

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – July 15, 2018

## [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

### **Suggested Study / Prep**

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Read the provided commentary below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

### **Commentary on Ephesians 1:3-14**

(From *Homiletics*; “Look-Alikes” – July 16, 2006)

The letter to the Ephesians is filled with some of the most awe-inspiring language in the New Testament. This is particularly evident in the first section of the letter as the author (possibly, but not certainly, Paul) engages in a “eulogy,” a blessing of God. This blessing (vv.3-14) is only one sentence in Greek composed of many different subordinate clauses and participles which point to the grammatical unity of this passage. The unity is further underscored by the subject of the passage, in that the author presents his audience with all the acts God has done for “us” throughout time. By emphasizing the atemporal nature of God’s activity, the author is able to use this eulogy as parenthesis, exhorting his audience to believe in the God who has been working on their behalf before the world even existed (v.4), and who will continue even through the “fullness of time” (v.10). Since God has always chosen “us,” we should be encouraged to respond in belief and blessing to the praise of his glorious grace. In this doxology, God’s works done for “us,” the community, are described essentially in three different ways: God the Father’s work from the beginning, the redemption and consummation in Christ and the down payment or the pledge of our final inheritance, the promised Holy Spirit, who works in “you” today.

The first section (vv.3-6) begins with an exhortation to bless God, common in Jewish prayers (e.g., Exodus 18:10; 1 Samuel 25:39; Psalm 41:13; 68:35; 89:52; 106:48; 119:12; for more information see Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998]). God is then identified in two ways, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and as the one who blesses us with every spiritual blessing (v.3). Spiritual blessings founded upon God’s choice are illuminated in the following discussion. This choice took place before God created the world, and it was a choice for “us” to be holy and unblemished (v.4). Election is described here as part of the author’s praise to God; it is not an object of fear or dread. God’s sovereignty and God’s foreknowledge make us able to receive adoption as children. Furthermore, while election is freely given, the end goal is “holiness,” as we see above (1:4). We know this “predestination” is good, because God’s will is good (1:6) as we know from his free gift of the Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ (1:6, see 1:1). The placement of “the Beloved” at the end of this section mirrors the placement of “in love” (v.4); God’s love for his Son and his love for “us” are the same, by his glorious grace (1:6).

The second section (1:7-10) describes “our” state and Christ’s work. Verse 7 begins with the characteristic “in him,” which is a catch phrase and keynote emphasis for the rest of the passage. The eulogy is clear: God’s purposes for us (holiness and blamelessness, 1:4) have been accomplished in Christ, specifically, through his blood (1:7). In Christ’s blood we find redemption and forgiveness. By implication, the state of humanity without Christ is one of transgression. These gifts of salvation are grounded in descriptions of God that echo verses 3-6, as God is described as lavishing the riches of his grace upon us. Furthermore, this wealth again originated in the “plan for the

fullness of time” (1:10) which God had set forth in Christ. This mystery of God’s will has now been revealed through Christ’s work, and will culminate when everything is gathered up into Christ (cf. Hebrew 2:8-9). Thus, God’s choices and plans for the world extend from the beginning into eternity, transcending all of time. The author will continue this understanding of Christ’s role as ruler over all things when he concludes the next section of his letter, giving thanks specifically for the activity of the community. There the author states that Christ has put all things under his feet (cf. Psalm 110:1; Hebrew 1:3, 13) and is “head over all things for the church, which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22-23). It is this church, subject to Christ (cf. 5:21) which is the subject of the final section of this passage.

Again, “in him,” (the NRSV translates “in Christ”) the author emphasizes “our” identity. As the ones who were predestined from the beginning to receive adoption as God’s children, we have obtained an inheritance. This section continues to emphasize God’s cosmic purposes and work (“the purpose of him who accomplishes all things,” v.11) within his singular will. In this section the author finally defines the “we” of this eulogy. “We” are the “first to set our hope on Christ,” and we exist for the purpose of praising his glory (1:12). As soon as he has identified the “we,” the author brings the audience into the eulogy. They have “also” heard “the word of truth,” they possess salvation and have believed, and finally, they have been “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13). Concluding the author’s early Trinitarian formation which began with God (1:3-6) and proceeded to discuss God’s Son, the Holy Spirit is now depicted as the “down payment” of the inheritance of both the author and the audience (“our inheritance,” 1:14). In a literal sense, this “down payment” (NRSV: pledge, Greek: ἀρραβων) is an economic term describing something like a first installment which functions as a legal claim to the object transacted. Here, the author uses it figuratively, encouraging his audience to trust God’s character, as he has been claiming throughout the whole eulogy. In the eyes of the author, God has acted the same way from the beginning, blessing and choosing “us,” and also “you.” Now we can trust the final consummation of all things in Christ as we have this deposit, the Holy Spirit, (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22) toward the redemption which ultimately culminates in the praise of God’s glory (1:14, cf. 1:6).

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out another commentary available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](http://WorkingPreacher.org).

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading this passage?**