

God's Plan for the Good News



SABBATH—JULY 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 3; Romans 11:33–36; Romans 16:25–27; Philippians 4:20; 2 Peter 3:18.

MEMORY VERSE: “God can do much more than we ask him to do, or we even [also] think of [about]. He does it by his power [strength] which is working in us. So, praise him in the church meeting in Christ Jesus. Praise him for ever and ever! May it be so!” (Ephesians 3:20, 21, WE).



Paul talks about how much he loves to preach to the non-Jews.

PAUL begins Ephesians 3 with an idea that he talked about earlier: God's plan for the Good News. Paul tells his readers that God kept this plan secret until now. “This is God's plan. Those [church members] who are not Jews will also share in the blessings of [from] God. They [non-Jews] also are a part of the body [church] of Jesus Christ. They also will receive [get] the things God has promised in Jesus Christ through [because of] the good news” (Ephesians 3:6, WE).

Next, Paul talks about how much he loves to preach to the non-Jews. Paul loves telling them about Jesus so much! We learn about the hard times that Paul suffers, too. Paul is sent to prison because he preaches to the non-Jews.

We also learn about Paul's love for the Good News. The Good News teaches that Jewish church members and non-Jewish church members are the same in God's eyes. God loves both Jews and non-Jews the same. Paul is excited about this Bible truth and about his work for God. This week, we will read and study Paul's prayers for the church and his praise for God. Paul helps us feel excited to do God's work, too!

PAUL, A PRISONER FOR JESUS (Ephesians 3)

Read Ephesians 3. What are the most important ideas in this chapter?

Paul writes Ephesians 3 in an interesting form. First, Paul starts the chapter with these words: “So I, Paul, am a prisoner of [who belongs to] Christ Jesus. I am a prisoner for you who are not Jews” (Ephesians 3:1, ICB). Then in the next verse, Paul starts to talk about a new topic. Paul tells us about his work as teacher to the non-Jews (Ephesians 3:2–13). After this topic, Paul comes back in Ephesians 3:14 to the idea he started with, in verse 1, about being a prisoner. Paul uses the words “That is why” (Ephesians 3:14, WE) to connect verse 14 back to the topic in verse 1. Then Paul gives us his prayer report.

In Ephesians 3:1, Paul says he is “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (ICB). Wasn’t Paul arrested by the Romans? Isn’t Paul in prison? So, how can Paul be Jesus’ prisoner when he’s locked in a Roman jail? What does Paul really mean? Paul uses “prisoner” as a word picture to show that he belongs to Jesus and not to Rome. So, while Paul may be in a Roman jail, Paul’s life is really under God’s control (compare Ephesians 4:1). Paul wants us to see that he is right where God wants him to be.

Do you see in Ephesians 3:13 what Paul says about his suffering? Later in his letter, Paul talks about his chains (Ephesians 6:20, NLV). This information suggests that Paul isn’t a prisoner in a comfortable house (compare Acts 28:16). Paul is in prison. Roman prisons weren’t nice places to be during New Testament times. The Kingdom of Rome didn’t have clean prisons that served good meals to its prisoners. The Kingdom of Rome didn’t need many prisons. The Roman leaders didn’t send people to prison to punish them. People were sent to prison to wait to go to court. Sometimes they waited in prison to die for a crime. Roman leaders expected prisoners to take care of their own needs. So, prisoners depended on family members and friends to bring them food and other supplies.

Paul may be worried that his readers will lose hope when they learn he is in prison. They may ask, “How can Paul really be a teacher from Jesus if he is in jail?” So, Paul helps his readers understand that his being in prison is part of God’s plan. Paul suffers for them. His suffering will honor God’s name in the end (Ephesians 3:13).



In Ephesians 3:1, Paul says he is “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (ICB).

GOD'S SECRET PLAN (Ephesians 3:1–6)

What secret did God give Paul to share with church members? Read Ephesians 3:1–6 for the answer.

Study Ephesians 3:1–6. In this part of the letter, Paul talks about five important ideas:

1. Paul writes this part of his letter to non-Jewish Christians. These non-Jews are members of the churches in Ephesus (Ephesians 3:1).
2. Paul says that God gave him the special job of preaching the Good News about His mercy to the non-Jews (read Ephesians 3:2; compare Ephesians 3:7, 8).
3. Paul says that God showed him a mystery. Paul already wrote about this topic in his letter to the Ephesians (read Ephesians 1:9, 10; Ephesians 2:11–22). This mystery is the Good News about Jesus (Ephesians 3:3, 4). Paul wants us to understand that he didn't invent the Good News. He is only a manager or preacher of the Good News. Again, Paul says that God gave him his special work: to preach the Good News to the non-Jews.
4. Paul isn't the only one who knows about God's secret. The Holy Spirit also explained the mystery to Jesus' other teachers and special messengers during New Testament times. The Spirit's explanation to teachers and messengers in New Testament times is better than the explanation given to God's servants in Old Testament times. God's plan was a secret in the past. Now, God explains His secret to His servants during New Testament times.
5. Paul announces, "This is God's plan. Those [church members] who are not Jews will also share in the blessings of [from] God. They [non-Jews] also are a part of the body [church] of Jesus Christ. They also will receive [get] the things God has promised in Jesus Christ through [because of] the good news" (Ephesians 3:6, WE).

Paul loves sharing the Good News about Jesus with Jews and non-Jews. These two groups become God's new church. More than that, they show God's plan for everyone on earth (read Ephesians 2:14–16). God changes enemies into friends. Together, they get from God the blessings He promised in the Good News (read Ephesians 3:6).



The Spirit's explanation to teachers and messengers in New Testament times is better than the explanation given to God's servants in Old Testament times.

HOW THE CHURCH SHOWS GOD'S WISDOM (Ephesians 3:7–13)

What does Paul say about God and the things God does? Read Ephesians 3:7–13 for the answer.

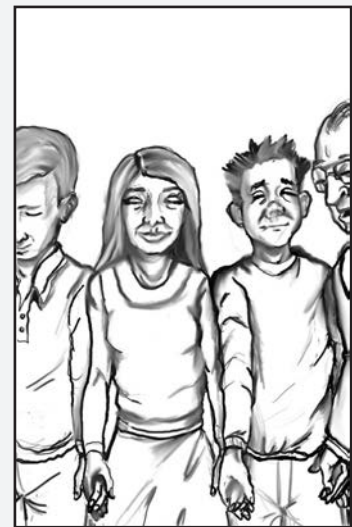
Paul announces that God in His mercy made him a preacher (Ephesians 3:7; compare Ephesians 3:1, 2). God doesn't give this gift to Paul because Paul is special. God makes Paul a preacher because God is filled with mercy. Paul helps us understand this Bible truth when he says, "I am the least important of all God's people" (Ephesians 3:8, ERV).

As we read Paul's letters, we learn how Paul views himself. Early on, Paul announces that God gave him special work to do for the non-Jews (Galatians 1:1). Later, Paul says he isn't worthy to be named as a teacher for Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:9). In Ephesians, as we just saw, Paul says he is "the least important of all God's people" (Ephesians 3:8, ERV). Finally, Paul says that he is the worst sinner (1 Timothy 1:15).

This famous quote from Ellen G. White may help explain Paul's thinking about himself: "When you come near to Jesus, you will see yourself for who you are. The nearer you get to Him, the more you will see your own sins. You will have a better understanding about yourself. You will see that your own sins are very bad compared to His holy life."—*Steps to Christ*, page 64, adapted.

Paul continues. In Ephesians 3:10, he writes: "His purpose [plan] was that all the rulers [leaders] and powers [the top angels] in the heavenly [in heaven] places will now know the many different ways he shows his wisdom. They will know this because of the church" (Ephesians 3:10, ERV). How does the church on earth show the angels in heaven that God is wise? The answer is the church shows God's wisdom when its members are in peace and agreement with each other. In the past, non-Jews and Jews were enemies. But when they accepted Jesus and joined the church, a miracle happened. Jesus joined people together who were enemies in the past. Now they are at peace. Their peace shows Satan and his angels that God's plan is happening. A loving church shows Satan and his angels that their end is near.

In Ephesians 3:10, Paul tells us the church's job. How will following what Paul says change us and the church?



The church shows God's wisdom when its members are in peace and agreement with each other.

LET JESUS LIVE IN YOUR HEART (Ephesians 3:14–19)

Compare Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:16–19 with his prayer for Christians in Ephesians 3:14–19. What does Paul ask for in each prayer? How are the two prayers the same?



Think about this Bible truth: your family belongs to God.

Paul tells us, “From the Father every family in heaven and on earth gets its name” (Ephesians 3:15, NIV). In the Greek language, the words “Father” and “family” are connected. The Greek word for “Father” is “**patēr**.” The Greek word for “family” is “**patria**.” These two words in the Greek language are much the same. Paul wants us to understand that God’s saving plan (Ephesians 1:9, 10) is for all time and for all people. Every family in heaven and on earth belongs to the Father. This news is very good! Think about this Bible truth: your family belongs to God. Sure, your family may make mistakes and not be perfect. But God loves your family anyway. Your family has His name.

In Ephesians 3:16–19, Paul asks God to give Christians a strong spiritual experience. Paul asks God to give His Spirit to His people to help make them strong (Ephesians 3:16). Paul also asks for Jesus to live in the hearts of Christians by faith (Ephesians 3:17). Then they will be strong in God’s love.

Paul praises God for the blessings He offers to Christians. Paul says to his readers, “May you have power [strength] together with all the Lord’s holy people to understand Christ’s love. May you know how wide and long and high and deep it is” (Ephesians 3:18, NIV). Why do you think Paul uses the words “wide,” “long,” “high,” and “deep”? Paul uses these four words to tell us that God’s love for us is very big. This information is more good news for us, too.

PAUL'S POEM OF PRAISE (Ephesians 3:20, 21)

Paul ends his prayer report with a short poem that praises God. What things does Paul praise God for? Read Ephesians 3:20, 21 to answer the question.

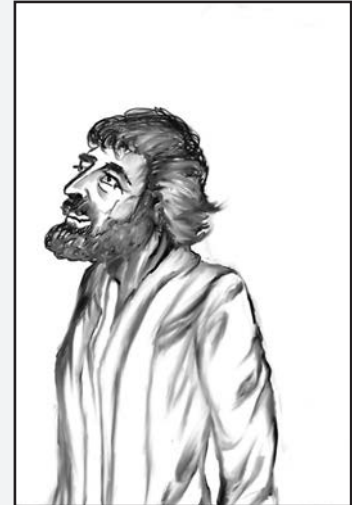
Paul shared with us a list of things he prayed for (Ephesians 3:14–19). Now Paul prays a powerful prayer for the church. His prayer ends with a short poem that praises God (Ephesians 3:20, 21). At the end of this poem, Paul says, “So, praise him [God] in the church meeting in [with the spirit and mind of] Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:21, WE). Yesterday, we saw that Jesus lives in the hearts of His followers (Ephesians 3:17). So, Jesus is the Savior of the church. In Paul’s short poem, he praises God for His saving love. God offers this love to us because of Jesus.

Look at the words “Give him [Jesus] glory [praise and honor] through [for] all time and for ever and ever” (Ephesians 3:21, NlrV). This verse shows us that Paul expects a wonderful future for Christians. In Ephesians 4:30, Paul is excited about the day when “God will make you free” from sin and death at the Second Coming (ICB). Paul’s poem celebrates Jesus’ strength. This strength has no limits or end. Jesus uses His never ending strength to help us win the fight against sin.

Review Paul’s second prayer report (Ephesians 3:14–21; compare with Paul’s first prayer report, in Ephesians 1:15–23). In the second report, Paul talks about the things he is thankful for. Paul says God the Father’s care for him makes him strong (Ephesians 3:14, 15). Paul says the Holy Spirit is ready to help Jesus’ followers, too (Ephesians 3:16). We also are partners with Jesus Himself (Ephesians 3:17), who loves us. Jesus’ love has no limits (Ephesians 3:18, 19). Paul prays that Christians “will be filled with everything God has for you” (Ephesians 3:19, NlrV). God will fill His followers with Himself. Paul is so thankful for all God’s precious gifts. Paul is surprised that God offers us so many wonderful gifts (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

Whenever you have problems, read Paul’s reports about his prayers. Paul’s reports help you remember God’s plan and His mercy. We are part of God’s big plan to save humans (Ephesians 1:9, 10). For sure, God’s love is at work in us.

What blessing from God are you most thankful for? Write a prayer of praise that thanks God for this gift.



Paul says God the Father’s care for him makes him strong (Ephesians 3:14, 15).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Ellen G. White, “Modern Revivals,” in *The Great Controversy*, pages 461–478.

Read this quote from Ellen G. White on Ephesians 3:14–19: “These verses promise us that God will give us knowledge. God wants us to know Him in a powerful way. So, why do we have a weak experience? We have every spiritual blessing in this life to understand God’s mercy. So, why don’t we grow in spiritual strength? Paul didn’t write Ephesians 3:14–19 to lie to us or trick us. Paul isn’t trying to give us false hope. Paul wrote these words to show us what we may become. We must become what God wants us to be if we wish to be citizens of His kingdom. How can we work together with God if we have a weak spiritual experience? We know the things that God offers to us Christians. So, we should try hard to understand the things that God wants us to know.

“Do we really believe the Bible? Do we really believe that we may get the knowledge about God that Paul promises us in Ephesians 3:14–19? Do we believe every word that God says? Do we believe the words that God’s special messengers and teachers say? Do we believe the words that Jesus says? All knowledge and blessings come from Jesus. He gives us every rich gift we have. So, do we really believe in God and in His Son?”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 1, 1889, adapted.



God wants us to know Him in a powerful way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Compare Paul’s praise poem in Ephesians 3:20, 21 to other praise poems in the New Testament. (Examples of other praise poems include Romans 11:33–36; Romans 16:25–27; Philippians 4:20; 2 Peter 3:18; Jude 1:24, 25.) What ideas are in these praise poems? How can we praise God and worship Him in the way these praise poems show us?
- 2 Paul says we “can be filled with everything God has for you” (Ephesians 3:19, ERV). Four different times in Ephesians, Paul talks about being filled with everything God has for us. Why do you think this idea is so important to Paul?
- 3 In Ephesians 3, Paul praises the many things that God does. Which thing that God does do you like best?

PART 3: THE BIBLE, A MIGHTY WEAPON

That night, Almira woke up after having another bad dream. Almira decided to go to the Seventh-day Adventist Church the next Sabbath. But in the morning, she thought, “I’m not a Christian. I can’t go to that church.” The next night, Almira had another nightmare. She worried again about what she should do. On Sabbath, she went to the Adventist church.

After several weeks, Almira’s parents discovered that Almira was going to the Adventist church every Sabbath. Almira’s parents didn’t allow her to go. Other family members heard that Almira was going to church. They told her to stop going. Neighbors saw Almira walk to the church on Sabbaths. They came out of their apartment buildings to scold Almira. For Almira, going to church became a fight every Sabbath. But she enjoyed worshiping at the church. So, she kept going. She learned about Jesus and found peace in Him.

But at home the evil spirit continued to bother her. The spirit kept coming at night. Almira started to pray, “In the name of the blood of Jesus Christ, please, Father God, protect me from Satan so I can sleep.” Almira prayed the prayer every night for three months. The prayers sent the spirit away. But Almira continued to feel afraid.

Almira told the Adventist pastor about her fears. The pastor told Almira to read the Bible. Whenever she felt the spirit nearby, Almira opened her Bible to Isaiah 43. Almira loved the Bible promise, “Now this is what the Lord says. He created you, people of Jacob. He formed you, people of Israel. He says, ‘Don’t be afraid, because I have saved you. I have called you by name, and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not hurt you. This is because I, the Lord, am your God. I, the Holy One of Israel, am your Savior. I gave Egypt to pay for you. I gave Cush [Egypt] and Seba to make you mine. You are precious to me. I give you honor, and I love you. So I will give other people in your place. I will give other nations to save your life’ ” (Isaiah 43:1–4, ICB). Almira also felt comforted by Isaiah 49:24, 25.

One night, Almira confessed all her sins to Jesus. After that, she slept better than she had in a long time. Finally, Almira stopped being afraid. When she read the Bible and prayed, the spirit always left. Almira understood that the spirit was stronger than she was. But Jesus was stronger than the spirit.

Read more about Almira next week. Thank you for offerings that help share the Good News about Jesus in Russia and around the globe.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Neighbors came out of their apartment buildings to scold Almira for going to church on Sabbath.

