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Exegesis Research Paper

- I. Text/Passage: Ephesians 3:14-21
- II. **Observations: Leave All of these questions in your final paper.**
 - A. **Who is mentioned in this passage? Are they referred to by name, by relationship, or in some other way? Is there any description given for each one? If so, what words are used to describe them?**

The characters mentioned, their names and relationship and their description in the text include God the Father and creator of the universe, the believers at Ephesus who needed strength and power from the Spirit, Jesus Christ the savior who died to regain the salvation of all humans, by faith Jesus lives in the heart of believers and the Holy Spirit who empower humans with the strength to do the work that God has ordained for the believers to accomplish. (Ephesians 3:14-21).
 - B. **What is happening in the passage?** In this passage, the Apostle Paul presented an intercessory prayer for the believers at Ephesus. Paul requested God to grant the believers strength and power. Paul also requests for believers to experience an abundance of God's love. According to Nderitu the text promotes and encourages the Ephesian believers to experience the love of God, as well as faith and wisdom to be stronger in the Lord.¹

¹ Joyce Wanjiku Nderitu, "An Introductory and Selective Study of Paul's Intercessory Prayer Reports in Ephesians And Its Significance To The Church Leaders Today." *Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN): Theses & Dissertations*, January 2002, 1–104.

C. Is there any dialogue between the participants? Can one of the speakers be identified as the main speaker in the passage? If so, who is the main speaker?

This is a monologue as Paul interceded on behalf of the believers at Ephesus for spiritual gifts and the prayer concluded with a doxology which is a hymn of praise. Paul was the main speaker as this was an intercessory prayer for the Ephesian believers.

D. What is being discussed? Are there any commands, promises, warnings, words of encouragement, instructions, etc.? If so, what are they?

The spiritual strength, power, and well fair of the believers were discussed as Paul intercede for the believers. The prayer ended with a doxology which states “Now to him who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

E. Were you able to tell when and where the events and/or discussions in this passage occurred? If so, when and where did these things occur? What places, if any, are mentioned in the passage?

Paul was kneeling when he made his request known to God as stated” For this reason, I kneel before the Father” (Ephesians 3:14). There was no mention of a specific location.

Is there anything else that was unfamiliar to you or that you needed to look up, such as a particular name, the definition of one of the words used, etc.?

I am familiar with the text but I reviewed the footnotes in the biblical text and it was noted “The Greek word for family (Patria) is derived from the Greek for father (pater) as stated in (Ephesians 3:15). One can suggest this is one reason in ancient Near East cultures the father is the head of the family, especially God as the father. Paul emphasized the importance of honoring and glorifying God as the creator of all things and the source of love, power, and strength.

F. Is there anything that is repeated, that is emphasized, or that stood out to you as being unusual?

This text illustrated the significance of leaders such as Paul taking the time to intercede on behalf of believers and it was evident Paul desired for the people to be blessed abundantly. So intercessory pray was emphasized in the text.

III. Interpretation:

A. Social Context: (What is the social context of the people in the passage? What did they believe about God, themselves, and each other? How did they interact with each of these mentioned? What did they think about and how did they interact with their families, villages/cities, neighbors, etc.?)

According to Thielman, the book of Ephesians was written after the death of Jesus when Paul accepted the call to preach and teach the Gentile nations². Finn describes this period as the time for the spread of Christianity during the Greco-Roman era. Arnold suggested some Ephesian people believed in magic and they worshipped the goddess Artemis/Diana and other gods.³ So the writer of Ephesians emphasized a monotheistic belief and the importance of praying to one God for power and strength.

B. Literary Context: (Where does this passage occur in the book? The beginning, middle, the end? What has come before it? What comes after it? You can insert an outline of the book, and/or a summary of what is mentioned before this passage and what is mentioned after it. Also, how does what we find in this passage relate to what has come before and what comes after?)

The intercessory pray is at the beginning of the book of Ephesians located at Ephesians chapter 3 which is subdivided into two parts. The intercessory prayer occurs in the

² Frank Thielman, *Ephesians BECNT*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 83

second section. According to Arnold, Ephesians (3:14-21) is Paul's second intercession prayer in the letter and Paul was aware of the resurrected power of Jesus as well as the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Paul begins his prayer with a posture of humility by kneeling before God and he recognized that God is all-powerful because he is the creator of everything in heaven and earth. After addressing God's divine presence Paul requested for God to impart power to believers so they will experience the power of God. Paul also requests for believers to experience the love of God in their life so believers will share the love of Christ with other people in the world. Then Paul prayed that the believers will have an awareness of God's power and love. Paul concluded the intercessory prayer with a doxology which is a hymn to praise and glorify God and to acknowledge God's majestic presence, his enormous power, and his abounding and abiding love.

C. Genre: (What type of literature is this, such as a psalm, a proverb, a law text, a narrative, etc.? Does it contain other forms of literature, such as a narrative, a dialogue, a prayer, poetry, a parable, etc.?)

The book of Ephesians is a letter/sermon to the people of Ephesus and Ephesians (3:14-21) is an intercessory prayer for the people.

D. Language: (Is there a special meaning to the original Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic? Compare various translations at this point. Is there a particular word that may have a special meaning?) The meaning of the text in English and Greek is similar. The word family was important in the prayer and the writer encourages the whole family to pray.

⁴ Clinton E. Arnold. 285

According to Arnold the meaning for father and family is similar in Greek and the writer presents a prayer for the family on earth and in heaven.⁵ This was noteworthy for me because the writer wanted the family on earth to become more aware of the power and love of the Heavenly family. The writer also wanted the earthly family to be aware of evil beings and he reminds the believers that the Father can protect them.

E. Text Criticism: (Is there a debate in the manuscript tradition about this passage? Footnotes in study Bibles and most academic commentaries will pick this up. Does the text variant alter the meaning or interpretation of the passage? If so, how?)

Sexton describes Text Criticism as the process of identifying errors in a text and making corrections so the original meaning of the text is preserved⁶ Heine suggests the text was transcribed from the Greek and there is no major debate regarding the manuscript⁷ The text is focused on an intercessory prayer.

F. Story of Israel before the coming of Christ? Does it occur during Christ's time in the world between his birth and death? Does it occur after the resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit? Is it a result of the fall, or part of the fulfillment of the Christ-event?)

⁵ Arnold. 188

⁶ Jason Sexton, "NT Text Criticism and Inerrancy." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 2006, 17 (1): 55.

⁷ Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. New York: OUP Oxford, 2002.

Israel was dominated by Greek and Roman control so Israel wanted a messiah to save the people. They were interested in a political leader but God sent a spiritual leader. Jesus lived and died for the sins of all people and he went back to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit to give power and strength to believers. The Paul intercessory prayer occurred after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul wanted to convey this message to the Ephesians in his intercessory prayer in (Ephesians 3:14-21).

G. Commentaries: (What are some of the main issues discussed by the commentators concerning this passage? What verse or verses, if any, do they seem to focus on more than others? How do they see what is said here impacting what happens elsewhere in the Old Testament and/or the New Testament?)

In the commentaries, the main discussion focused on prayer and the power of God to effect change. A verse that was a point of focus was “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, (Ephesians 3:16). According to Arnold, Paul acknowledged God is the source of abundant power, love, and strength and Paul recognized God’s sovereignty by kneeling when he did an intercessory prayer that was completed with a hymn of praise..⁸ It was suggested God had empowered military men to win battles in the past and Paul believed the power of God was more potent with humans after the resurrection of Jesus so he emphasized the importance of prayer. In the Old Testament the power of God was evident as stated, “And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God (1Samuel 23:16). “And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief

⁸ Arnold. 290

men to go up with me (Ezra 7:28). In the New Testament, it was stated “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty things;” (1:Corinthians 12:21-27). “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passed knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Corinthians 2:5).

According to Arnold Trinitarian theology focus on praise and worship, the gift of love, power, and strength, and the belief that God has the power to intervene and affect change in an individual’s life.⁹ There is also a belief that there are opposing forces that are contrary to the power of God but God is the most powerful force and it is necessary for people to depend on God rather than their strength. Arnold proposed Paul needed to pray for power and the love of God for the new believers because the people who lived in Ephesus and along the West coast of Asia minor believed in the effect of their willpower

⁹ Arnold, 307-308.

and their strength and they did not believe in evil. Paul's prayers will reinforce the belief in a powerful, loving God who can give strength, love, and power to believers. Paul's message is humans are by nature weak and sinful and we need God's power and strength to sustain us. God is also loving and he died for the sins of all people which is different from the god and goddess who were not capable of sacrificing themselves for humanity.

H. Application(s):

- a. **Summary: (Summarize in one concise statement or sentence what the passage is teaching. What is the main point of this passage? What is the main message to the original audience in their context?)**

The writer is praying for believers to experience God's love, power, and strength through the Holy Spirit. The prayer concluded with a doxology that included God will hear the prayer of believers and they will be blessed abundantly.

- b. **Impact on/Importance to Believers, Unbelievers, and Me: (What is the importance/significance of these events to people today? What applications might we make to our own lives, such as what we believe, how we treat others, what we do, etc.? In other words, how should knowing what is in this passage then change us now?) Believers: (What does this passage teach a new Christian, a mature believer, etc. about who God is, what He has done, what He is going to do, etc.? Is there a promise to be relied upon, a truth to be known and trusted, a command to be obeyed, etc.?)**

1. **Believers:** Will learn about the love of God, the promise of God, and the need to pray for the power of God through the Holy Spirit and for strength against evil forces. A new believer will learn they are loved by God, they will be strengthened and God has the power to answer prayers. As the text states "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians (3:16).

2. **Unbelievers: (What does this passage teach someone who has not yet trusted Christ?)**

The text will teach an unbeliever about the existence of a God who is offering them love, power, and strength with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. They can also learn God has the power to answer prayers and make a difference in their lives.

3. Me: (What does this passage teach me about God, His ways, and His actions in the past, present, and future? How does this instruct and/or challenge me?)

This text taught me God loves me and he will give me the power and strength through the Holy Spirit to understand and experience the love of God. I learn I can pray regarding any issues and my prayers will be answered. The text states “Now to him who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians (3:20). This text challenged me to dream big and to trust God’s love for me in the past, present, and future.

C. Preaching/Teaching:

1. What essential elements would you want to include when preaching/teaching this text in your faith community/ministry context?

Prayer is an essential element of communication between humans and God. The text begins with “For this reason” which suggests a prior discussion between Paul and the believers in Ephesus. Paul described himself as a servant and a prisoner of Jesus as he describes his calling and commitment to serve the Gentile nation and particularly the people in Ephesus (Ephesians 3:1-13). While the Jews normally stand to pray Paul chooses to kneel as a sign of reverence before God the Father and creator of the universe to petition God on behalf of the people. Paul is requesting an abundance of blessings. Paul describes the abundance as “according to the riches of his glory” (Ephesians 3:16). Paul made three requests to God on behalf of the people. The appeals were strength from the Holy Spirit, the power to understand and do the work of God, and the ability to experience the love of God. The text states “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted

and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-18). Paul concluded the intercessory prayer with a hymn of honor, praise, and thanksgiving to God in advance. This suggests Paul was confident in his belief that God will answer his prayer. I believe it was important to demonstrate the relevance of prayer to the people at Ephesus so that they can learn how to have faith in the power of God and believe in God's love, power, and strength in all circumstances as all things are attainable with God's help. The doxology was a declaration of God's ability to provide as it was stated in the text "Now to him who by the power at work within us can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen". (Ephesians 3:16-18). The most important element to present this text in a ministry context is an introduction that defines the topic and presents the main idea. The main idea is intercessory prayer. Then the body of the presentation will identify at least three main themes and Paul presented the need for power, love, and strength. Paul's application of the text to the social/ministry context demonstrated the relevance of the text in the society and personal situation. Paul demonstrated the importance of prayer and believing in prayer. Paul talked about believing in an abundant blessing from the source or creator of the universe. The conclusion will summarize the ideas presented in the session so Paul concluded with a doxology of praise to God. This approach will help people in the faith community to identify with the teaching ideas presented. I will present this topic on

prayer to adults over 35 years old who are interested in academic and exegesis
information on the power of intercessory prayer

2. Are any parts of it that might require a special explanation to help your ideal/target audience understand?

I think it will be important to review the historic and social context of the original population with detailed explanation and visual aids so the present target population can understand the significance of intercessory prayer in the original context as expressed in Ephesians 3:14-21.

3. Are there any parts of it that might be especially challenging or disturbing to some in your ideal/target audience?

The target population is familiar with the general concept of prayer in a social and religious context so I do not feel a presentation on intercessory prayer will be disturbing or significantly challenging. I will be mindful to reserve time for questions and answers at the end of the presentation.

Biography

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