

in Col 1:9, in which a similar phrase, “wisdom and understanding,” is Paul’s prayer for the believers to whom he writes:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (σοφία καὶ συνέσει)... (Col 1:9)

Given these parallels, it seems best to understand the phrase to describe “wisdom and insight” as divinely given to those He redeems in order to enable them to grow in sanctification as they seek God and live in the strength of His abundant grace.

9–10 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in the Messiah, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

As noted above in our discussion of this pericope beginning with v. 3, vv. 3–14 comprise a single sentence in the Greek. The English translations have divided this long, run-on sentence into several sentences in order to make it read better in the English. But we should remember that it is one sentence in the Greek, thus gathering all of the words together to offer a unified message about the blessings that God has lavished upon all those He has purposed to save.

As a result of the long sentence in the Greek text, English translations differ regarding what a given clause in the sentence modifies. Thus, the NASB takes the final clause of v. 8, “in all wisdom and insight” to describe the manner in which God made known the mystery of His will, i.e., He did so “in all wisdom and insight.” But as noted in my comments on v. 8, it seems best to understand this phrase to denote the result of God’s abundant grace given to His chosen ones, namely, that such grace results in giving them “wisdom and insight.”

So in the long sentence, we must determine what the opening words of v. 9 modify. It seems quite clear that they describe yet another aspect of the manifold blessings of God’s grace given to His chosen ones. The blessings of His bountiful grace enumerated in the previous verses include:

1. His eternal choosing of us for salvation
2. His sovereign determination that we should be holy and blameless before Him
3. that we have been adopted as children into His family
4. that all of this is based upon our redemption which Yeshua made for us in giving His own life for each of us

Now, in our verse, Paul adds yet another blessing to the list, namely, that God has “made known to us the mystery of His will.” Once again we have that which is “already” and “not yet.” Even as our full redemption awaits the final day of His coming, yet we truly possess the riches of our redemption now, even if not completely. So the blessing of which Paul speaks here is that God, in His grace and mercy, has revealed Himself to us in specific ways, through the Scriptures and the work of the Ruach HaKodesh in making the inspired word applicable to us, thus enabling us to know God’s will and to walk in it.

The general revelation of God is to be distinguished from His special revelation given to His chosen ones. The general revelation of God is universal, being seen in the creation. In Romans Paul teaches us that even God’s invisible attributes are revealed in the created world.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Rom 1:20)

But general revelation does not reveal the plan of salvation which God purposed from all eternity to redeem those He has chosen through the redemption made by His Son, Yeshua, and applied through the saving work of the Spirit. The plan of salvation was, from the beginning of the world, revealed through God’s direct revelation to individuals, especially the Prophets and Apostles who wrote what God had revealed in the Scriptures. It is only when, through the regenerative work of the Ruach, a person is given faith to understand and believe the word of God, that the glorious message of salvation is known and received resulting in salvation. As Paul teaches in Romans:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Messiah.¹ (Rom 10:17)

Yet when Paul writes that “He [God] made known to us the mystery of His will,” he is referring specifically to the message of the gospel that is received by faith among those who are chosen to salvation. Thus, as the gospel is proclaimed, it offers a “general call” to salvation, meaning it is proclaimed to all people without distinction. However, it is the “effectual calling” of the Spirit of God to the elect which results in both their desire and ability to accept the message of the Gospel and thereby to repent of their sins and believe in Yeshua as their Savior and Lord. It is therefore the result of God’s sovereign and bountiful grace that He discloses to the elect the reality of His plan of salvation, vested in the work of Yeshua and made applicable by the work of His Spirit.

Therefore, when Paul writes that God “made known to us the mystery of His will,” he means that God gives special revelation to the elect by opening their hearts and minds to the truth of the Gospel, enabling each one to see and thus to receive the unspeakable gift of His grace. Some have tried to interpret the words “to us” to refer to Israel on a national level rather than to individuals chosen to eternal salvation. For they want to define divine election as being only of a corporate nature (a national entity made up of believers and non-believers) and not of individuals who are chosen unto eternal salvation. Note the following examples:

Usually when people speak of divine election, they think of the election of individuals and the benefit to them. But biblical texts have a different emphasis, for election is primarily a corporate term. Nothing in Ephesians 1 focuses on individuals; rather, the text focuses collectively on those who are in Christ. This changes the theology. People become elect only in the Elect One—Christ.²

Craig Keener also appears to interpret divine election in Eph 1 to be understood as God’s choosing of national Israel. Commenting on 1:4-5

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- 1 Early and diverse manuscripts (P^{46vid} S* B C D* 81 1739 Old Latin vg cop^{sa, bo, fay} goth arm) have ῥῆμα Χριστοῦ. Some early manuscripts along with later texts (S^c A D^{b, c} K P Ψ 33 614 1241 Byz Lect syr^{p^h}) have ῥῆμα θεοῦ.
 - 2 Klyne Snodgrass, “Ephesians” in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 49.

he writes:

Salvation was God's initiative, because of His love (Deut 7:7–9). The Old Testament declares that God "predestined" or (literally) "chose" Israel (e.g., Deut 14:2) in Abraham to be his covenant people and adopted them as his children, but that his people often fell short of the covenant.¹

But it is clear, both from the immediate context as well as the overall message of Ephesians, that Paul is talking about God's grace to individuals whom He has chosen to be united together in Yeshua and thus in the local communities of the *ekklesia* He promised to build (Matt 16:18). While it surely is true that God chose Israel as a nation and that such divine choosing results in temporal blessings for the whole nation as well as eternal blessings for those who come to faith in Yeshua, what Paul is teaching us here is that God's grace is given to each individual whom He has chosen for eternal salvation. Note the repeated use of the pronouns in these opening verses of Ephesians:

- "who has blessed us" (v. 3)
- "just as He chose us in Him" (v. 4)
- "that we would be holy and blameless (v. 4)
- "He predestined us to adoption as sons" (v. 5)
- "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us" (v. 6)
- "In Him we have redemption" (v. 7)
- "the forgiveness of our trespasses" (v. 7)
- "which He lavished on us." (v. 8)

It is evident, therefore, that when Paul speaks of divine election, of redemption being purchased by the blood of Messiah Yeshua, of being adopted as children into the family of God, he is referring to God's decreed will to save an enumerable group of individuals to the glory of His grace. These individual believers are thus united together in the family of God as one people of God, the *ekklesia* of Yeshua.

He made known to us the mystery of His will... – The word "mystery" (*μυστήριον*, *mustērion*) means "something hidden" or "secret." It is used of the "unmanifested or private counsel of God, (God's) secret" as well

1 Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP, 2014), p. 543.

as “that which transcends normal understanding.”¹ That God reveals Himself in creation, and that He reveals His will through His prophets, and ultimately through His Son Yeshua, does not mean that He reveals the totality of His will or that He reveals His purposes completely. Moreover, even that part of His will which He has revealed may not be comprehensively understood and fully appreciated by our finite human reasoning.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Torah. (Deut 29:29)

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Is 55:8–9)

Even though *musterion* is not used by the Lxx for the word translated “secret” in Deut 29:29, the word used (*κρυπτός*, *kruptos*) is a close synonym. In fact, in the canonical books of the Tanach, *musterion* is used by the Lxx only in the book of Daniel (Dan 2:19, 27, 30, 47). Interestingly, it is found 28 times in the Apostolic Scriptures, 21 of which are in Paul’s epistles. The word is found six times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3–4, 9; 5:32; 6:19), and it seems quite clear that Paul uses it in his other epistles to focus primarily on the fact that God’s way of redemption is the same for both Jew and Gentile. His use of the word and its message in Ephesians seems to focus on an obvious further reality flowing from the singular redemption that both Jew and Gentile enjoy, namely, that both are united as one in the body of Messiah, the *ekklesia*. It is therefore in Ephesians that the concept of the mystery of God’s will is most fully developed.

...according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him – Here we are met again with the word *εὐδοκία* (*eudokia*), translated as “kind intention,” which we encountered in v. 5. There Paul teaches us that God’s predestination of His chosen ones results in their becoming “adopted children” in God’s family. Here, in v. 9, God’s “kind intention” was that His would make known the hidden truth of His will, that Jew and Gentile together would make up the completed family of His redeemed people.

This aspect of the divine will was given in “seed form” to Abraham,

1 BDAG, “μυστήριον,” p. 662.

Isaac, and Jacob when, in the covenant enacted with them God promised: “in your seed all the nations/families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). But the mystery of that promise was how this would come to pass.

We first should ponder the richness of what is meant in “kind intentions.” In using this word *eudokia*, Paul has given us a glimpse into the very heart of God, for it was the deep desire and loving intention of the Father that He would save many people, from every tribe, family, and language group, forgiving them of their sins and giving them a life of righteousness by which they would be enabled to become living witnesses of His grace and love, and be thus enabled to enjoy the greatness of God forever.

But note secondly the very means by which the Father’s kind intentions would become a reality: *which He purposed in Him*. The Greek makes it clear that the word translated “which” in the English, refers back to *eudokia*, “kind intentions.”¹ God’s plan of redemption, of blessing through salvation for all of the elect, is entirely vested “in Him,” that is, in Yeshua. And this truth begins a crescendo which finds its fortissimo in the next verse (v. 10).

with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, – (εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν.) The phrase begins with the preposition *εἰς* (*eis*), which in this context should be understood to mark the purpose of God in making known the mystery of His will, that is, “the summing up of all things in Messiah.” The Greek word *οἰκονομία* (*oikonomia*), translated as “administration,” carries the sense of “administration or management of a household or of a state.” It was used in Paul’s day both to denote the position of an administrator as well as the work that such an administrator would perform. Here, God is the divine administrator, being infinite in wisdom so that the plan is perfect; being infinite in power, so that He is able to make each part of the plan work as He wills; and He is infinite in His righteousness, so that all that is accomplished will be in full harmony with His own holiness. His plan is therefore sure and certain to gain its intended goal. As Trapp comments:

God is the best economic; His house is exactly ordered for

1 ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ, where the relative pronoun ἣν is feminine, thus referring to the closes antecedent, τὴν εὐδοκίαν, “kind intention.”

matters of good husbandry.¹

The phrase “fullness of the times” finds a similar parallel in Gal 4.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Torah, so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4–5)

Here, however, the word “time” (*χρόνου, χρονου*) is singular whereas in our Ephesians verse it is plural. In discussing the similarities and differences between the two verses, Hoehner writes:

It seems that in Galatians the fullness of time speaks of a particular point of time in history when God brought forth His Son. In Ephesians the plural appears to point to the fullness or totality of the times or epochs of history.²

Thus, the phrase “fulness of the time” speaks to a given event in the course of human history while the plural, “fulness of the times” speaks of the culmination of the whole of earth’s history. This must therefore focus upon the millennial kingdom, promised by the prophets of Israel in the Tanach and reiterated in the Apostolic Scriptures.³

...that is, the summing up of all things in Messiah, things in the heavens and things on the earth. – The Greek verb *ἀνακεφαλαιῶ* (*anakephalaioō*) literally has the sense of “to unite under one head” or more plainly, “to sum up.” It is used only one other place in the Apostolic Scriptures, in Rom 13:9.

For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up (*ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται*) in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” (Rom 13:9)

1 John Trapp, *A Commentary on the New Testament* (Dickinson, 1865) [reprint by Baker, 1981], p. 590.

2 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 219.

3 2Sam 7:14–17; Is 2:1–4; 11:1–5; Jer 23:3–8; 31:31–37; Dan 2:35, 44–45; Hos 3:4–5; Amos 9:11–15; Zeph 3:14–20; Zech 14:16–21; Matt 24:29–31; 25:31–46; Lk 1:31–33; 2:25; Acts 3:19–21; 15:13–18; Rom 11:25–27; Rev 20:1–6.

What does Paul mean when he writes of “summing up all things in Messiah”? We find parallels to this expression in two other prison epistles of Paul.

For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col 1:19–20)

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

When sin entered the world through Adam, the world and all born into it became marked by rebellion against God, being touched with death, decay, and disorder. Though the Scriptures do not give us a great deal of information on the disruption that occurred in the heavenly realm, we do know that there was disorder. Created beings or angels rebelled against God, became His enemies, and continue to disrupt the world and do all in their power to turn mankind further and further away from God and to bring them under their power. Peter teaches us that the devil is a real enemy and we must therefore constantly be on guard against him.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1Pet 5:8)

Likewise, Paul admonishes us in Ephesians to be ready for battle against the enemy of our souls.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Eph 6:11)

But God could not and will not allow this disorder to remain, for before the world began He had decreed His plan of salvation. This plan, the “mystery of His will,” is more fully described in vv. 20–23 of our chapter. But here we may simply be reminded that all things will be made right through the authority and power of our King Who reigns

at the right hand of God. This is what Paul means when he writes of “all things being summed up in Messiah.” He means that through the power of our risen and reigning King, all will be made right and harmonious in the universe. Evil will be no more, and righteousness will reign forever.

Further, “things in heaven and things on the earth” (τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) amplify the meaning of the previous phrase “all things,” for the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (Eph 6:12) will be forever vanquished, along with death and sin, and all will once again be universally giving praise to God, whether as objects of His just and sovereign wrath or as those upon whom He has set His love and united them together in His beloved Son, Yeshua. This is what Paul means by summing all things up “in Him.”