (**Ephesians 3:7-9**)

⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed To His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 417.