



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

EPHESIANS



He is Our Peace



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BY DAVID JACKMAN



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He is Our Peace
Pathway Bible Guides: Ephesians
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(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)
PO Box 225
Kingsford NSW 2032
Australia
Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478
Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265
Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au
Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Matthias Media (USA)
Telephone: 330 953 1702; international: +1-330-953-1702
Facsimile: 330 953 1712; international: +1-330-953-1712
Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com
Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

If asked to sum up in a word the experience of living in today’s world, many millions of people might well choose the word ‘brokenness’. In a fallen world, life frequently breaks down. Expectations are disappointed; tragedies strike; relationships break up; families disintegrate; hopes are smashed. Life is broken and it needs to be fixed—but how? All too often disappointment leads to bitterness, hurt to hostility, and cynicism morphs into aggression. We are all aware that ‘Humpty’ has ‘had a great fall’, but who can put the pieces of life back together again, and how might it happen?

Ephesians has God’s answer. Many Christians affirm that this is a letter all about the church, and we shall certainly see why—but we are not its primary focus. It is supremely a letter about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of his body, and from whom the whole church grows “so that it builds itself up in love” (4:16). This is a letter that teaches us about God’s big purposes, on the grandest scale, here in time and stretching into eternity: “to unite all things in him [Christ]” (1:10). It exalts the Lord Jesus and shows us who he really is; what he has done for us, his people; and how the brokenness of our world can only be mended by the gospel of his grace.

If the greatest division of the first-century world—that between Jews and Gentiles—can be healed through the cross of Christ, then there are

no broken relationships beyond his loving reach. Since Christ is our peace, reconciling sinful people like us to God as our Father, there can no longer be any barriers to separate us from one another once we are united to Jesus, by faith. The church of redeemed, reconciled believers then serves as a prototype, within time, of what God purposes to accomplish for all eternity. Loving relationships and unity between Christians are the fruit of the love of Christ for his people, seen in his death and resurrection. It is also the proof of his total supremacy over all the hostile powers of evil, including the devil himself, and the demonstration to the whole universe that God's mighty work of salvation is accomplished, that it is totally effective, and that it will be eternal in its outworking.

Studying this wonderful letter not only deepens our understanding of all that Jesus is and all that he has done for us, but also deepens our love for him. And that makes us want to live to please him, to walk in love as he loved us (5:2). As we study Paul's practical applications of the gospel to our new lifestyle, we shall be corrected, challenged and above all empowered to live an authentic Christian life in a broken world. Paul's purpose is that we should become more and more in practice what God has made us to be, and so reveal to the whole world the miracle of restoration and new life in Christ, which is the only cure for our human brokenness.

David Jackman

November 2011

1. CLEAR VISION

Ephesians 1:1-14



Getting started

Christians often say that God is in control. But it's sometimes easier to say than believe. What is it that most makes you question whether God really is in control, either in the world at large, or in your personal life and circumstances?



Light from the Word

Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

1. The writer, readers and greeting are all related to Jesus Christ. What is the connection to Jesus in each case, and why do you think Paul draws attention to it (vv. 1-2)?

2. “In the heavenly places” is an unusual phrase (v. 3), indicating the nature of our spiritual blessings in Christ. What do you think it means? Check your answer out against its other uses in this letter (1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12).

3. God chose his people before he made the world. What two great purposes does Paul highlight in verses 4-5? Why do they matter?

8. By “we” in verse 11, Paul seems to have himself and his fellow Jewish believers primarily in mind (contrast “you also” in verse 13, referring to the predominantly Gentile church). How does he describe God’s blessings to them (vv. 11-12)?
9. What blessings do the Gentile believers now experience, and how have they come to receive them (vv. 13-14)?



To finish

Look back on all the blessings listed in these verses, and remind yourself of how each one is dependent on Christ and being “in him”. How does this help us with the issues raised in our ‘Getting started’ question? What sort of response do you think this passage calls for?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God the Father for his wonderful cosmic plan of redemption, and the Lord Jesus for enabling it to happen through his sacrificial obedience to the cross.
- Pray for yourself and your church that you may understand the privilege of being caught up in God's eternal plan and that such clear vision will motivate all your choices and priorities.

FOR THE LEADER

What are Pathway Bible Guides?

The Pathway Bible Guides aim to provide simple, straightforward Bible study material for:

- Christians who are new to studying the Bible (perhaps because they've been recently converted or because they have joined a Bible study group for the first time)
- Christians who find other studies¹ too much of a stretch.

Accordingly, we've designed the studies to be short, straightforward and easy to use, with a simple vocabulary. At the same time, we've tried to do justice to the passages being studied, and to model good Bible-reading principles. We've tried to be simple without being simplistic; no-nonsense without being no-content.

The questions and answers assume a small group context, but it should be easy to adapt them to suit different situations, such as individual study and one-to-one.

Your role as leader

Because many in your group may not be used to reading and discussing a Bible passage in a group context, a greater level of responsibility will fall to you as the leader of the discussions. There are the usual responsibilities of preparation, prayer and managing group dynamics. In addition, there will be an extra dimension of forming and encouraging good Bible reading habits in people who may not have much of an idea of what those habits look like.

Questions have been kept deliberately brief and simple. For this reason, you may have to fill in some of the gaps that may have been addressed in, say, an Interactive Bible Study. Such 'filling in' may take the form of asking follow-up questions, or using your best judgement to work out when you might need to supply background information. That sort of information, and some suggestions about other questions you could ask, may be found in the following leader's

notes. In addition, a *New Bible Dictionary* is always a useful aid to preparation, and simple commentaries such as those in the *Tyndale* or *Bible Speaks Today* series are often helpful. On Ephesians, the commentaries by Peter O'Brien, Leon Morris and John Stott are all good.² Consult these resources after you have done your own preparation.

On the question of background information, these studies are written from the assumption that God's word stands alone. God works through his Holy Spirit and the leaders he has gifted—such as you—to make his meaning clear. Assuming this to be true, the best interpreter and provider of background information for Scripture will not be academic historical research, but Scripture itself. Extra historical information may be useful for the purpose of illustration, but it is unnecessary for understanding and applying what God says to us.

The format of the studies

The discussion questions on each passage follow a simple pattern. There is a question at the beginning of each discussion that is intended to get people talking around the issues raised by the passage, and to give you some idea of how people are thinking. If the group turns out to be confident, motivated and comfortable with each other and the task at hand, you may even decide to skip this question.

Alternatively, if the group members are shy or quiet, you may decide to think of related types of questions that you could add in to the study, so as to maintain momentum in a non-threatening way.

After the first question, the remaining questions work through the passage sequentially, alternating between observation, interpretation and application in a way that will become obvious when you do your own preparation. The final question of each discussion, just before the opportunity for prayer, could be used in some groups to encourage (say) one person each week to give a short talk (it could be 1 minute or 5 minutes, depending on the topic and the people). The thinking here is that there's no better way to encourage understanding of a passage than to get people to the point where they can explain it to others. Use your judgement in making the best use of this final exercise each week, depending on the people in your group.

In an average group, it should be possible to work through the study in approximately 45 minutes. But it's important that you work out what your group is capable of, given the time available, and make adjustments accordingly. Work out in advance which questions or sub-points can be omitted if time is short.

And have a few supplementary questions or discussion starters up your sleeve if your group is dealing with the material quickly and hungering for more. Each group is different. It's your job as leader to use the printed material as 'Bible Guides', and not as a set of questions that you must rigidly stick to regardless of your circumstances.

Preparation: 60/40/20

Ideally, group members should spend half an hour reading over the passage and pencilling in some answers *before* they come to the group. Not every group member will do this, of course, but encourage them with the idea that the more they prepare for the study, the more they will get out of the discussion.

In terms of your own preparation as leader, we recommend you put aside approximately *two hours*, either all at once or in two one-hour blocks, and that you divide up the time as follows:

- 60 minutes reading the passage and answering the questions yourself as best you can (without looking at the leader's notes or Bible commentaries)
- 40 minutes consulting the leader's notes (plus other resources, like commentaries). Add to your own answers, and jot down supplementary questions or other information that you want to have available as you lead the discussion. Make sure you write everything you need on the study pages—the last thing you want to do is to keep turning to the 'answers' in the back during the group discussion
- 20 minutes praying about the study and for your group members.

This 60/40/20 pattern will help you to focus on the Bible and what it's saying, rather than simply regurgitating to the group what is in the leader's notes. Remember, these notes are just that—notes to offer some help and guidance. They are not the Bible! As a pattern of preparation, 60/40/20 also helps you to keep praying for yourself and your group, that God would give spiritual growth as his word is sown in your hearts (see Luke 8:4-15; I Cor 3:5-7).

If, for some reason, you have less or more time to spend in preparation, simply apply the 60/40/20 proportions accordingly.

1. Such as the Interactive Bible Study (IBS) series also available from Matthias Media.
2. L Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1994; P O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC, Apollos, Leicester, 1999; J Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, BST, IVP, Leicester, 1979.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. CLEAR VISION

Ephesians 1:1-14

► Remember 60/40/20



Getting started

It is so easy to take our world view from the pressures of our culture, whether through the media or personal contacts. The 'Getting started' question is designed to get us looking inside first to see where our doubts and fears are about God being in charge, and then to prepare us for the panoramic views of spiritual reality that the study passages open up for us.

Studying the passage

The greeting that begins any New Testament letter is always more than just a standard 'hello'. The identity of the author and the letter's destination are basic, but what are the distinctives that the writer emphasizes? Here it is not so much the greeting itself (v. 2), which is comparatively conventional (though note that the full title of "the Lord Jesus Christ" is used), but rather it is Paul's emphasis on his divinely-given authority as an apostle (v. 1a), and his reminder that Christians live at two addresses—they are "in Ephesus", and they are "in Christ Jesus". The interaction between the two leads us into the letter's major concerns.

Verse 3 introduces an unusual phrase, "in the heavenly places", which is so important to the letter that it is worthwhile even at this early stage stopping off to look at its other uses in Ephesians (question 2). Encourage the group to think it means not just "heaven" (see 6:12), but also the whole unseen domain of spiritual forces, where a cosmic conflict is being fought out in which we too are involved. It's probably unwise to allow too much speculation at this point, but the issue needs to be noted since so much of the rest of the letter deals with it.

Verses 3-14 form one long sentence in the original, so the ideas do need to be kept closely together. We need to remember that it is actually one long benediction, in which Paul blesses God for all the spiritual benefits he has given so lavishly to his people. Questions 3-9 are designed to pull out the detail from the verses of what Paul means by “in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (v. 3).

It would be easy for the group to become stuck in speculative discussion about election and predestination (v. 4), but Paul’s concern is the reality and purpose of these great truths, not abstract theologizing. You will need to keep the group on track here. Probably the best way of doing this is to draw attention to the “in Christ” theme, which dominates the paragraph. Christ is referred to either by name or reference in every single verse up to verse 13, with the exception of verse 8. This is a magnificent section establishing and elevating the Lord Jesus Christ in all his majestic splendour and rescuing grace, so we want to come out of the study thrilled with who we are in him and with our eyes fixed on Jesus and our faith deepened so that we have total confidence in his person and work.

Another way to avoid getting bogged down in the intricacies of predestination is to underline with the group the purposes of God in bestowing all these spiritual blessings on his people. Some are for our direct benefit in terms of holy living, divine sonship (vv. 4-5), forgiveness (v. 7), wisdom and insight (v. 8), and in the revelation of God’s mind and purposes (v. 9). But running all the way through (vv. 6, 12, 14) is the greater purpose of “the praise of his glory”, revealed in his grace. Paul wants his readers to be assured in their understanding and reception of all the gospel benefits they have received by God’s sovereign grace “in Christ”, because he knows that is how they will live distinctively different lives to God’s glory, in Ephesus or anywhere else. It is central to the purpose of the passage to keep these practical perspectives clearly in view as we rejoice in the detail of all that Christ has accomplished for his people. As the passage moves from God’s sovereign choice in time past to the experience of the Christian believer in the present, note that everything depends on the cross (v. 7). It is easy to pass over the phrase “through his blood” but it is the key to understanding God’s grace (question 5).

This section is one of the ‘mountain peaks’ of New Testament pastoral theology, so don’t be surprised if it is hard to do it justice in one study. Its content is far bigger than we can grasp. But if you plan to cover each part equally and keep the study moving on so as not to be sidetracked from the big picture, you will have served the group well. It is particularly important to be

aware of the movement of the passage towards the climax in verse 10b. As you read from verse 9, you have a sense of Paul building up to this great revelation (and it is truly staggering in its applications). One way in which this happens is by the introduction of the word “mystery” in verse 9, which will occur again at 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32 and 6:19. Since Bible words have Bible meanings it is always more valuable to understand a term’s significance by observing its usage in the letter, rather than simply looking up its derivation in a lexicon. Such a “mystery” could only be understood by revelation, which is the disclosure of God’s biggest purpose for planet earth, both for time and eternity, the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ (v. 10a). This purpose is nothing less than “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth [i.e. everywhere]” (v. 10b). Do take time at question 7 to meditate on the implications of this both for our world view and for our personal priorities in life.

Study 2 will show us that Christ is already appointed to be head over everything for the church (1:22), so this is clearly the present reality as 1:20-21 will make plain. But here in 1:10 the stress is more on the future fulfilment of this great plan, when Christ’s victory will be exercised over the whole of creation, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess the lordship of Jesus (Phil 2:9-11). Ephesus was full of “mystery” religions and cults, each with their own views of the meaning of existence and the purpose of the universe, but Paul wants his readers to be certain that those questions and searchings all find their fulfilment in Christ and in the gospel.

The final verses therefore come right down to the present experience of the writer and his readers in first-century Ephesus (vv. 11-14). As question 8 indicates, the “we” of verse 11 seems to refer to the priority of the Jews, in chronological terms, in receiving God’s revelation in Jesus. The “you also” in verse 13 is most naturally read as referring to the Gentiles’ inclusion “in Christ” through Paul’s own missionary apostleship (see Acts 19). The Lord Jesus came first to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6), which is where faith and hope “in Christ” first was generated. But Paul’s overriding purpose is to assure the predominantly Gentile Ephesian believers that their privileges are exactly the same, and that they are in no way inferior to Jewish believers, or less secure.

Note in verses 13-14 a summary of what it means to be “in Christ”: the gospel word of truth is heard and believed; then the Holy Spirit is received, as a present mark of God’s possession and a deposit guaranteeing future glory, in the fullness of redemption. The implications work out in two ways: we are now

God's possession, or inheritance; and all that he has for his redeemed people will certainly one day be ours.



To finish

So many Christians fail to realize and so appropriate all the gospel blessings that are already ours “in Christ”. It would be like receiving a large legacy cheque and being grateful for it, treasuring it even, but framing it and putting it on the wall rather than cashing it and living in the enjoyment of all its benefits. The ‘cash value’ of this passage is immense in terms of faith, joy and peace, not only in our personal lives as we seek to live for Christ in our ‘Ephesus’, but also in the church for our corporate faith and enthusiastic witness.



Give thanks and pray

Each study will end with a suggestion for thanksgiving and for prayer. These are intended only as a starting point. However, it is good to model thanksgiving and prayer that flow from what is learnt in the Bible study.



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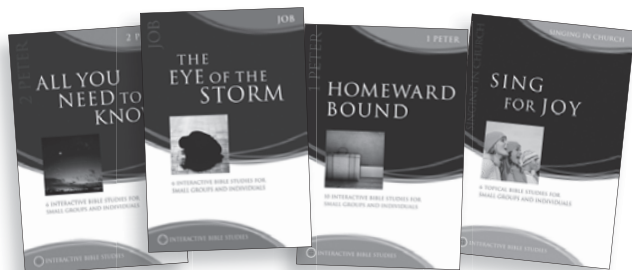
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We pray that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.



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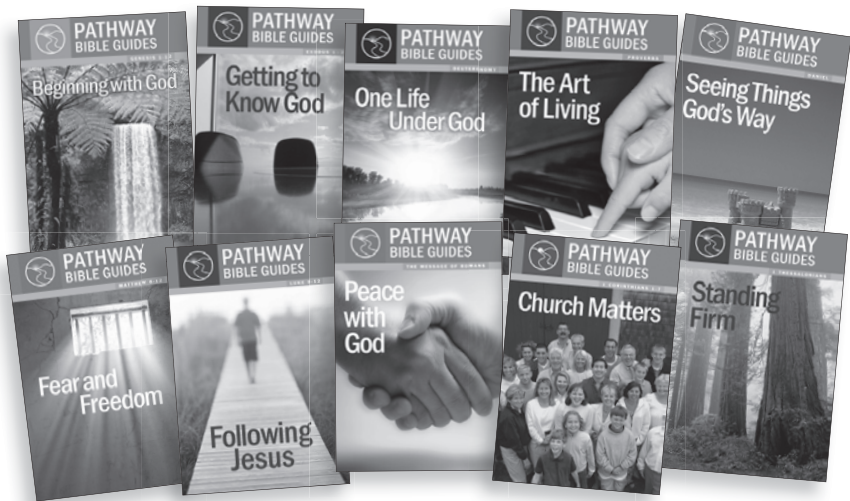
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Pathway Bible Guides

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God's big plan, Paul tells the Ephesians, is to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). And as the letter unfolds, it becomes clear that Jesus is not only the centre and goal of that unity, but the one who achieved it—on the cross.

He himself is our peace, says Paul. In his death and resurrection, Jesus smashed down all the barriers of sin and hostility that divide us from God and from one another, and freed us to live a new Spirit-filled life of love, thanksgiving and unity.

In *He is Our Peace*, well-known British preacher and author David Jackman is our wise and helpful guide through Paul's majestic letter to the Ephesians.

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