

Ephesians 3:1–13 (NKJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,⁷ of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.¹³ Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Interpretation: Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.

1. Compare and contrast Paul's self-reference in v. 1 with his self-reference in 1:1. In this context, why might Paul be motivated to alter the terms in which he describes himself?

2. What is Paul referring to with the phrase “the dispensation of the grace of God” (v. 2)? [Note: The word “dispensation” may also be translated “administration,” “stewardship,” or “commission.”]

3. By what means (v. 3) did Paul gain his knowledge of “the mystery” (v. 4)? By what means do we gain knowledge of the same mystery today?

4. In verses 5–6, Paul gives an extended description of “the mystery.” What is Paul using this term to describe? Why is this term helpful? [Note: You may wish to compare with other occurrences of the term “mystery” in Eph. 1:9; 3:9ff; 5:32; and 6:19.]

5. When did Paul become a minister (v. 7)? How does this verse reflect Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road (cf. Acts 9:1–19)?

6. Is Paul correct when he describes himself as “less than the least of all the saints” (v. 8), or is he just overly conscientious about his sin? [Hint: Consider 1 Cor. 15:9 and 1 Tim. 1:15.]

7. How does the church display “the manifold wisdom of God” to the “principalities and powers” (v. 10)?

Application: Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 3:1–13 for your own life today.

8. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

9. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
