



Ephesians

God's Master Plan

Sample Lesson #1
and
Leader's Guide Answers

1:

God's Master Plan

Read—Introduction, Ephesians 1:1–14, other Scripture references as given.

Imagine sitting in an estate attorney's office waiting to hear the reading of your grandfather's will. Many times he told you with a smile that someday he was going to make you very wealthy. Now, grieved by his passing, your mind wanders as you reflect upon his comment. When the attorney reads your grandfather's will, you are overwhelmed by his generosity and amazed by your newfound fortune. Your life will never be the same.

Ephesians 1:3–14 reveals a first look at God's grand plan and lists four spiritual aspects of a Christian's divine inheritance (adoption, acceptance, redemption, sealing). Reading about your spiritual inheritance will thrill your heart; understanding your spiritual inheritance will change your life.

Now before you begin this and every lesson, ask God to reveal Jesus Christ to you and to transform you into His image.

1. a. What is the central theme of Ephesians (see Introduction)? _____

- b. What two important questions does Ephesians answer (see Introduction)?
 1. _____
 2. _____
2. Paul identifies himself as an apostle (Greek *apostolos*—one sent or commissioned by another; in this case, God). The letter is addressed **to the saints who are in Ephesus** (Ephesians 1:1). To whom was Paul referring when he used the word **saints** (Ephesians 1:15; Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 4:12)?
3. Paul identifies his audience and offers a familiar New Testament greeting (**grace to you and peace**, Ephesians 1:1–2). Some people search for peace in personal and professional success, interpersonal relationships, and individual achievement. Others give up their search for this elusive treasure and turn to entertainment or resort to self-medication, including the use of prescription and non-prescription drugs.
 - a. Peace is one of man's greatest desires, but relatively few can even define it. What is peace?
 - b. Where have you found lasting peace in your life?
 - c. *Do you think* an individual can truly experience peace without knowing God's grace (salvation)? Why?
4. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul praises God for the spiritual blessings He bestows on those chosen for salvation (Ephesians 1:3–13). In the Greek New Testament, Ephesians 1:3–14 forms one long sentence, likely emphasizing the fact that these spiritual blessings are the rightful inheritance of every believer. What and where are the **heavenly places** (*places* [NIV: "realms"] is italicized to indicate it was added by the translators) where believers have been blessed (Ephesians 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12)? Answer in your own words.
5. a. The term **heavenlies** (heavenly places) refers to a place or realm to which many Christians only give a passing thought. Yet it's the place or realm where God has blessed all believers with His great spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). What *do you think* are these blessings that every believer possesses?
- b. Since the **heavenlies** (heavenly places) are the repository or storeroom of God's great blessings, what can a Christian do to access them in increased measure (2 Corinthians 4:18; John 6:29; Hebrews 11:1)?

6. Beginning in Ephesians 1:4 the Bible begins to reveal the first aspect of God’s grand plan—man’s redemption. God’s plan for man’s redemption was devised before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), was done by a volitional choice on His part (Ephesians 1:4), and was done according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:5). If you are saved (born again), it’s not because you chose Christ; it’s because He chose you (Ephesians 1:4). For what purpose (the question “Why am I here?”) did God choose those who are saved (Ephesians 1:4, 6, 12)?

- 1. _____ (v. _____).
- 2. _____ (v. _____).

7. God’s motive for extending salvation to man is love, and man’s redemption was accomplished according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:4–5). The phrases **He chose us ... before the foundation of the world** and **having predestined us** (Ephesians 1:4–5) imply that God chooses only specific people for salvation, and by consequence, the rest are not chosen and eternally lost. Other passages in the Bible appear to teach that anyone who truly repents and believes in Christ alone for eternal life can be saved (John 3:16; Acts 17:30; Romans 10:13; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Do you believe that only certain people (those whom God predestined) can be saved, or do you believe anyone can be saved if he or she trusts in Jesus Christ completely for salvation? Why?

8. A person is adopted into God’s family when he or she is saved (born again, redeemed). When Paul used the word **adoption** (Gk. *nióthesia*), he borrowed a common image from Roman culture. A father chose to formally adopt his own son at a particular age. The adoption was done solely at the discretion of the father, was irreversible, and included an irrevocable inheritance. List three ways *you think* Paul’s comparison of the Roman concept of adoption to redemption presents an accurate picture of salvation.

- 1. _____ 2. _____
- 3. _____

9. Another aspect of a believer’s spiritual inheritance in Christ is redemption (Ephesians 1:7). The word **redemption** (Gk. *apolutrosis*—purchasing with a price) refers to the price Jesus Christ paid for man’s salvation. List four things the Bible says about this redemption (Ephesians 1:7).

10. In Ephesians 1:10 the Bible gives us the first official statement of God’s grand plan. Even though God’s plan includes man’s salvation, it extends far beyond his redemption. In your own words restate God’s grand plan, trying to capture the full extent of His plan with your answer (Ephesians 1:10; 3:8–11; Romans 8:18–23).

11. The first aspect of God’s grand plan—man’s redemption through faith in Christ alone—was determined before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), involved a choice on His part (Ephesians 1:4), and was done in love (Ephesians 1:4) according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:5, 9). What must happen before this eternal transaction is completed in the life of an individual, and what do all new believers receive as God’s pledge of their redemption (Ephesians 1:13–14)?

12. Now that you see that God’s plan of redemption was accomplished entirely by Christ’s sacrifice on your behalf, are you absolutely sure that you are saved? YES NO I’m not sure
If you are not sure, turn to the back of this Bible study guide and read the Final Exam. It will explain how to be born again according to the Bible.

Leader's Guide

Lesson 1: God's Master Plan

1.
 - a. The book of Ephesians reveals God's grand plan for His creation in this age and the age to come (Ephesians 1:9–11; 3:8–11). His master plan is to bring everything together under the sovereign authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10).
 - b.
 1. What in the world is God doing?
 2. Why am I here?
2. The word *saint* (Gk. *hagios*) is the normal designation for all New Testament believers. The word *saint* refers to all those who have placed their faith in Christ alone for eternal life and are now set apart by God for His service. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul addresses the Corinthian believers as saints even though their spiritual conduct was worldly and ungodly (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). The apostle was referring to their position or standing in Christ, not the personal spiritual conduct.
3.
 - a. In the Old Testament, the word *shalom* (peace) is one of the most significant terms and can be defined as “fulfillment, completion, maturity, soundness, wholeness, community, harmony, tranquility, security, welfare, friendship, agreement, success, and prosperity” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). Peace is often understood as the opposite of war (Ecclesiastes 3:8) and can also be used to describe the end of military conflict. Individually, the word *peace* stresses a state of serenity, either resulting from an absence of negative external circumstances or due to inner strength or maturity. In the New Testament peace is a gift from God to those who are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). The Bible also anticipates peace (absence of conflict and a state of harmonious relations) as being the normal state of affairs among Christians (Mark 9:50). Moreover, Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and His people ought to reflect His image. Lastly, peace was often used as an early Christian greeting when it was linked with grace (Ephesians 1:3).
 - b. Answers will vary.
 - c. Answers will vary. No one can experience true peace until he or she knows the God of peace. The Bible says those without Christ are without hope and strangers to the covenants of promise (Ephesians 2:12), which is hardly a state of peace. A non-believer may experience some “circumstantial peace” if peace is defined as the absence of external conflict, but this type of peace is temporal and inferior to that which can be experienced by those who are redeemed and are walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The believer, by the grace of God, can arrive at a place of spiritual maturity where he or she lives in peace regardless of the external circumstances (Job 13:15; Acts 16:20–25; Philippians 1:19–26).
4. In Ephesians 1:3 the term *heavenlies* refers to the unseen, spiritual dimension or realm where Christ rules supremely and the storehouse from which God's benevolent gifts are given freely to believers based upon their relationship to Christ. In the four additional passages where the phrase occurs in Ephesians (1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) the scene is more local, as it is in another of Paul's epistles (2 Timothy 4:18). The meaning is that the spiritual blessings of God (the riches of Christ) are found only in heaven and are available to all believers through Christ's sacrifice.
5.
 - a. In the larger context of the New Testament, the spiritual blessings refer to all that is made available to the believer because of Jesus Christ's death and sacrifice. In the immediate context, the phrase refers to the specific spiritual blessings mentioned (adoption, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, inheritance, sealing).
 - b.
 1. By faith the believer realizes these spiritual blessings are authentic and eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18).
 2. The Christian must believe what God has promised him and claim his inheritance by faith (John 6:29).
 3. The Christian must exercise faith to believe God and His promises (Hebrews 11:1).
6.
 1. God chose them so that they would live holy and blameless lives (Ephesians 1:4).
 2. God chose them so that they would live their lives filled with praise to Him for all He did on their behalf (Ephesians 1:6, 12).
7. Answers will vary. The question of the exact nature (divine election/human response; limited atonement versus a legitimate offer of salvation to all men, the security of the believer, etc.) of man's redemption has been the subject of intense theological debate throughout church history. Below is a summary of some of the main perspectives and a few observations/considerations.

1. **Salvation from God's perspective.** All three members of the Godhead are involved in man's redemption. From the Father's perspective, man's redemption was accomplished in eternity past when God the Father chose him for salvation (Ephesians 1:3–4; Acts 2:23). From the perspective of Jesus Christ, man's redemption was accomplished when He died on the cross (John 19:30; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:7). From the perspective of the Holy Spirit, redemption is accomplished when man believes the gospel and receives the indwelling Holy Spirit as a pledge or guarantee of his (spiritual) inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14).
2. **The efficacy of Christ's sacrifice (Who can be saved?).** There are three general views. (1) *The Universalist View:* Proponents of this view teach that since Jesus Christ died for all, all will be eventually saved. This view denies the need for personal repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30). (2) *The Limited Atonement View:* Jesus Christ died for the elect and the rest will be eternally lost. (3) *The Sufficient-Efficient View:* Jesus Christ died for all (sufficiency; 1 John 2:2), but only those who trust in Him will be saved (John 3:16; Romans 10:13). In this view, Christ's death on the cross was sufficient to redeem all men (Titus 2:11–12), but it's efficient or effective for only those who are saved (John 1:12).
3. **By grace alone.** Man, in his natural state, is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Therefore God must extend grace to quicken him and bring about regeneration. God extends *common grace* to all men (Matthew 5:45; Acts 17:25). He extends *condemning grace* to all men in the form of general revelation (Romans 1:18–20). He extends *convicting grace* to all men (John 16:8–11). He extends *converting (saving) grace* to those who believe the gospel and are chosen for salvation (Ephesians 2:8–9). Theologian Charles Ryrie (Ryrie Study Bible, note on Ephesians 1:3) provides a concise interpretation of Ephesians 1:3–14 and God's plan of redemption when he says, "God has determined beforehand that those who believe in Christ will be adopted into His family and conformed to His Son (Romans 8:29). It involves a choice on His part (v. 4); it is done in love (v. 4); it is based on the good pleasure of His will (vv. 5, 9, 11); its purpose is to glorify God (v. 14); but it does not relieve man of his responsibility to believe the gospel in order to bring to pass personally God's predestination (v. 13)." Theologian J I Packer addressed the interrelatedness of divine election and the human responsibility to believe in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life in his helpful book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Packer believes the question of divine election and human responsibility remains an antinomy. He describes an "antinomy" as two apparent conflictual laws that address the same subject, but it is unknown how they can be totally reconciled with each other. For example, light can be explained as particles and as waves. What is not clear to scientists is how light can be both waves and particles. Packer goes on to say that the question of divine election and man's responsibility to choose Christ are both taught in Scripture, but their precise interrelatedness remains a mystery.
8.
 1. Roman adoption is a picture of God's grace because it was the decision of the father, not the choice or good works of the child.
 2. Roman adoption was irreversible, which is a picture of the believer's security in Christ.
 3. Roman adoption included an irrevocable inheritance to the child, which is a picture of the inheritance believers receive in Christ (**the riches of Christ**).
9.
 1. The believer's redemption is **in Him** (Christ). There is salvation in no one other than Christ (Acts 4:12).
 2. The believer's redemption is settled and secure: **we have redemption**.
 3. The believer's redemption was paid for by Christ's death on the cross (**through His blood**). This may seem obvious to most students, but some teach that Christ's sacrifice on the cross, including the shedding of His blood, is not essential for man's salvation. They believe the way Christ lived (His example) is enough to save someone who believes in Christ (the moral ethic argument). The Christian, however, is saved "through His blood" (His sacrifice on the cross), not by His sinless life and example.
 4. The believer's redemption results in the forgiveness of all sins, past, present, and future. There is no time qualification on the sins that are forgiven. Some teach that Christ paid for the believer's past sins, but he must confess his present sins or lose his salvation. Salvation, as it is stated in Ephesians 1:7, results in the forgiveness of sins—all sins.
10. Answers will vary, but should read something like the following: God's grand plan, hidden in ages past but now revealed in Jesus Christ, is to bring all things in heaven and earth under the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ. This grand plan includes those who are saved as well as those who reject Christ. The lost will ultimately acknowledge Christ's sovereign authority in eternal judgment. God's grand plan also extends to all creation. When God's grand plan is finally fulfilled, all creation will be restored to its original glory and purpose.
11. Individuals must believe the good news (gospel, the word of truth) (Ephesians 1:13). God gives believers the presence (sealing) of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
12. Answers will vary.