

# Bible Study Guide



# THE STORY OF GOD

## Introduction

This is a study of the **Story of God** revealed in Scripture. Through three themes, we encounter the God who **Speaks**, pursuing a relationship with us; the God who **Dwells**, rescuing and adopting us as His children; and the God who **Reigns**, gathering and sending us as ambassadors for His Kingdom. Each study focuses on the gracious action of God towards His people, touches on a particular **theological** theme, and evokes a response to a **question**.

**Our God Speaks** - We begin with God's speech. God speaks to create, reveal Himself, and make promises to His people.

**Our God Dwells** - We move to the incredible reality that the God who speaks also draws near and dwells among us, dies for us, and fills us with his presence.

**Our God Reigns** - We end with God establishing and ruling over His Kingdom as he builds the church, sends us on a mission, and recreates the world.

Through this study, we are invited into a deeper knowledge of the beauty and goodness of Jesus as we see how Scripture reveals the comprehensive salvation we have in Christ. In knowing more about God's action - past, present, and future - we can more deeply know our own part in the Story of God as we enter it, participate in it, and share it with others.

Theme	Title & Passage	Theological Focus	Question
<b>Our God Speaks</b>	<i>The God Who Creates:</i> Genesis 1:1-2:3	Account of <b>Creation</b>	Is there a purpose to life?
	<i>The God Who Reveals:</i> Deuteronomy 4:32-40	Precursor to the Giving of the Law: The LORD Alone is God ( <b>Revelation</b> )	How do we know God?
	<i>The God Who Promises:</i> Jeremiah 31:33-34	Promise of the New <b>Covenant</b>	How can things be made right?
<b>Our God Dwells</b>	<i>The God Who Becomes:</i> Luke 2:22-38	The Anticipation of Simeon and Anna ( <b>Incarnation</b> )	Why did God become human?
	<i>The God Who Saves:</i> Hebrew 10:1-18	The Full, Perfect, and Sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction: ( <b>Atonement</b> )	How is my guilt paid for?
	<i>The God Who Fills:</i> John 14:15-31	The Work of the Holy Spirit ( <b>Pneumatology</b> )	Is it up to me alone?
<b>Our God Reigns</b>	<i>The God Who Builds:</i> Ephesians 4:1-16	The Body of the Christ ( <b>Ecclesiology</b> )	Why should I be part of a church?
	<i>The God Who Sends:</i> Ephesians 3:1-13	The Job of the Church ( <b>Mission</b> )	How should we live as disciples?
	<i>The God Who Recreates:</i> Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5	God Remakes the World in Perfection ( <b>Eschatology</b> )	Where can we find hope?

## **Bible Toolkit Steps for all 9 studies**

**Pray:** Ask God for eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Pray for grace in group discussion as you listen and share.

### **Step 1: What Does it Say?**

**Look Closely:** This step is for marking the text and looking at the words and phrases for any:

- Repetitions and Contrasts, Commands and Promises, Connecting words: *for, therefore, but, so that*, Characters and audiences, actions and emphasis

**Look Structurally:** This step is for looking at the whole passage and how the ideas are grouped together. Ask:

- What part of Scripture is this? Is this narrative, poetry, prose discourse (letters, speeches, etc.)? How does this influence how to read this text?
- What is the flow of thought? Give each group a **HEADING** and note what this says about the author's **MAIN IDEA(S)**.

**Step 2: What Does it Mean?** This step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage.

**Look at the Context:** Read the passages before and after.

- How do they impact the meaning of the immediate text?
- Are there themes from the whole book that are in your passage?
- What big Bible themes are addressed? What do they add to the message of the whole book?
- What other OT or NT passages connect to this passage?

**Step 3: What Does It Reveal?** This step is for considering the timeless truths of the passage in light of the gospel. Here are some questions you could ask:

- What does it reveal about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- What aspects of the gospel are we reminded of?
- What is revealed about our sin? The world?
- What part does this have in God's larger story?
- What is the **MAIN IDEA**.

**Step 4: What Does It Mean for Me?** This step is for responding in faith, considering how these revealed truths will change how we live:

- Is there sin to confess?
- Repentance called for?
- A promise to claim?
- An example to follow?
- A command to obey or knowledge to embrace?
- Grace to receive and be gripped by?

**Praying from the Passage:** With words, phrases, and the main idea(s) from this passage, pray for God to work in you and through you. How does this passage invite you to love the **LORD** your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself.

## Study 1 - The God Who Creates: "Is There a Purpose to Life?"

### Genesis 1:1 - 2:3

**1** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

**3** And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**6** And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." **7** And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. **8** And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

**9** And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. **10** God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

**11** And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **13** And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

**14** And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. **16** And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

**20** And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." **21** So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." **23** And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

**24** And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. **25** And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

**27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

**28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." **29** And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall

have them for food. **30** And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. **31** And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**2.1** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **2** And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

**Notes:**

## **STUDY #1 Genesis 1:1-2:3**

### **Step 1: What Does It Say?**

1. Look at each time the passage says "God" and list the verbs that describe what he is doing. What do they reveal about his personal involvement in creating his world?
  
2. The passage begins with an earth 'without form and void', and ends with a beautifully formed and full creation. How does God accomplish this?  
    What forms does he create?  
    How does he fill them?  
    How will they continue to be filled?
  
3. What do we learn about ourselves and how we are related to creation and to our Creator? How did humanity's creation differ from the rest? How does this give meaning to life?

### **Step 2: What Does It Mean?**

4. God not only spoke his creation into being, he created it to "pour forth speech" (Psalm 19:2). How does creation speak to us about the Lord? How does it testify to his glory?
  
5. As God's people, we are also called to speak. Where in Scripture do we hear words of praise to God as the Creator and Sustainer of the world? (See Psalm 104 as an example).

### **Step 3: What Does It Reveal?**

6. John 1:1-2 tells us more about who was there "in the beginning." Who is the "Word"? What was made "through him?" How has he entered his creation and united himself to it (1:14)?
  
7. God is still speaking in his Gospel, calling us to be reconciled to himself through his Son. How would you summarize that message? How does it re-create us?
  
8. What happens next in Genesis 3 explains the brokenness we see in creation. What hope for its restoration do we have? (see Romans 8:19-21) How is this related to us? How is it related to what Christ has done?



## 9. What is the Main Idea?

### Step 4: What Does It Mean for Me?

10. What in creation calls forth your praise and thanksgiving to God? What do you see of his wisdom, generosity, love of beauty, provision, etc? How can you receive it personally as a gift and give thanks?

11. God is speaking through his creation but we need more revelation than creation can give us. What other ways does he speak? How has he spoken to you through his Son? (see Hebrews 1:1-2). How might you explain this to someone who feels that God is silent or far away?

12. How do people in your life who are not Christians try to answer the question "why am I here?" How does God's creative act in this passage help you respond?

### Study Notes

**Genesis 1:2** The Spirit was "hovering," like a mother bird protectively over her young. The same word is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 to compare God to an eagle encouraging her young to fly. In Luke 1:35, the angel Gabriel tells Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Garland notes, "as God created the world out of nothing through the Spirit, so he will create this unique child" (Garland, *Luke ECNT*, p. 81).

**Genesis 1:3** "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

**Genesis 1:26** "Let us make man..." The "us" God uses can be understood as "the plural of fullness, which is found in the regular word for God (*elohim*) used with a singular verb" (Kidner, p. 56). This singular plurality is now fully revealed as the One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Genesis 1:27** Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 19:4 to explain that God's plans for marriage were there "from the beginning."

**Genesis 2:1-3** Sabbath, or "rest" in Hebrew, is one of the themes that run through the entire story of Scripture. God's rest, that was meant to be shared with humanity, was lost in the fall, then given again to Israel and lost again, and then finally and fully given in Christ, both as a promise for the new creation, and as something we experience now (Hebrews 3:7-4:11).

## Study 2 - The God Who Reveals: [Deuteronomy 4:32-40] "How do we Know God?"

### **Introduction: Precursor to the Giving of the Law - The LORD Alone is God**

"To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God..." In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites of the law that was given to them 40 years before. They are now at the doorstep of Moses' departure and the Israelites' entrance into the land God promised. They serve a God who speaks in creating the world and Moses reminds them that they follow a revealing God who makes Himself known.

### **Deuteronomy 4:32-40**

**32** "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. **33** Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? **34** Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? **35** To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. **36** Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. **37** And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, **38** driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, **39** know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. **40** Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

**Notes:**



## STUDY #2 Deuteronomy 4:32-40

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. What are the Israelites to ask? Why?
2. What did the Israelites see and hear?
3. What are the Israelites to know? For what reason?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

4. Verse 32 begins with "For...", pointing us to the verse before. How does what follows connect to what came before?
5. Make a list of all of the references to God as the actor in verses 32-40. How is He described? What does he do?
6. Why is God unique, according to these verses?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

7. Read Exodus 34:6. What does this tell us about the *character* and *nature* of the God who makes himself known?
8. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. Who is Jesus?

9. Why is the giving of the law a good gift of God's revelation to us? Why can we trust God's word?

10. What is the Main Idea?

**Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?**

11. How has God made Himself known to you personally?

12. What Scriptures have been personally revealing to you about who God is and who you are?

13. How do people you know who don't know Jesus try to "know God" (or know spiritual things in general)? How would you explain to someone how God has made Himself known to you?

## Study Notes

**Deuteronomy:** Authored by Moses, this book serves as a reminder of the law given to them before the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In his final messages to the Israelites, Moses seeks to motivate them to ongoing faithful obedience (*ESV Study Bible*).

**Deuteronomy 4:33** The emphasis here is on the fact that *no other* people has ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of fire rather than whether or not they lived or died as a result. Speaking from the fire is a reference to earlier in the chapter (4:11-12) referring to events in Exodus on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:9; 24:17-18) (Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 129).

**Deuteronomy 4:35** "...the LORD is God; there is no other besides him." Throughout Deuteronomy, the idea that "The LORD is one" is paramount. Called the *Shema*, in reference to the Hebrew word for "hear" in Deuteronomy 6:4, it is the unique claim that the God of Israel is primary, exclusive, and in a category of His own. One translation option for "The LORD is one" is "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone." This would have been a stark contrast to the polytheism of the Ancient Near East. Jesus reiterates the centrality of the exclusivity of God in Mark 12:29.

**Deuteronomy 4:36** The "discipline" here in context has nothing to do with punishment. Rather, it denotes training or education, in this case instruction in "his words." This likely should be understood in the technical sense of "words" as equivalent to the Ten Commandments (Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 132).

**Deuteronomy 4:37** "In this brief motive clause occur two of the most covenantally significant words in the Old Testament, 'love' and 'choose.' As technical terms they are virtually synonymous as a great many scholars have put beyond doubt. In other words, 'to love' is to choose, and 'to choose' is to love." (Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 132).

**Deuteronomy 4:38** "...to give you their land for an inheritance..." The land was not the end in and of itself but the place where God would dwell with his people. One way to think of the "promised land" is as the land of God's promised presence. God's *being* with them is His blessing.

## Doctrine of Revelation

"Christianity is the true worship and service of the true God, humankind's Creator and Redeemer. It is a religion that rests on revelation: nobody would know the truth about God, or be able to relate to him in a personal way, had not God first acted to make himself known." J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 21.

"[Revelation is] the Christian notion that God chooses to be known, and makes this possible through self-disclosure in nature and human history." Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 152.

"God has taken the initiative through a process of self-disclosure, which reaches its climax and fulfillment in the history of Jesus of Nazareth." McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 153.

## Verses on God making Himself known:

In Creation	In Jesus	In Scripture
Romans 1:18-20	John 1:1-14	Deuteronomy 18:18-22
Psalms 19:1-4	Colossians 1:15	2 Timothy 3:15-17

### Study 3 - The God Who Promises: [Jeremiah 31:33-34] *"How Can Things be Made Right?"*

#### **Introduction: Promise of the New Covenant**

God speaks through creation, through His revelation, and now He speaks through His promises. Jeremiah was called by God to "speak his word" many generations after God revealed himself and his law in Deuteronomy. His message was primarily a word of judgment and exile because of Israel's unfaithfulness. But it also contained a solemn promise from God that he would one day remake and restore his people.

#### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**31** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

**33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

#### **Notes:**

### STUDY #3 Jeremiah 31:31-3

#### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. What did God do for his people in the past? Who was he in relationship to them? Why is there a need for a New Covenant? (see note on the meaning of "covenant")
2. What does God "declare" he will do in this New Covenant?

#### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

3. God made a covenant with Israel after he led them out of Egypt, promising to make them his treasured possession if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant. How quickly did they break the covenant? (Exodus 32:1-9). What was missing in their hearts?
4. What does it reveal about God that he makes covenants with his people? What does it reveal about us that we break them? How do God's promises in the New Covenant provide the answer?

#### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

5. God promises in the New Covenant that his people will know him, from the least to the greatest. How has that promise been fulfilled in Christ and the gift of the Spirit?
6. God promised to write his Law on the hearts of his people. What does this mean? How has that promise been fulfilled in Christ and the gift of the Spirit?
7. At the last supper Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." What promise(s) of the New Covenant did he fulfill through his death?

8. What is the Main Idea?

#### Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?

9. List each promise God made in the New Covenant. How has He kept them for you? How can you live differently because of what He has done?

10. How would you describe God's love and commitment from this passage? How might you share the Lord who makes and keeps his promises with someone who is feeling the pain of broken promises?

#### Study Notes

**Jeremiah 31:31** A covenant is a bond that creates a relationship of love where each side has made a vow to be faithful (Tim Keller). "A biblical covenant is a binding relationship of eternal consequence in which God promises to bless and his people promise to obey." (Philip Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, p. 466.)

**Jeremiah 31:32** The idea that God refers to himself as the "husband" of his people can be found in Isaiah 54:5, Hosea 2:19, Revelation 21:2, e.g.

**Jeremiah 31:33** God's promise to write his law on his people's heart is fulfilled as the message of Christ is written on our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:2-6)

**Jeremiah 31:33** God's promise, "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Genesis 17:7, Exodus 6:7, e.g.), thereby making them his beloved and blessed people forever, is the most frequently repeated promise in the Old Testament. (Philip Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, p. 471)

**Jeremiah 31:34** The word *know* "carries its most profound connotation, the intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion, and will." (J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p. 581), (John 10:14, Galatians 4:6)

## Study 4 - The God Who Becomes: [Luke 2:22-38] "Why did God Become a Human Being?"

### **Introduction: The Anticipation of Simon and Anna**

From the God Who Speaks, we move to the God who Dwells. In Jeremiah last week, we learned of God's New Covenant. Now, we follow Mary and Joseph as they enter the temple and are met by two characters. Simeon and Anna have been waiting with anticipation for this very moment. Their words and actions speak volumes about the true nature of this child and why God came to dwell with them in Jesus Christ.

### **Luke 2:22-38**

**22** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

**25** Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

**27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

**29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;  
**30** for my eyes have seen your salvation  
**31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
**32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

**33** And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

**34** And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed **35** (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

**36** And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, **37** and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

**38** And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.



## **STUDY #4 Luke 2:22-38**

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. Make note of the characters and their reactions in this passage. Who are they? How are they alike and different? What are they reacting to?
2. What is being emphasized by Luke's references to "the Law" in verses 22-27?
3. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through Simeon? What is emphasized the three times the Spirit is referred to in verses 25-27?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

4. The Hebrew origin of the name of Jesus means "God Saves" or "God's salvation" (see Luke 2:21). How is this significant in our passage?
5. When Simeon turns to Mary and Joseph, why is it good news and bad news that God became human and is now in their midst in Jesus? Who is it good news for? Who is it bad news for?
6. Both Simeon and Anna were waiting for something. What were they waiting for? What is the connection between what they were waiting for and Jesus?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

7. Colossians 1:15-20 tells us that in Jesus "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." What did Simeon and Anna recognize about Jesus, through the Holy Spirit? Who is Jesus?
8. Augustine is quoted as saying, "Christ is hidden in the Old, revealed in the New." Simeon's blessing is full of references to the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:10, Psalm 98:2, Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah

46:13). How does the incarnation - God coming to dwell with them - point to God's plan of salvation?

#### 9. What is the Main Idea?

#### Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?

10. Read Simeon's words to Mary. How does the reality of who Jesus is - fully God, fully human, come to dwell with us - give us hope? How does it serve as a warning? What thoughts from your heart are revealed to you by this passage?
11. What does the world around you think about Jesus? Only a great teacher and good example to follow? Merely human? How could you use this passage to tell someone about the nature and mission of Jesus?

#### Study Notes

**Luke 2:21** While not included in our study, it is significant that Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph obediently name their son "Jesus" as revealed by an angel earlier in Luke. In Hebrew, the name of Jesus means "the LORD Saves" or "The LORD's Salvation." Notice how, later, Simeon says, "for my eyes *have* seen your salvation" (verse 30, emphasis added). The arrival of Jesus - fully God, fully human - means salvation has arrived.

**Luke 2:22-24** The ways in which Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies is central to Luke (see Luke 24:44-47). For the "time of purification," see Leviticus 12; for presenting Jesus to the Lord as the male who first opens the womb, Exodus 13:2,12; for the offerings Mary and Joseph present, Leviticus 12:8. The emphasis is also on obedience and conformity with the law.

**Luke 2:24** The nature of their offering indicates that Mary and Joseph were of humble resources. See Leviticus 12:8.

**Luke 2:25** The phrase "the consolation of Israel" points to an important theme in Isaiah (40:1; 49:13; 51:3). The phrase for the "Holy Spirit" in this verse is *Pneuma ēn Hagion*. In John 14:26, Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as "comforter" or "helper" (*Paraklētos*). Simeon is waiting for Israel to be comforted (see Isaiah 40). The Comforter comes upon him to reveal that in this child is not only Israel's comfort, but a light to the Gentiles and glory to Israel (v. 32).

**Luke 2:25-28** Insights about who Jesus is are not arrived at by clever human deduction (Matthew 11:25). The Holy Spirit reveals who Jesus is. See further 1 John 4:2: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." And Jesus speaking to Peter in Matthew 16:17.

**Luke 2:26** The "Lord's Messiah" points back to Luke 2:11 as well as further back to Psalm 2:2 and Psalm 18:50 in reference to the LORD's Messiah, who would be a descendant of David. Israel was waiting for a Messiah as promised in Isaiah 9:6.

**Luke 2:27** The Holy Spirit is not only "upon" Simeon (v. 25), it reveals insight to Simeon (v. 26) and directs his actions (v. 27).

**Luke 2:29-32** There are numerous Old Testament passages referenced in this passage. Genesis 15, Isaiah 52:10, Psalm 98:2, Isaiah 42:6, Isaiah 49:6. Luke emphasizes the many ways in which God's plan of salvation finds its focus in Jesus, as revealed in the Old Testament.

**Luke 2:29** In the Book of Common Prayer Evening Prayer Service, we pray the "Nunc Dimittis: The Song of Simeon." We remember our rest in the salvation promised by God - at the close of each day and in the "world without end."

**Luke 2:32** Another key theme is Luke is God's plan of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. Simeon's blessing points us to Isaiah 49:6 and Isaiah 45:25. As early as Genesis 12:3, we also see God's plan to bless all people through Abraham. God had always planned this and in Jesus, it finds its fulfillment.

**Luke 2:34-35** Simeon turns his attention to Mary and Joseph, blessing them and telling Mary in particular the tragic but necessary reality of her Son's mission. Many will "fall" at his message in their opposition to Jesus. Mary herself will experience anguish at Jesus' crucifixion. And as one commentator puts it, "Knowing God is a double-edged sword, cutting to the hearts of many for good and ill, for 'rising and falling.'" (Spencer, *Luke*, p. 75).

**Luke 2:36-38** Luke places two witnesses - including one male and one female - in other stories as well. Mary and Joseph (1:26-38) and Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James alongside Peter (Luke 24:1-12). This doubling and inclusion both serves as an example of "two witnesses" from Deuteronomy 19:15 as well as Luke's emphasis that the good news is for *all* - Jew, Gentile, male, female (France, *Teach the Text*, p. 40). Note the parallels and differences with Simeon - Simeon comes to the temple, Anna is already there. The Spirit is upon both (Anna as a "prophetess"). Both are well-along in years. Both speak of consolation and redemption.

**Luke 2:38** While Simeon awaited the consolation of Israel, Anna speaks to those awaiting the "redemption of Israel." Luke points out the age of both, perhaps showing how long they had waited for this moment. Isaiah 43 conveys this desire. In this sense, being "redeemed" means being freed, by ransom or other form of exchange, from oppression. While some might have thought this meant oppression by the Roman empire, John the Baptist's ministry shows us that people were desperate for freedom from a different kind of oppression - their sin and separation from God.

## Study 5 - The God Who Saves: [Hebrew 10:1-18] "How is My Guilt Paid For?"

### **Introduction: The Full, Perfect, and Sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction**

As we consider The God Who Dwells, first in Jesus Christ, we now turn to Jesus' saving action on the cross. Hebrews 10 brings us to the center of the author's argument about the superiority of Jesus and His mission. We learn what can take away sin. We learn what is offered to us by Jesus. We see the beauty of atonement - God's action to draw us near and reconcile us to Himself, restoring our broken relationship with Him.

### Hebrews 10:1-18

**1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

**5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;

**6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

**7** Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' "

**8** When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**11** And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

**15** And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

**16** "This is the covenant that I will make with them  
after those days, declares the Lord:  
I will put my laws on their hearts,  
and write them on their minds,"

**17** then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

**18** Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

## STUDY #5 Hebrew 10:1-18

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. What is the problem described in verses 1-4? What is "impossible" and why?
2. In verses 11-14, how is the role of Jesus described? What is it contrasted with?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in verses 15-18?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

4. Verse 5 begins with "Consequently." How do verses 5-10 explain verses 1-4? Note how the author unpacks this in verses 8-10.
5. The word "atonement" is a way, in English, of describing the Hebrew word to "cover" or "purge" in order to reconcile ("make one"). Where do you see this idea described in this passage? How is it accomplished and what is the result?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

6. What does our passage tell us about why Jesus died? Why is this the only "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation [thing presented to God], and satisfaction," as it says in one of the prayers during Communion?
7. Verse 10 says, "we have been sanctified" (see study note for "sanctified"). Verse 14 refers to "those who are being sanctified." How is our sanctification already accomplished and yet ongoing?

## 9. What is the Main Idea?

### Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?

10. What does your culture think "sin" or "guilt" is? What remedies are pursued to deal with sin/guilt/shame? Are these temporary or permanent? Using this passage, how would you answer the question: "What do Christians believe about guilt and what has God done about it?"
  
11. Verses 16 and 17 tell us that God will put his law on our hearts and write them on our minds. He also promises to remember our sins no more. How is God inviting you to open your heart and mind to Him? What comfort do you take that, through Christ's atoning sacrifice, your sins will be remembered no more?

### Study Notes

**Atonement** The word "atonement" is meant to capture the Hebrew word *kippur* - a covering for the repayment of a debt and a purification. To "atone" is to make "at-one." Since, through sin, we were separated from God and from relating to one another as we were created, God in his abundant goodness and mercy, made a way for us to draw near to Him. In Leviticus, the high point of the year was the "Day of Atonement" on which *everything and everyone* who approaches God in the temple (priests, altars, sacrifices) are "atoned" for through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. But this had to be repeated yearly; it was never final. The book of Hebrews shows how Christ is greater than all - the perfect priest and perfect sacrifice - the only one capable of restoring our disrupted relationship with God.

**Hebrews 10:1** The "law" here refers to the Levitical code in particular but also the entire sacrificial system in general. "Drawing near" means approaching God and being in his glorious presence. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden as the result of their rebellion against God. Now, under the curse of sin, they could not approach God's goodness without it being dangerous to them. Thus, the system of the law was a gracious gift on the part of God and much desired by his people, despite their ongoing rebellion against God. However, as this verse tells us, it was not a "perfect" system in that it had to be repeated yearly, showing that a permanent solution was necessary.

**Hebrews 10:2** “Sin may be comprehensively defined as a lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence” (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 99). It is not just the things we do, it affects our nature; we both inherit it and actively participate in it. It is a fatal condition from which we must be rescued.

**Hebrews 10:3** The word “atonement” in the Old Testament meant “to cover, purge, make reconciliation” (kāpār, *kippur*). Leviticus 16 describes the arrangements for the “Day of Atonement.” Read Genesis 9:5 and then Leviticus 17:11. Now read Hebrews 9:22. You will see a connection between shedding of blood (death), sin, and forgiveness.

**Hebrews 10:4** It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin completely. Hebrews 9:9 tells us that they couldn’t cleanse the conscience. Further, elsewhere in Scripture, God clearly states his ultimate desire: doing his will (Jeremiah 7:23), justice (Amos 5:21), and a right relationship with God (Psalm 51:17). Through the shedding of blood of a non-guilty sacrifice, a temporary solution was created. Further, the blood of animals could never fully pay for the loss of human life - only the life of a human could, but not just any human. This is why Hebrews tells us that only in Jesus do we find the perfect priest and perfect sacrifice - fully God, fully human.

**Hebrews 10:5-7** The author is pointing readers to Psalm 40:6-8. While it is a “Psalm of David,” the author of Hebrews places these words as ultimately fulfilled and spoken through Jesus.

**Hebrews 10:10** “Sanctification is an ongoing transformation within a maintained consecration...” (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 183). It is both restoration to right-relationship with God through Jesus’ work on the cross as well as an ongoing process of growing in Christ-likeness through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Hebrews 10:11** Priests in the Old Testament were specially set apart from the tribe of Levi (Deuteronomy 33:8-11). Again, we are reminded that, despite their service repeatedly and every day, sin could not be taken away entirely or permanently, for the priest themselves had to be atoned for. This is why Christ is unique: he stands outside and above the Levitical priesthood and needs no atonement for himself.

**Hebrews 10:12** Sitting at the right hand of God is a signal of power, authority, honor, and status. It is, in short, identity and equality as and with God, a key theme in Hebrews. Further, it notes a triumphant, completed work in Jesus and Jesus as our ongoing and only direct access to God (1 John 2:1).

**Hebrews 10:15** The Holy Spirit “bears witness” through the testimony of scripture and points us to Christ. “The Spirit shines in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God not only in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6) but also in the teaching of Holy Scripture” (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 32).

**Hebrews 10:16** A covenant is a binding promise, made between two parties. What makes God’s Covenant with humanity unique is that he *always* keeps his covenants, even when we do not (2 Timothy 2:13). This also connects us to Jeremiah 31:33 and God’s true desire for His people: our whole selves united with and committed to Himself.



## Study 6 - The God Who Indwells: [John 14:15-31] *"Is It Up To Me Alone?"*

### The God Who Fills (Indwells): The Work of the Holy Spirit

God dwells with us through Jesus and through what was accomplished on the cross. "But will God indeed dwell on earth?" That cry of Solomon as he was dedicating the temple has been answered in Christ. He was born as one of us, took our place on the cross, and, in this passage, promises to abide not only with us but in us through the Holy Spirit.

#### John 14:15-31

**15** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

**18** "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **19** Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. **20** In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. **21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." **22** Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" **23** Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **24** Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

**25** "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. **26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. **28** You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. **29** And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. **30** I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, **31** but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."

**Notes:**

## STUDY #6 John 14:15-31

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. How does Jesus refer to the Holy Spirit? What does he say the Spirit will do?
2. Where do you see the unity of the Father, Son and Spirit? How are we included in that unity?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

3. The disciples are full of sorrow because Jesus has told them he is leaving. How will they not be left as orphans? What assurances of his presence does he give them in these verses?
4. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of Truth" and says he will "teach you all things." Why does Jesus place so much value on this work of the Spirit? (see notes on 14:17)
5. Jesus gives a new commandment "love one another even as I have loved you." (John 14:15) What does he promise to do if we love him and keep his commands and word? How would you describe this mutuality of love?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

6. Later in this conversation Jesus says "He (the Spirit) will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14) What does glorify mean? How does this transform our minds and hearts?

7. Jesus says that both the Spirit and the disciples will “testify about Me.” (John 16:8) How do we see this happening at Pentecost in Acts 2? In the world?
8. The Holy Spirit brings us into close communion with Jesus. How does he also bring us into close communion with the Father? (see Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6)
9. What is the Main Idea?

#### **Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?**

10. Jesus promised he would not leave us “orphans.” Are there ways you live like an orphan? How does faith in these assurances from Jesus make a difference?
11. What part does the Holy Spirit have in our study of the Word?
12. Reflect on the nearness of Jesus to you through the Holy Spirit. How might you describe to someone what it is like to know this nearness of God?

## Study Notes

**John 14:15** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I loved you" (John 13:34, also John 15:12, 15:17)

**John 14:16** The Greek word "*parakletos*" is translated here as "Helper." It could also be translated: advocate, comforter, helper, counselor, intercessor.

**John 14:17** Jesus also refers to the "Spirit of Truth" in John 15:26 & 16:13 where he makes it clear that the truth is centered on Him.

**John 14:17** "The world does not know but the purpose is that the world may know (John 17:22-26)." (L. Newbigin, *The Light has Come*, p.188)

**John 14:18** To be an "orphan" is to be alone in the world, fending for yourself.

**John 14:18** The Holy Spirit is referred to as the "Spirit of Christ" in Romans 8:11.

**John 14:19** The power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us through the Spirit and will give life to our bodies in the resurrection. (Romans 8:11)

**John 14:19, 20** The disciples saw Jesus after his resurrection but didn't fully "see" until the Spirit was poured out. We also see Jesus by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17,18) and will see him "face to face" when he returns. (1 Corinthians 13:12, 1 John 3:2)

**John 14:20** Jesus speaks about this mutual "in-ness" in John 10:38; 14:11, and 17:21

**John 14:28** As Jesus has said in this gospel, it was the Father who sent the Son, the Son does what he sees the Father doing, and says what the Father gives him to say. It is undeniable that the Son is fully God, and "of one being with the Father" and it is also true that "the Father's priority is undeniable." (J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p 794). This is the mystery and beauty of the nature of the Trinity.

Jesus himself longs to go to the Father but he also knows it is to our advantage: "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

He also says he will bring us to the place he's going: "I go to prepare a place for you ... and I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also." (John 14:2b,3)

**John 14:30** The "ruler of this world" is the devil. He has no power over Jesus and Jesus says that through his death and resurrection he will be judged. (John 16:11)

## Study 7 - The God Who Builds: [Ephesians 4:1-16] *"Why Should I Be Part of a Church?"*

### **Introduction: The Body of Christ**

From the God Who Speaks through the God Who Dwells, we now encounter the God Who Reigns in the next three studies. The purpose of God in the story of God is to create a people for himself, to the praise of his glorious grace. Having filled his people with his Spirit, now we consider how God continues to build, unify, and mature his church. We discover that everyone has a God-given part to play.

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

**4** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. **7** But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it says,

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men."

**9** (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? **10** He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) **11** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **14** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **15** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Notes:**

## STUDY #7 Ephesians 4:1-16

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. What is the “calling” to which Christians have been called? Look at chapters 1-3 for clues.
2. What are all the things that Paul includes as part of walking in a manner worthy of this calling?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

3. Why does Paul use the image of a “body” to describe the church?
4. Paul describes the virtues or character traits (vv.2-3) that should shape the way we relate to one another in the church before he describes the ministers or ministries (vv.7-16) of the church. Why? What does this tell us about what it means to be a member of the body of Christ?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

5. Who is the source of the church’s unity? What is God’s role? What is our role?

6. What is the picture of maturity that we are given in verse 13? How do we grow into this maturity as a church?
7. What is the Main Idea?

#### **Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?**

8. Why does our culture long for unity and diversity yet struggle to achieve it? How would you explain to a non-Christian friend or neighbour how God's vision for unity and diversity within the church is good news for them?
9. The church is meant to hold together what our culture so often rends asunder: truth and love. In what contexts or relationships in the church is God giving you opportunities to build others up by "speaking the truth in love"?

#### **Study Notes**

**Ephesians 4:1** The word "therefore" marks a transition in the letter, which is structured in two halves (chapters 1-3 and 4-6). The first half describes the gospel of grace, the second half describes the life that emerges when people are gripped by the gospel of grace. The first half focuses on theology (the truths to live by), and the second half on ethics (how to live by them). The first half unpacks the depth of God's love for us, the second half the shape of our love for God and one another. Chapters 4-6 must be read within the context of chapters 1-3. Grace precedes and makes possible our response to God's grace.

The language of "calling" in Paul's writings is not about our personal vocation, but our conversion to Christ (cf. 1:18; 4:4). It is something that all Christians share alike (cf. Romans 8:28-30).



Chapters 4-5 are woven together by Paul's repeated command to "walk" in unity (4:1), holiness (4:17), love (5:1), light (5:8), and wisdom (5:15). This connects back to Paul's use of the verb in 2:10 – we are walking in the good works that God has prepared for us.

**Ephesians 4:3-6** The theme of unity is central to the whole letter. The unity of the church is a gift of God – not something we create, but something we "maintain" or seek to protect and cherish. It is rooted in God's plan (1:10), established by God's saving work (2:11-22), and lived out according to God's command (4:1-16). The unity of the church is meant to be a foretaste of the unity to come when all things will be under Christ (1:10).

Christian unity has its source in the unity of the triune God (one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father) and his saving work. Paul uses all three words available in the Greek language for "one," and he repeats the word "one" seven times – the Hebrew number for perfection or completeness. In other words, God gives the church the deepest and fullest possible unity that can be experienced by humans this side of heaven.

**Ephesians 4:8-10** Paul quotes Psalm 68:18. Psalm 68 celebrates God's victory over his people's enemies and vindication of his people. The language of "descent" and "ascent" can be interpreted in different ways, but most likely refers to Jesus' incarnation (descent) and ascension (ascent), or more generally to the twofold movement of his saving mission – humiliation and exaltation (cf. Phil. 2:5-11).

Christ's physical absence allows him to provide a spiritual fullness (cf. 1:23 and 4:10), filling the church with his Spirit (5:18) and giving each member gifts for the maturation of the whole (4:7).

**Ephesians 4:11-12** Here Paul is not describing spiritual gifts that he gives to individual people in the church (cf. Rom. 12), but rather people as gifts to the church.

'Shepherds and teachers' most likely refer to the same person and role in church. Shepherding happens primarily through the teaching of God's word; hence the significance of verse 15.

Should there be a comma following 'teachers' in verse 11? If so, then the role of equipping the saints for the work of ministry applies to all the people Paul mentions. If not, then this equipping role is the specific responsibility of the pastor-teachers. Either way, the work of ministry is for all the saints (every Christian). The work of ordained ministers is to "equip" all Christians for this work, because "each part" (v. 16) of the body is needed for its growth in maturity, unity, and love.

**Ephesians 4:13-16** The church is pictured as a single organism or body, which is growing by God's grace into "mature manhood" as a child grows into adulthood. In 2:15, Paul wrote that God is creating a new humanity in Christ, and now he describes how that new humanity will reach maturity.

Maturity comes from not being like Adam and Eve, who listened to the craftiness (cf. Gen. 3:1) of Satan's word, but growing in maturity through speaking the truth of Christ in love.

Speech has great power in the church. It can deceive or it can build up. It can curse or it can bless. It is intended to be a God-ordained means of love in the church, which is why Paul focuses on the ethics of our speech in 4:25-32.

## Study 8 - The God Who Sends: [Ephesians 3:1-13] "How Should we Live as Disciples?"

### **Introduction: The Job of the Church**

After considering how our God reigns in building His church, we turn to His reign as he gathers and sends His church. God's purpose in his big story is to create a multi-ethnic people for himself. The gospel is for all people. God not only reveals to Paul the mystery of Christ – that Gentiles, like Jews, were now partakes of the promises of God through Christ – but also commissions him to share the riches of Christ with the Gentiles.

### **Ephesians 3:1-13**

**3** For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— **2** assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, **3** how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. **4** When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **6** This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

**7** Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **11** This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **13** So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

**Notes:**

## STUDY #8 Ephesians 3:1-13

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. Paul names two privileges or “graces” that were given to him by God (vv. 2, 7). What are they?  
How are they connected?
2. To whom has the gospel of Christ been revealed? With whom is the gospel of Christ to be shared?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

3. How is his eternal purpose made known? To whom? Through whom?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

4. How is Paul equipped for the ministry of stewarding the gospel?
5. What is Paul’s unique role in the mission of the church?
6. What is the Main Idea?

#### Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?

7. What are some of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (v. 8) that you have received? (Glance over chapters 1-2 for review) With whom is God commissioning you to share these riches?
  
8. How does this expand your thinking about the centrality of the church to the gospel message and mission? Spend time discussing and praying over your own attitudes to the church in the light of this passage.

#### Study Notes

**Ephesians 3:1** In the Bible, “Gentiles” refers to all peoples or ethnicities who are not Jewish – God’s covenant people stemming from the family of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:2-3).

**Ephesians 3:3-6** “Mystery” does not refer to an obscure puzzle or problem that is hard to understand, but to a truth revealed by God that could not be known in any other way (i.e., by human reason, intuition, or scientific discovery). The “mystery of Christ” (as spelled out in ch.2) includes a vertical and horizontal axis: union with Christ (2:1-10) and union between Jews and Gentiles (2:11-22). The spiritual reality of the gospel creates and includes the social reality of the church. “To sum up, we may say that the ‘mystery of Christ’ is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. It is this double union, with Christ and with each other, which was the substance of the ‘mystery.’” (Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p.117)

It is a fundamental principle of Christian mission that we can only give what we have first received, or grace is given to be shared.

**Ephesians 3:7** The Greek word for “power” here is *dynamis*, from which we get the English word “dynamite” and “dynamic.” It refers to the dynamic activity and energy of God at work in the world – a significant theme in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, who lived in a culture obsessed with magic. Rather than a vague and magical force, God’s power is personal and concrete. It is connected to the power of God at work in Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement (1:19-20). It is also connected to the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life (3:16). The same power at work in Christ is now at work in us by the Holy Spirit in ways that exceed our boldest prayers and wildest imaginings (3:20). For Paul, this power is the real source of hope and fruit in gospel ministry and mission.

**Ephesians 3:8** "Saints" is a word Paul uses to describe all Christians, not a special set of super Christians. It literally means "holy ones". All Christians have been set apart by God and are being made holy (sanctified) in Christ (cf. 1:4, 4:24).

**Ephesians 3:10** The existence and life of the church bears witness to the reality of Christ's victory in the spiritual realm. Paul's reference to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" most likely refers to the unseen but very real world of spiritual forces. They cannot be reduced to human causality and material reality, but neither are they completely divorced from them. In biblical cosmology, the visible and invisible realms are distinct from but porous to one another; they are constantly interacting and interfacing and influencing one another. Paul gives more detail in chapter 6: our battle is not against "flesh and blood" but against the "rulers", "authorities", "cosmic powers", and "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12). The good news is that these are the very spiritual powers over which Christ reigns (1:21) and for which the believer has been given the mighty armour of God (6:10-20).

**Ephesians 3:12** The language of "boldness and access with confidence" describes the believers' experience of being part of the household of God (cf. 2:19, 3:6). It is the posture of adopted children toward their heavenly Father, assured of his lavish love for them. Part of the mystery of the gospel revealed to Paul is that this privileged belonging and relationship, something Jews and Gentiles share together (and equally) in Christ (cf. 2:18).

**Ephesians 3:13** "It is noteworthy that Paul concludes this section as he began it (verse 1), namely with a reference to his own sufferings in the Gentile cause.... Jesus said that he would enter his glory through suffering, and that his followers would have to tread the same path. Here, however, Paul writes something different, namely that his sufferings will bring them (his Gentile readers) glory. He is suffering in prison on their behalf, as their champion, standing firm for their inclusion in God's new society. So convinced is he of the divine origin of his vision that he is prepared to pay any price to see it become a reality. That is the measure of Paul's concern for the church." (Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p.129)

## **Study 9 - The God Who Re-creates: [Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5] "Where Can we Find Hope?"**

### **Introduction: God Remakes the World in Perfection**

At the close of our study, we recall how, in our first study, we heard the Lord bringing creation into being through his Word. In last week's study we heard him revealing His Gospel to the nations through His church. Now, in this last study, we are invited to "behold" the future he has in mind for his world, the final glorious fulfillment of his Word.

### **Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5**

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

**5** And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **6** And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

...

**22** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. **3** No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. **4** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. **5** And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

### **Notes:**

## STUDY #9 Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5

### **Step 1. What Does It Say?**

1. What does John see? What is there? What does he tell us is not there?
2. Who tells him to “behold”? What is he told to do?

### **Step 2. What Does It Mean?**

3. What does the declaration “It is done” mean?
4. What do we learn about the reign of God in the new heavens and the new earth? What is the significance of the two images used to describe this new reality?
5. What is the central role of Christ in this vision?

### **Step 3. What Does It Reveal?**

6. In this study we have seen God act and heard him speak throughout the story of Scripture. How do we see everything he’s said and done brought to a glorious fulfillment in this vision of the future?
  - His creation in Genesis
  - His revelation in Deuteronomy
  - His covenant promise in Jeremiah
  - His incarnation in Luke
  - His sacrifice in Hebrews
  - His gift of the Spirit in John
  - His building up of the church in Ephesians
  - His gospel call to the nations in Ephesians
7. What is the Main Idea?

#### Step 4. What Does It Mean For Me?

8. How has this vision changed your perspective or lifted your heart? How does having this hope make a difference in how you live?
  
9. We live in a culture with very little hope. How would you summarize the hope you have as a believer to an unbelieving friend?

#### Study Notes

**Revelation 21:1** "God is making all things new, not all new things" (Darrell Johnson). The Greek word for "new" refers to a new *kind* of heaven and earth (not a *first* time heaven and earth).

The sea symbolizes the source of evil (Revelation 13:1) and the place of judgment (Revelation 18:21).

**Revelation 21:2-3** There are a few ways to read this passage: as a place, as a people, or possibly both. Regardless, this is primarily a vision of the church as the end point of history, dwelling with Christ. No matter which way it is interpreted, the main focus is this union and presence of God with His people.

**Revelation 21:2** See Revelation 19:7,8 for how the bride is adorned as compared to "the harlot" in Revelation 17:4, 18:16.

**Revelation 21:3** The word "behold" appears 26 times in Revelation. The final one, spoken by Jesus, says: "Behold, I am coming soon and my reward is with me and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:12-13)

**Revelation 21:5** From beginning to end, the book of Revelation is based on the ultimate significance and blessing on what has been heard and written. "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near," (Revelation 1:3). "Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book," (Revelation 22:7).

**Revelation 21:6** Living water is promised in Zechariah 14:8, Isaiah 49:10, 55:1, and by Jesus in John 4:10, 7:38,39 where it is identified with the Holy Spirit.



**Revelation 21:7** “The one who conquers” refers to Revelation 2,3 and the promises to the seven churches. Revelation speaks to people who are suffering and depicts the Christian spiritual life as a battle. To “conquer” is to resist the temptation of the Beast and to be faithful to Jesus even to the point of death. It encompasses refusing compromise as well as perseverance and faithfulness under persecution and suffering.

**Revelation 22:1,3** The Lamb is identified as Jesus in Revelation 5:9: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

**Revelation 22:2** In Genesis, the tree of life is a symbol of immortality. It is the source of life that can’t be compromised or corrupted. This is clearly linked to Jesus through whom we have access to his immortal, resurrected life. God blocked access to the tree of life after the Fall (Genesis 3:22,24) but Christ promises that his people will eat its fruit (Revelation 2:7;22:14).

The promise that the nations will be included as the people of God stretches from God’s promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3) to this fulfillment in Revelation. Isaiah 60: 3, 5, 11 describes the nations bringing their glory into Jerusalem (Revelation 21: 24, 26).

**Revelation 22:4** Throughout the Scripture, the ultimate promise of God is that his people will see his face. (Psalms 11:7, 17:15; 42:2; Matt 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:12, 1 John 3:2). This is the supreme good for which we were made.

**Revelation 22:4** Believers have the name of God written on their foreheads as a sign of Christ’s ownership and their loyalty to him, in contrast to unbelievers, who receive the beast’s mark (Revelation 13:16, 14:9).

**Revelation 22:5** This light is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s vision (Isaiah 60:3,19,20). Jesus identifies himself as the Light of Life (John 8:12) and the Light of the World (John 9:5)

### Study Notes for Question 6

- His creation in Genesis - The Lord creates a new heavens and a new earth, (21:1) where his people have full and free access to the tree of life (22:2).
- His revelation in Deuteronomy - The revealing light of God’s Word becomes the fullness of the Light of his presence (22:5).
- His covenant promise in Jeremiah - The promise “I will be their God and they will be my people” is abundantly fulfilled (21:3, 21:7).
- His incarnation in Luke - God is fully present with his people and they see his face (21:3).
- His sacrifice in Hebrews - The one who died as a sacrificial lamb is now seated on the throne, declaring “it is finished” (22:1,3).
- His gift of the Spirit in John - The water of life is identified by Jesus as the Holy Spirit which in this vision has become a river (22:1).
- His building up of the church in Ephesians - The church is fully built up and adorned as the Bride and the New Jerusalem (21:2).
- His gospel call to the nations in Ephesians - The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations who have been brought in by the gospel.