

The book of Exodus tells of God's chosen people, enslaved under Pharaoh and cruelly oppressed for many years. Then, God raised up a mighty deliverer and redeemed His people by the blood of the lamb, setting them free to go and claim the inheritance that He had promised them long before. He revealed His will to them, and sent His presence into their midst as a glory-cloud, to lead and guide them as the people of His inheritance. That's the Exodus pattern.

In the book of Ephesians, we read about God's chosen people, enslaved under sin and cruelly oppressed for many years. Then, God raised up a mighty deliverer and redeemed His people by the blood of the lamb, setting them free to go and claim the inheritance that He had promised them long before. He revealed the mystery of His will to them, and sent the Holy Spirit into their midst, to lead them and guide them as the people of His inheritance. That's the Ephesians perfection of the Exodus pattern.

The remarkable connections between God's redemption of His people out of Egypt and the blessings that Paul is celebrating in Ephesians 1 highlight what Paul has been saying about God's plan to unite all things in Christ. What God did for Israel in Egypt back then is what God has done for the world in Christ Jesus! And as glorious and wonderful as *that* Exodus was, this one is even more wonderful!

And so in v. 11, Paul continues to recount our blessings in Christ. Just like Israel looked forward to the Promised Land once they were delivered from Egypt, so we too look forward to our inheritance. And just like God sent His glory-cloud presence to be with His people and to guide them on their way, so Paul in v. 13 tells us how God has sealed us with the Holy Spirit, the down payment of our inheritance. We have a glorious future ahead of us, and we can be sure that God will get us there, because He's given us His Spirit. This is the good news found in these verses from Ephesians 1.

This gives us three themes to talk about this morning: the identity of God's chosen people, the inheritance we've been predestined for, and the role of the Holy Spirit in God's great plan to unite all things in Jesus, to the praise of His glory.

First, we need to look at the pronouns in this section, because Paul does a good bit of jumping back and forth. In vs. 11, Paul says that “we” have obtained an inheritance in Christ, but that initial “we” is undefined. Who is he talking about?

Then, in v. 12, he speaks of “we who were the first to hope in Christ”, most likely referring to the Jews, since the gospel came to the Jew first, then to the Gentiles. And this makes sense of what Paul has been saying: the Jews must obtain their inheritance, since this was God’s will, expressed in His predestined counsel. History is the record of God working out all things in according to this purpose. If God’s own covenant people, chosen especially to be the ones through whom He blessed the world didn’t obtain their inheritance, then history would be a record of God’s *futility*, but since those who were the first to hope in Christ have indeed obtained the promised inheritance, then what God has done results in the praise of God’s *glory*.

And so Paul proclaims first that yes, God’s chosen people are receiving their inheritance and praising His glory. But then he moves from “we who were the first to hope in Christ” to “you also”, by which he means the *Ephesian* Christians, who were largely Gentiles, and he includes them in God’s purpose and plan! Not just us, he says, but you too, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and believed in Jesus, you too were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit!

And so finally in v. 14, Paul speaks jointly of “our” inheritance. Jews and Gentiles share the same faith in Jesus, we share the seal of the Spirit, and so we share the same inheritance, which means that we will all praise God’s glory together.

Now, v. 14 is a bit tricky to translate, and your version might sound different than the ESV, which is what I read. Here’s the big difference: the ESV says that the Spirit is “the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it”. Other versions, like the King James, say that the Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession”, implying that *God* is the one redeeming *His* possession, referring to us as His people. In other words, we’ve been given the Spirit as a down payment until God completes His redemption plan.

Now, when our redemption is fully realized in the new creation, that's *also* when we will receive the fullness of our inheritance, so the two ideas aren't really opposites, but in my judgment, the KJV and other translations have this right, and v. 14 is referring to us as God's possession. What the KJV could be stronger on is the idea of personal ownership, and so it's helpful to hear the NASB translation of this verse: the Spirit is the "pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession." But of course, God owns everything, and so I think SM Baugh is right to translate this as "*prized* possession"<sup>1</sup>, especially in light of Exodus 19:5, where God makes exactly this point: the whole earth belongs to God, but His covenant people are His treasured possession.

The big idea from vv. 11-14 is that Jew and Gentile together are God's own people, His heirs, through faith in Christ. And here's the blessing Paul is talking about: since you are God's prized possession, He's planned a good future for you, and taken steps to ensure that you will reach those future blessings.

Our second theme has to do with our inheritance. As if it weren't enough to be redeemed and forgiven, God tells us that the best is yet to come! So what are the future blessings God has for us? In Exodus, the inheritance that the Jews looked forward to centered on the Promised Land. They were looking forward to being God's people in God's place in a right relationship with God.

For us too, we are like Israel in the wilderness: we are redeemed and forgiven, God is with us, but we haven't yet reached our home. And if you are thinking of heaven, you aren't wrong, but to be more precise, our future inheritance is what we heard about in our reading from Revelation: the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, uniting all things in heaven and on earth in the presence of God and under the blessing of God. God's people in God's place in a right relationship with God. So the blessings that we are still waiting for include the new heavens and the new earth, and new resurrected bodies to live there in. We see this confirmed in Romans 8, a parallel passage that deals with these same themes of redemption, inheritance, and the Holy Spirit, and it concludes by describing our future hope as new creation and new bodies. That's the inheritance that God has planned for us, that's what we have to look forward to.

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<sup>1</sup> Baugh, S.M., *Ephesians* (EEC), Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 75.

And so third, what's the role of the Spirit in all this? When you heard the gospel and believed, God sealed you with His Holy Spirit. This seal, like a logo or a brand, is an official identifying mark that you belong to God. Since you have the Spirit, you have a right to this inheritance, you're a part of God's prized possession.

But this seal wasn't just chosen at random: you were sealed with the *promised* Holy Spirit. And when you look back into the Old Testament, to places like Isaiah 44:3 and Ezekiel 36:26-28, you can see that the Spirit was promised to be given in the context of redemption and new creation. And so when God seals His people with the Spirit, He's assuring them that His promises to renew them and deliver them are coming true!

And furthermore, I think the term "down payment" is the best way to describe the role of the Spirit in v.14. When you make a down payment, you're giving a large portion of the full payment as a promise that the rest is coming. The Spirit is not just a placeholder to remind you that the inheritance is coming, and not just a seal to identify you as an heir. The Holy Spirit is the first and best part of your inheritance, because out of all God's promises, the greatest one is this: "You shall be my people, and I will be your God."

And so while we wait for the new creation and our new resurrected bodies, we don't have to wait to experience closeness with God, because the Spirit has already been given to us! And if God has already given you His Spirit, then you can be sure that He will give you the rest of your inheritance, as well. And in fact, as we will see later in Ephesians, the work of the Spirit in our lives is what sustains us and unifies us and keeps us so that we will in fact receive our inheritance. If it were up to us, we'd forfeit our inheritance and go right back into slavery, but because we are sealed with the Spirit, our future is certain.

Those are the main themes of these verses; so what applications can we make? First, let me remind you again how God speaks of you in v. 14: you are God's prized possession; King Jesus' royal treasure. Is that how you think of yourself? Is that a key part of your identity? It should be! Other people, other measuring sticks, and even your own feelings will come up with many other names and descriptions for you, but you won't find very many better or more encouraging than this one!

Second, remember your future hope, from v. 11 and 14. Your day, your week, or even your life is a mist and a vapor, so whether it's going well or whether you are struggling, you need to look beyond this life. Today might be hard, but your hope is not in today. Jesus has promised you an eternal inheritance, a place in His new creation, and an incorruptible new body to enjoy it in. How foolish you are to worry and complain, when very soon everything will be made right forever! Your best day here on earth is nothing compared to the glory that is waiting for you, and even if you live a life of suffering here on earth, it is not worth comparing to eternity with Jesus.

Third, the gospel is not just for early adopters! From the first to hope in Christ to the last, everyone shares in our wonderful inheritance together. Because God's blessings are infinite, your inheritance doesn't grow smaller when more people are saved. So keep spreading the Word of truth, to young and old alike, so that many more will believe in Jesus and receive the Spirit's seal.

Fourth, this passage speaks powerfully to assure you of your salvation. V. 11 says that God accomplishes His predestined purposes. God does not change His mind, and He does not run into problems; He works all things according to the counsel of His will. Once you believe and are sealed with the Spirit, nothing can break that seal; nothing will overthrow the predestined purpose of God.

Fifth, notice the final phrase of v. 14, also the last phrase of v. 12 and similar to v. 6. All that God does, He does for the praise of His glory. None of these blessings are your doing; they all come from His hand. And so when you pray, don't just petition God; don't just ask Him for things! It's fine to ask; He loves to give, but don't neglect the whole point of everything, which is to praise the glory of God! Paul has just given you a long list of blessings; He's teaching you how to pray a prayer of praise! Since the purpose of God's eternal plan of redemption is praise, and since you are now a part of that plan in Christ, get praising! Praising the glory of our God is a huge part of the book of Ephesians. May it be a huge part of your life, as well.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*