

**Ephesians 3:1-13 (NIV)****God's Marvelous Plan for the Gentiles**

**3** For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. <sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

**Ephesians 3:1-13 (HCSB)****Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles**

**3** For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> you have heard, haven't you, about the administration of God's grace that He gave to me for you? <sup>3</sup> The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. <sup>4</sup> By reading this you are able to understand my insight about the mystery of the Messiah. <sup>5</sup> This was not made known to people<sup>[a]</sup> in other generations as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: <sup>6</sup> The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>7</sup> I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of His power.

<sup>8</sup> This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints—to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of the Messiah, <sup>9</sup> and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. <sup>10</sup> This is so God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. <sup>11</sup> This is according to His eternal purpose accomplished in the Messiah, Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In Him we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>13</sup> So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.

**Footnotes:** Ephesians 3:5 Lit to the sons of men

Ephesians 3:12 Or through His faithfulness

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible<sup>1</sup>

### Ephesians 3:1-13

**3:1** Paul here initiates a thought that he leaves unfinished until [verse 14](#). The apostle celebrates his present circumstances in light of God's will and calling for his life.

**3:2** **The administration of God's grace** refers to Paul's unique ministry, describing the implementation of a divine strategy. Paul's ministry was not of his own making, but was given to him as a commission from God ([Ac 9](#)).

**3:3** **Mystery** points to something that once was hidden or secret and now has been revealed through means impossible by human discovery. The mystery revealed is that God determined through the person and work of Christ to incorporate the Gentiles into one body of the church as equal partners with Israel ([v. 6](#)).

**3:6** **Coheirs** shows that believers in Christ are co-inheritors of God's Kingdom. It also characterizes the new community of believers with Christ as head. That the Gentiles would have equal footing with God's covenant people was a new aspect of God's revelation.

**3:8** **Least of all the saints** is a combination of a superlative and a comparative in one Greek term. The unusual term may have been a playful allusion to Paul's name, thus acknowledging that in himself he was insignificant; but in Christ, God had made him a new creature.

**3:10** God's intent was that through the church, his **multifaceted wisdom** should be made known. "Multifaceted" means manifold or multicolored like a beautiful jewel. The history of the Christian church and the unfolding drama of redemption is watched with avid interest by the **rulers and authorities in the heavens**, an apparent reference to angels (cp. [1Pe 1:12](#)).

**3:11-13** The church is central to God's working in history. The gospel is good news for a new society and new life. Paul described the church as a divine agent and as a divine fellowship with a divine mandate.

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1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 3".

**English Standard Version - Study Bible<sup>2</sup>**  
*Ephesians 3:1-13*

**3:1-13 Revelation of the Gospel Mystery.** Paul explains his calling and ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. This was to assure his Gentile readers that their share in the inheritance is authentic because of its divine origin.

**3:1-7 Paul's Apostolic Ministry.** Paul elaborates on his call to apostleship. He was sent as a gracious gift to the Gentiles.

**3:1 For this reason.** Paul breaks off his thought here only to resume it in [v. 14](#), where the opening phrase is repeated (cf. the similar break in [2:1, 5](#)). **prisoner for Christ.** Paul suffered imprisonment or confinement several times in the service of Christ ([4:1](#); [Acts 16:23](#); [24:23](#); [Col. 4:10](#); [2 Tim. 1:8](#); [Philem. 1](#)). **on behalf of you Gentiles.** Paul was the apostle, teacher, and preacher to the Gentiles ([1 Tim. 2:7](#); [2 Tim. 1:11](#)), so the sufferings he experienced during his ministry were on their behalf ([2 Cor. 6:5](#); [11:23](#)).

**3:2 assuming that you have heard.** Cf. [4:21](#). Paul may not have known the recent Ephesian converts, especially in the outlying villages (see [Introduction: Author and Title](#)), though he had spent three years in Ephesus ([Acts 20:31](#)).

**3:3 mystery.** See note on [Col. 1:26-27](#). This mystery is now revealed: Christ has come to unify Jew and Gentile in one body through the gospel, about which Paul had just **written briefly** (see the parallels with [Eph. 1:9, 17](#)). Christ revealed this mystery to Paul **by revelation** on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:1-7](#)) and more fully at other times (cf. [Acts 22:17-21](#); [2 Cor. 12:1-7](#); [Gal. 1:12](#); [2:2](#)).

**3:5 not made known.** While Moses and the prophets had written of Christ and his salvation to the ends of the earth ([John 5:46](#); [1 Pet. 1:10-12](#)), and while God had even promised to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him ([Gen. 12:3](#)), the full realization of who Christ was and the extent of the salvation that would come to the Gentiles was not clear until after the giving of **the Spirit** ([1 Cor. 2:8-10](#)). **apostles and prophets.** See note on [Eph. 2:20](#).

**3:6 the Gentiles are fellow heirs.** Paul explains the content of the “mystery” mentioned in [vv. 3-4](#): Gentile and Jewish Christians are now united in God’s new family as equal heirs with one another and with Christ ([Rom. 8:17](#); [Gal. 3:28-29](#)).

**3:7 minister.** A servant or official charged with an area of responsibility. Paul was duty bound to proclaim the gospel ([1 Cor. 9:16](#)), yet he regards this burden as a **gift of God’s grace** because he served out of gratitude for the grace that he himself had received.

**3:8-13 The Mystery and Wisdom.** God’s wisdom is revealed in Christ. Before being revealed, it was a mystery.

**3:8 very least of.** This is not false humility on Paul’s part, since he is acutely aware that he had once been a persecutor of Christ and his church ([Acts 9:4](#); [Phil. 3:6](#); [1 Tim. 1:13](#)). **saints.** See note on [Eph. 1:1](#).

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2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 3".

**3:10 manifold.** Taking various forms, or of many different kinds. God's **wisdom** has many facets and aspects, like an intricately cut diamond (see [1 Cor. 1:26-29](#)). **now.** In this age, in contrast to the time before Christ's first coming. **Rulers and authorities in the heavenly places** refers to angelic beings. God's redemptive purposes are of interest to angels ([1 Pet. 1:12](#)) and the whole host of heaven, who are better able to glorify God when they behold in wonder what God has done and does in creating **the church** ([Psalm 148](#); [Rev. 7:11](#); [19:1-8](#)). See note on [Eph. 6:12](#).

**3:11 eternal purpose.** God's redemption in Christ originated in the fathomless sea of eternity with God's "manifold wisdom" ([v. 10](#)). See the emphasis on God's plan and purpose in [1:3-14](#). **realized in Christ Jesus.** God's plan of salvation to the ends of the earth had to be put into effect in human history, which God did through the earthly work of his incarnate Son.

### NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

#### *Ephesians 3:1-13*

**3:1** Paul was under house arrest in Rome for preaching about Christ. The religious leaders in Jerusalem, who felt threatened by Christ's teachings and didn't believe he was the Messiah, pressured the Romans to arrest Paul and bring him to trial for treason and for causing rebellion among the Jews. Paul had appealed for his case to be heard by the emperor, and he was awaiting trial (see [Acts 28:16-31](#)). Even though he was under arrest, Paul maintained his firm belief that God was in control of all that happened to him. Do circumstances make you wonder if God has lost control of this world? Like Paul, remember that no matter what happens, God directs the world's affairs.

**3:2, 3** Paul's "special responsibility" refers to the special stewardship, trust, or commitment that Paul had been given. He had been assigned the special work of preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, God's great plan shown to Paul in a revelation.

**3:5, 6** God's plan was not revealed to previous generations, not because God wanted to keep something from his people, but because he would reveal it to everyone in his perfect timing. God planned to have Jews and Gentiles comprise one body, the church. It was known in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would receive salvation ([Isaiah 49:6](#)); but it was never revealed in the Old Testament that all Gentile and Jewish believers would become equal in the body of Christ. Yet this equality was accomplished when Jesus destroyed the "wall of hostility" and created "one new people" ([2:14, 15](#)).

**3:7** When Paul became a servant of the gospel, God gave him the ability to share the gospel of Christ effectively. You are not an apostle, and you may not be an evangelist, but God will give you opportunities to tell others about Christ. And with the opportunities he will provide the ability, courage, and power. Make yourself available to God as his servant whenever an opportunity presents itself. As you focus on the other person and his or her needs, God will communicate your caring attitude. Your words will be natural, loving, and compelling.

**3:8** When Paul describes himself as "the least deserving of all God's people," he means that without God's help, he would never be able to do God's work. Yet God chose him to share the Good News with the Gentiles and gave him the power to do it. If we feel that our role is minor, we may be right—except that we have forgotten what a difference God makes. How does God want to use you? Draw on his power, do your part, and faithfully perform the special role God has called you to play in his plan.

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3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*, 2003-4.

**3:10** The "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" are either angels who are witnesses to these events (see [1 Peter 1:12](#)), or hostile spiritual forces opposed to God ([2:2](#); [6:12](#)).

**3:12** It is an awesome privilege to be able to approach God with freedom and confidence. Most of us would be apprehensive in the presence of a powerful ruler. But thanks to Christ, by faith we can enter directly into God's presence through prayer. We know we'll be welcomed with open arms because we are God's children through our union with Christ. Don't be afraid of God. Talk with him about everything. He is waiting to hear from you.

**3:13** Why should Paul's suffering make the Ephesians feel honored? If Paul had not preached the Good News, he would not be in jail—but then the Ephesians would not have heard the Good News and been converted either. Just as a mother endures the pain of childbirth in order to bring new life into the world, Paul endured the pain of persecution in order to bring new believers to Christ. Obeying Christ is never easy. He calls you to take your cross and follow him ([Matthew 16:24](#))—that is, to be willing to endure pain so that God's message of salvation can reach the entire world. We should feel honored that others have suffered and sacrificed for us so that we might reap the benefit.

## Life Essentials Study Bible<sup>4</sup>

### A Principle to Live By Ephesians #6: Servants of the Gospel

from Ephesians 3:1-13

**As unified members of Christ's body, we are to serve God and one another, demonstrating to both the visible and the invisible world the message of God's love and grace through Jesus Christ.**

The power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand ([1:20](#)), and the power that raised up all true believers and seated us with Christ ([2:6](#)) is the same power that also called Paul to be a "servant" in preaching the gospel ([3:7](#)). Paul's calling was definitely unique ([Ac 9:15-16](#)). However, his ministry simply continued what the other apostles began, fulfilling what Jesus said while still on earth:

*But I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd. ([Jn 10:16](#)) (See Jn #21: Oneness in Christ, [p. 1455](#).)*

Paul's special calling also continued to be an answer to Jesus' prayer for the apostles—and all of us—as He anticipated the cross:

*I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their message. May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me. ([Jn 17:20-21](#))*

Today, as members of Christ's body, whether Jews or Gentiles, we have a special calling to be servants of the gospel. Through our oneness in Christ, we are called to demonstrate to the world and even to "the rulers and authorities in the heavens" ([Eph 3:10](#)) that Jesus Christ, who is one with the Father, "has come to seek and to save the lost" ([Lk 19:10](#)). (See Jn #33: The Results of Love, [p. 1468](#).)

#### Reflection and Response

**In what practical ways can every local church demonstrate to the world that God has provided a way of salvation for all people through His Son, Jesus Christ?**

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4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1628.