

# Ephesians

Transformed by Grace, Empowered by Peace

Study 10

The Gospel and Suffering

Ephesians 3:1-13

## Ephesians 3:1-13

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

**1. Fill in the blanks. Based on the video lecture, what are the four themes covered in Ephesians 3:2-12?**

- The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ are included in God’s \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- Paul is a \_\_\_\_\_ of that \_\_\_\_\_
- The reason is for \_\_\_\_\_ during \_\_\_\_\_ times

**Ephesians 3:1-2**

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation (stewardship) of the grace of God which was given to me for you,”

**2. a) Comprehension question. Paul says he is a prisoner. For whom and why?**

- He is a prisoner for (on behalf of) the Gentiles.
- He is a prisoner because he is a steward of God’s mystery.
- He is a prisoner because he is a minister of the Gospel.

**b) Discussion question. Paul is a “steward” of God’s mystery. What is his responsibility as a steward?**

**Ephesians 3:3-4**

“how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),”

**3. a) Fill in the blanks. What is the difference between the common understanding of the word “mystery” and the biblical meaning of “mystery”?**

Common understanding of “mystery”	Biblical meaning of “mystery”
Something that can be discovered	Something that was hidden in the past but now revealed by God

**b) Fill in the blanks. What are the characteristics of biblical mystery (Greek: “musterion”)?**

Characteristics	Reference
Hidden for ages in God	Ephesians 3:9-10
Concerns Jesus Christ	Ephesians 3:4-6
Requires revelation	Ephesians 3:3

**Ephesians 3:3a, 6**

“how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,”

**4. a) Comprehension question. Based on Ephesians 3:6, what is the mystery that God has revealed to Paul?**

That the Gentiles (nations) should be:

- fellow heirs,
- members of the same body,
- and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

**b) Discussion question. Who are the Gentiles?**

You and me! (Non-Jewish people)

**c) Discussion question. Why is the inclusion of the Gentiles significant?**

There used to be hostility between God’s earthly chosen people (the Jews) and all other [Gentile] nations around. We as non-Jewish people were alienated from God’s promises. But now, we are made one in Christ.

**5. Practically, what should we do now that we know this mystery?**

- The Great Commission - We are to take the Gospel to the whole world!
- The Creation mandate - We can only have dominion over God's creation and be His representatives when we are a reconciled humanity (Romans 8:20-21)

**Ephesians 3:10**

“to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,”

**6. Comprehension question. Based on the video lecture, what did God's manifold wisdom result in?**

The reconciliation of mankind. The removal of strife.

**Ephesians 3:11**

“according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

**7. a) Comprehension question. Was our salvation an afterthought of the fall of man? (i.e. God planned for our salvation after Adam sinned)**

**b) Reflection question. What does this reveal about God's perspective of you?**

**Ephesians 3:1-2, 7-8**

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation (stewardship) of the grace of God which was given to me for you,”

“of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”

**8. Comprehension question. Paul’s life calling is the ministry of the Gospel. However, this ministry caused Paul to be imprisoned and to suffer. Based on the video lecture, how do we address the problem of suffering?**

- Adjust our perspectives in life
- Look at suffering in the light of Biblical truths, not circumstances
- Understand the purpose of suffering
  - Suffering in the light of a universal vision
  - Suffering in the light of grace

**9. a) Comprehension question. What is an example of false “Christian” teaching regarding suffering?**

- Joel Osteen - Your Best Life Now
- That the Christian life is a life without suffering

**b) Comprehension question. How is this in contrast with Paul’s experience and example?**

- Paul was suffering in prison for the Gospel’s sake
- The Lord Jesus never promised us a life without suffering

**c) Comprehension question. Based on the video lecture, what Scripture tells us that we will be persecuted as Christians?**

- 2 Timothy 3:12 - “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

**10. Comprehension question. When we suffer, how should we look at our sufferings? Through what lens or for what purpose?**

- Through the lens of biblical truth.
- Romans 8:18-21 - our suffering in light of “the glory that is to be revealed to us”

**a) Comprehension question. How did Paul see his sufferings? Through what lens or for what purpose?**

- He was suffering on behalf of the Gentiles, the people to whom he was writing.

**11. Reflection question. Based on the video lecture, every circumstance has a dual track - “Satan’s purposes” or “God’s purposes”. In each instance, we are given an opportunity to honour and glorify God. Share a recent example of this in your life.**

**Elizabeth Elliot**

“He suffered not that we might not suffer but that when we suffer trusting in His suffering we become like Him”

**12. Comprehension question. Based on the quote above by Elizabeth Elliot, what should be the results of our suffering?**

- That we become more like Christ, i.e. Christ-like.

### **Takeaway**

**A. Themes covered in Ephesians 3:2-12**

- a. The Nature of the Mystery**
- b. Gentiles are included in God’s promises to Israel**
- c. Paul is a steward of that Gospel**
- d. The reason is for encouragement during difficult times**

- B. The Biblical understanding of mystery is that it is hidden in ages past, concerns the Lord Jesus Christ, and is revealed to us by God Himself**
- C. The Mystery in Ephesians 3**
  - a. That the Gentiles (nations) should be:**
    - i. fellow heirs,**
    - ii. members of the same body,**
    - iii. and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.**
- D. Ways we should address the problem of suffering:**
  - a. Adjust our perspectives in life**
  - b. Look at suffering in the light of Biblical truths, not circumstances**
  - c. Understand the purpose of suffering**
    - i. Suffering in the light of a universal vision**
    - ii. Suffering in the light of grace**

### **Case Study**

#### **Case 1 – Suffering**

**Bee Teh was a manager at the local Jaya Grocer supermarket and was a faithful Christian serving actively at the neighbourhood Baptist church. He was on the board of deacons and he led a life group.**

**Admittedly he was not a perfect believer and would occasionally pilfer some goods from the store and take it home for his family as he was the sole breadwinner. He reckoned the store would not miss it anyway.**

**One day when there was an economic downturn he was suddenly retrenched. He went through a period of great depression and personal bitterness because he had trusted God and God did not reciprocate. He was almost on the verge of suicide.**

**His pastor had always taught that a Christian would lead a victorious life and that all he had to do was to claim the blessings. Some friends came by and told him it was because he was stealing from the store, the angels saw it and this was divine retribution. Other friends said that he was not serving enough in church.**

1. **Discussion question. Why was Bee Teh suffering? What did the trial reveal about where his ultimate treasure lay?**

We would be tempted to say that his suffering is due to Bee Teh's untoward behaviour of stealing from the supermarket. It could possibly be God's retribution or also possibly not.

However, his bitterness was because his ultimate treasure lay in the things of this earth, and not in God. He has an inaccurate view that trusting God means that God will never allow him to suffer.

2. **Discussion question. What do you think about his friends' input into his life? Was it accurate or helpful?**

Inaccurate and unhelpful. They have a transactional view of our relationship with God.