

『南山神学』40号（2017年3月）pp. 57-77.

## THE MESSIAH IN THE TRINITARIAN HYMN OF THE LETTER TO EPHESIANS.

Theological Analysis of the Eulogy in Eph 1, 3-14.

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### 1. Introduction

Eph 1, 3-14 is without doubt one of the literary and theological masterpieces of the New Testament, and for this reason is the subject of constant attention by scholars. Some, admiring the literary style of this eulogy, search for parallels with other ancient texts and similar fragments within the New Testament; others, recognizing the theological importance of the text, attempt to establish the theological interpretation that they consider to be the most accurate<sup>1</sup>. In this study, we will offer a contribution to the theological interpretation of the fragment. In current theological research on Eph 1, 3-14 two basic positions are accepted by the majority of scholars. The first concerns its literary genre as being a eulogy, in which the author praises God for His deeds<sup>2</sup>. As a eulogy Eph 1, 3-14 is a skillfully crafted hymn expressing an advanced theological concept in which God's plan of salvation for believers is revealed. The second position refers to the way in which the theological concepts are expressed<sup>3</sup>. The author praises God for His deeds, pointing to the three dimensions through which the

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<sup>1</sup> P.S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, CCSS, Grand Rapids 2009, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, SP, Collegeville 2008, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids 2010, pp. 72-73.

actions of God are recognized by believers. The first dimension concerns the relation between God and believers, who in the God's salvific plan were elected to receive God's grace that led them to faith in Jesus the Messiah. This dimension is the subject of the author's praise especially in Eph 1, 3-6, where the reason and aim of God's plan of salvation is presented. The second dimension regards the agent by whom God realized His salvific plan. The Messiah, who from the very beginning was designated in God's plan to fulfill God's will, was Jesus of Nazareth. The relation between Jesus of Nazareth and the people elected by God to believe in Him is the subject of the author's praise in Eph 1, 7-13a. The salvation and reconciliation to God of all people who believe in Jesus the Messiah, is brought about by His blood. This is the most crucial statement concerning Jesus' actions on behalf of believers. The third dimension concerns the relation between the Holy Spirit and the believers chosen by God and saved by Jesus. In Eph 1, 13b-14 the author expresses his conviction that all grace given to believers by God and realized by Jesus the Messiah are guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of the believers' share in God's heritage. Frequently these three dimensions are considered by some scholars as underscoring the Trinitarian structure of the eulogy, since God is the creator of the plan of salvation, Jesus Christ is the agent who fulfilled the plan, and the Holy Spirit is now the seal of the believers' relationship with God<sup>4</sup>. In all three dimensions, the Messiah is always in the center of attention, which is underlined by use of the titles "Jesus Christ" or "Christ" and particularly by an extensive use of pronouns that appear instead of the titles. The pronouns are used so frequently that sometimes it is difficult to understand to whom they are related. Additionally, cases where in the one sentence there are a number of pronouns relating to different subjects are not the exception, but form instead one of the

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<sup>4</sup> B. Witherington III, *The Letter to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*, Grand Rapids 2007, p. 227.

characteristics of the eulogy. In the majority of cases it is possible to determine the subject of the pronoun with reasonable confidence, but there remain some cases where the subject can only be indicated as being probable, and this leaves an opening for different interpretations of certain passages, or even to different interpretations of the whole eulogy. An example is the use of the pronoun “we” in verse 11 that is contrasted to pronoun “you” used in verse 13. The identification of “you” as a reference to the Gentiles is clear, but the identification of the pronoun “we” raises a serious problem since it is not immediately clear if it refers to Jewish Christian, Jews, the apostles, or the first generation of Christians. In this study we will argue for the interpretation of “we” in verse 11 as referring of Jews. For this reason we will analyze the whole eulogy with particular focus on the use of the pronouns. Special attention must be given to the pronoun “in him” with reference to the Messiah that appears very frequently in the eulogy. It points to the Messiah as being the main reason for praising God. This frequency raises the question as to what concept of “Messiah” and the Messiah’s function underlies the author’s presentation of the divine plan of salvation.

## 2. Analyses of the text Eph 1, 3-14

### 2.1 Eph 1, 3<sup>5</sup>

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ  
 εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις  
 ἐν Χριστῷ,

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek text: Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*<sup>27</sup>, Stuttgart 1993. The English translation: The New Revised Standard Version, Oxford 1990.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

Verse 3 speaks of the relation between Jesus and God, as well as the relationship between Jesus and those who believe in Him. God is first presented as being the father of Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of believers<sup>6</sup>. While the phrase "God of Israel" is common in blessings used by the Jews, the reference to God as being the father of Jesus Christ is certainly not a Jewish way to bless God, and this indicates immediately a Christian interpretation of the relationship between Jesus and God. God and Jesus the Messiah are presented as being related as Father and son, where the son's role in the fulfilment of the Father's plan is the main concern of this presentation of the relationship. Jesus Christ is the One in Whom and by Whom, God accomplished in human history His salvific plan for those who believe. This statement leads the reader automatically to the second kind of relationship mentioned in verse 3, where the idea that God through the Messiah gave the believers (those who believe in Jesus as Messiah) all possible blessings that humans can receive from Him. This moves the attention of the reader onto the role that Jesus the Messiah plays in the relationship between God and humankind. All that God included in His plan at its final stage is made available to humankind only through faith in the Messiah. The phrase *in Christ*, or its equivalent *in Him*, appears in this eulogy eleven times, and it directly underlines the Christocentric character of this hymn, which has a Trinitarian structure<sup>7</sup>. The author calls Jesus *Our Lord* and *Christ* (the Messiah), showing two dimensions of the relationship between the believers and Jesus. The term

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<sup>6</sup> The similar phrases are found in 2 Cor 1, 3 and 1 Pet 1, 3.

<sup>7</sup> The subject of verses 4-6 is God, then the subject of verses 7-10 is Jesus Christ, and finally the subject of verses 11-14 is the Holy Spirit. Cf. P.S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 30.

κύριος – *master, owner, lord* – refers to a man who has control or mastery, including even the power to dispose of another’s life<sup>8</sup>. This simply means that the believers are subordinated to the will of Jesus. For this reason the first dimension in the relationship between Jesus and the believers concerns the reality of this world, in which the believers are walking in the way of faith according to the rules established by the Lord. The term Χριστός – *Christ* (or χριστός – *anointed one*) in the New Testament is used to translate the Hebrew term *Messiah* and it refers to the person of Jesus of Nazareth<sup>9</sup>. By this term the author presents Jesus as the One who fulfilled all the promises given by God to His nation. Only some of his countrymen accepted Jesus as being the Messiah, and this became one of the reasons for the distinction between Jews who believed in Jesus and Jews who refused to believe<sup>10</sup>. The name “Christians” that was first used in Antioch with reference to followers of Jesus means “*Messiah-followers*”, indicates that this name was coined by Gentiles who recognized differences in behavior (probably toward the Gentiles) of Jews who believed in Jesus and those did not, rather than a term invented by Jews, who normally referred to these as “*the Nazarene sect*” (Ac 24, 5)<sup>11</sup>. For Christians, both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, Jesus is not only the One in Whom God fulfill His plan, but also He is the One in Whom they receive all heavenly blessings by the fact that they are incorporated by their faith in Him into the exalted Christ,

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<sup>8</sup> The term is used in the New Testament 719 times in both secular and religious contexts, the latter referring to Jesus or God. This second use does not appear in the Letter to Ephesian, nor in Gal, Philip, Col, 1 Tim, Tit, Philm, 1-3 J. See: J.A. Fitzmyer, κύριος, in: *EDNT* Vol. 2, p. 329.

<sup>9</sup> F. Hahn, Χριστός, *EDNT* Vol. 3, p. 479.

<sup>10</sup> Probably the main reason for this distinction was the fact that the followers of Jesus also included Gentiles who did not convert to Judaism, as Ac 11, 19-26 suggests.

<sup>11</sup> E.D. Freed, “Christian”, in: B.M. Metzger, M.D. Coogan (eds), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Warsaw 1997, p. 90.

who is in His heavenly realm<sup>12</sup>. This means that by faith in Christ the believers are filled with all spiritual blessings (not earthly material blessings) in Christ (i.e., the Messianic blessings) in heaven (i.e., not on this earth)<sup>13</sup>. In our opinion it refers to a final destination of Christians in heaven, which has been decided for those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. In support of this opinion we underline the fact that the author speaks about “all spiritual blessings” which indicates the state of perfection that is possible for humans only in the heavenly realm, and only in Christ, the Messiah, since only He fulfilled God’s plan of salvation. It means that although this blessing has already been decided for Christians, yet its realization belongs to future<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.2 Eph 1, 4

καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς  
 ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ,  
 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be  
 holy and blameless before him in love.

Verse 4 contains two personal pronouns in the masculine singular – αὐτός –

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<sup>12</sup> The term “*in Christ*” is used in this hymn eleven times, and it may take a variety of meanings, the most probable being instrumental (through Christ’s agency) or local (Christ is a place or space). A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC, Mexico City 1990, pp. 21- 22. We favour the second possibility, since it correlates better with the idea of predestination presented in verse 4.

<sup>13</sup> It is our translation of the phrase, which differs little bit from the text above: ὁ εὐλογίησας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ - *who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ*. This blessing is somehow related to the gift of the Holy Spirit, since the believers have received some gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the seal of their inheritance, as verses 13-14 suggest, however it should not be taken as meaning “all spiritual blessings” that implies the existence of Christians in heaven.

<sup>14</sup> Verse 3 contains a Christology presented in a strictly eschatological context.

where the first refers to Christ while the second refers to God. The verse presents God's decision and its purpose. Concerning the decision, the author states that God, in the Messiah, chose the believers before the creation of the world. This is an extraordinary statement, which contains many theological issues whose interpretation and meaning are subject to much debate. The phrase "*he chose us in Christ*" indicates God as being the subject of the decision and the Messiah as being the *modus* of realization of the decision. The concept of God's election of the people is basic for the Old Testament authors in their self-understanding of the Jews as the chosen nation (Deut 7, 6-8; 14, 2). The idea is that of God, who chose from among many nations the nation that will do God's will according to His plan and purpose. God chose the Jews to believe in Him, to worship Him, and to obey Him. Within this chosen nation, God prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. This purpose, according to the Christian author of the Letter to Ephesian, becomes one of choosing among the nations the people who believe in the Messiah, and by their faith belong to the new chosen nation. It does not mean that Israel is no longer the nation chosen by God; it means that now not only Israel, who was chosen based on its faith, belongs to God, but they also belong to God who are not from the Jewish nation, but by faith in the Messiah have found the way to believe and worship the only God. The Christian awareness not only of being elected by God (Rom 8, 33; 2 Tim 2, 10; 1 Pet 2, 9), but also the conviction that this happened through faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 12, 18; Lk 9, 35; 23, 35) both permeate the New Testament. In our opinion, the thought of the author here concerns the fact that the Gentiles were chosen by God to believe in Him the true God, rather than that God chose them on the basis of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This is attested in the second part the author's statement concerning God's decision which, according to the author, was made before the creation of the world. This statement could lead to questions concerning the predestination of Christians and the pre-existence of

Christ and consequently of the Church if we interpret the phrase without taking into consideration the fact that it belongs with the context of a hymn, and the point of departure in its interpretation should be this rather than starting from the theological implications of the statement<sup>15</sup>. The author, as a beneficiary of God's salvific plan, gives praise to God: all elements involved in the history of salvation are seen by him as the realization of a plan previously prepared by God. This included both the first Adam and his descendants, and therefore introduces the mystery of sin, as well as the second Adam, Jesus the Messiah, through whom the mystery of salvation is realized<sup>16</sup>. Consequently, nothing in the unfolding of the plan of salvation can be attributed to an agent other than God Himself. Verse 4 directly points to the Messiah as being God's *modus operandi* in including the Gentiles also within the new chosen nation.

### 2.3 Eph 1, 5

προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ  
τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ,

He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according  
to the purpose of his will,

Verse 5 develops the idea of election (already introduced in v. 4) by presenting the destination of those who were elected by God<sup>17</sup>. Through Jesus the Messiah, the Gentiles became the adopted children of God, and the *modus operandi* of this

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<sup>15</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 23- 24.

<sup>16</sup> Since the author is writing a hymn of praise, not a theological discourse, the notion punishment does not come into consideration.

<sup>17</sup> God's predestination is presented as in verse 4, however this time it is related to the theme of adoption as children. For similar passages cf. Rom 8, 29-30 and 1 Cor 2, 7.



adoption was Jesus<sup>18</sup>. It indicates Jesus as being the One who made possible that the Gentiles, who are not God's adopted children by belonging to the chosen nation, became the adopted children of God based on their faith in the One anointed by God<sup>19</sup>. The Jews who were adopted children of God by their faith in God and the covenants made with Him enjoyed this dignity from the very beginning (Rom 9, 4), however in the case of the Gentiles who did not know the One God, and the way to knowledge of Him by accepting and following Judaism was well-nigh impossible due to cultural differences, were led to acknowledging the true God by believing in His Messiah. This makes the Messiah, who is identified as Jesus by to Christians, to be the only way by which the Gentiles can join the covenant with the One God and at the same time to be accepted by God as His adopted sons. Although in verse 5 the pronoun "*we*" refers to Christians in general, including Jewish and Gentile Christians, the phrase regarding adoption applies better to Gentile rather than to Jewish Christians, since the Jewish Christians' privileges are irrevocable (Rom 11, 29) and they cannot be adopted again if they had already been adopted<sup>20</sup>. It leads us to the conclusion that God's plan of adoption for all people, which is a part of God's salvific plan, was fulfilled by Jesus the Messiah, in whom the Gentiles can attain by faith to the dignity of being adopted sons of God<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Here, on the basis of Eph 1, 13; 2, 11 we understand Eph 1, 5, although addressed to Christians in general, as being focused particularly on the way Gentile Christians were adopted by God.

<sup>19</sup> The term "*adopted son*" comes from Greco-Roman law, and refers to the adoption of a son to having a status not possessed by birth.

<sup>20</sup> The question of the Jews being adoption will be subject of analysis later in verse 11.

<sup>21</sup> The use of pronouns "*we*" and "*you*" in Eph 1, 11-13 seems to support this interpretation.

## 2.4 Eph 1, 6

εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ.

to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Verse 6 gives the purpose for God's adopting the believers through Jesus Christ, namely, to give praise of His glorious grace, which believers receive through Christ. Contrary to Eph 1, 12. 14 where the object of the Christians' praise is the glory of God, in Eph 1, 6 the object of praise is the glory of God's grace. This grace is the adoption of believers through Christ, who is here called "*the Beloved*"<sup>22</sup>. This term is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew term **אֲהֻבָּ** that described Israel as God's beloved people (Deut 32, 15; 33, 5. 12. 33; Is 5, 7; 44, 2; Jer 11, 15; 12, 7). In Paul's writings this term is used with reference to believers (1 Thess 1, 4; 2 Thess 2, 13; Rom 9, 25; Col 3, 12)<sup>23</sup>. In Ephesians, the term is used in references to Christ. The use of the term *beloved* referring to Jesus Christ indicates His close relationship with God: for Whom He is the beloved Son, by Whom God will reveal His plan of salvation. Thus it is possible to take the term *Beloved* as an equivalent to the term Messiah/Christ.

## 2.5 Eph 1, 7-8

Ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν

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<sup>22</sup> However, in the context of verses 7-8 the term "adoption" (v. 5) includes all events that led to the final stage of being recognized as God's children. That means that redemption, reconciliation and salvation are also the objects of the Christian's praise for God's grace.

<sup>23</sup> M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, p. 199.

τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει,

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight

Verse 7 describes God's grace that believers have received in the Beloved (v. 6). It is important to notice that the personal pronouns "*in Him*" and "*in His blood*" refer to the Beloved Son, but the personal pronoun "*His grace*" refers to God. All that the believers received were granted through the deeds of Jesus the Messiah describes the meaning of God's grace shown to us. This grace contains two the most important deeds in the process of the realization of God's salvific plan. The first is: "*In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*", which indicates the agent (Jesus the Messiah) through whom the grace was given; then the grace is specified (redemption and forgiveness of the sins); and finally the way in which the grace was given is indicated (by the blood of the Messiah). The term ἀπολύτρωσις – *redemption* literally describes the act of buying back a slave or captive through payment of a ransom, from which derives the meaning *setting free* or *release*. It appears in the LXX only once in Dan 4, 34. In the New Testament the term appears ten times in all, of which seven are in Pauline writings with a strong influence of seeing the divine act of the liberation of Israel from Egypt as an act of redemption (Deut 7, 9; 9, 26; 13, 5; 15, 15; 1 Chr 17, 21)<sup>24</sup>. In Eph 1, 7 those who are redeemed are Christians, who were captives but by faith belong to Him, since He paid their ransom in order to buy them back<sup>25</sup>. The payment refers to His own blood, referring to the sacrifice of His life in order to release them from the slavery of sin. Liberation from the

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<sup>24</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, pp. 84-85.

bondage of sin is not directly indicated in verse 7 but phrase “*the forgiveness of our trespasses*” directly points to sin as the “owner” of those who were redeemed by Jesus Christ<sup>26</sup>. Forgiveness of trespasses does not simply refer to the pardon of sins, but it refers to paying the price for sins, that in this case refers to Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross in atonement for sin<sup>27</sup>. A consequence of this sacrifice is that those for whom the blood was shed become his property. Verse 7 shows clearly that for the author, God’s grace toward humankind in adoption is centered on a soteriological Christology<sup>28</sup>.

## 2.6 Eph 1, 9

γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν  
εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ

he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good  
pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

Verse 9b contains another example of using the phrase “in Him”, however this time it is placed in the context of a presentation of the final aim of God’s plan of salvation (v. 10). The author praises God for making known to believers His will (v. 9a), which from the very beginning contained two elements: the first is εὐδοκία - *good pleasure*, that here denotes the will of God; the second is Christ, who in the whole plan of God takes the central position, since He is the one chosen to fulfil this plan<sup>29</sup>. The term εὐδοκία - *good pleasure* appears twice in the eulogy. In verse 5 it refers to God’s will concerning the election of believers, and

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<sup>26</sup> B. Witherington III, *The Letter to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, p. 235.

<sup>27</sup> P.S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, pp. 201-202.

here (vv. 8-9) it refers to God's will regarding the knowledge of His plan by the believers. The knowledge of God's plan in Christ, is presented by the author as being the grace for which the believers praise Him. They are the ones who acknowledge God's plan, and recognize the full dignity of Christ by which they have been granted the ability to understand His plan to sum up the whole world in the Messiah<sup>30</sup>.

## 2.7 Eph 1, 10

εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.

as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Verse 10 gives an explanation of God's good pleasure as He it set forth in the Messiah (v. 9). The first statement concerns the purpose of God's will that has been decided in Christ. The phrase τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν - *for the fullness of time* indicates that God's salvation plan does not end with the salvation of human kind by Jesus Christ, but it extends to the totality of this world<sup>31</sup>. God's plan goes beyond the earthly reality, and it includes not only election of those who believe in Christ, as it was presented in verses 3-7, but it also reaches a cosmic dimension since the universe is centered and reunited in Christ (vv. 8-

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<sup>30</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase "*plan for the fullness of time*" refers to the fixed period of time (καιρός), when the Messiah not only comes but also when He fulfills His task. This means that the phrase *fullness of time* refers more to the future than to the past or present. The term οἰκονομία - *stewardship, management* - here refers to God's choice of Christ to manage the plan of redemption.

11)<sup>32</sup>. The second statement concerns the idea of reunifying the universe in Christ, and indirectly indicates the division of the universe (heaven and earth), which until accomplishment of the fullness is the actual state of our present condition<sup>33</sup>. This directly points to the union of the universe in Christ as being the final purpose of God's will. This is the "mystery of God's will" that was acknowledged by Christians in Christ by the grace and will of God<sup>34</sup>. The third statement shows that Jesus Christ is not only the redeemer of human kind by His sacrifice, that earned for us forgiveness of sins and peace with God, but more importantly He is recognized as being the one who brings together again in Himself all beings into one combined state of fellowship in Him<sup>35</sup>. This state is the final purpose of God's plan, and the corner-stone of the plan is the Messiah by whom the re-capitulation of the universe will be effected by God. The Messiah/Christ is the only mediator between God and His creation, who will bring all creation back to its primal state of existence, which is one of peace and harmony with the Creator<sup>36</sup>.

## 2.8 Eph 1, 11-12

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργουῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ

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<sup>32</sup> M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>33</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>34</sup> J. Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, Glasgow 2000, p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> The verb ἀνακεφαλαίω – "bring everything under the headship of" that often is translated as "to sum up" or "gather up" has a background in rhetorical and philosophical usage where it refers to the summation of an argument. However, in Eph 1, 10 it refers to the climax of God's plan of salvation in which Jesus Christ is the center to which on the one hand all elements of the plan lead, and in which, on other hand, all elements of the plan find their full realization. P.S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, p. 88.

εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.

Verse 11 again contains two pronouns with different referents: the first “*in Him*” refers to Jesus Christ, and the second “*the counsel of His will*” refers to God. The verse brings up again the topic of election that had been presented in verse 4 with regard to Christians. Here, however, the personal pronoun “*we*” is not clearly specified, leading to a variety of interpretations. Usually it is taken as referring to Jewish Christians, but the reasons for that conclusion differ<sup>37</sup>. It has also been suggested that “*we*” refers to the author himself<sup>38</sup>. We would like to propose another interpretation and understand the “*we*” in Eph 1, 11 as being a reference to the Jews. The first argument comes from the structure of Eph 1, 11-14, where there is a dichotomy between “*we*” (Eph 1, 11) and “*you*” (Eph 1, 13), and it is used to indicate the chronological difference between these two groups. The pronoun “*you*” certainly refers to the Gentiles (v. 13), and it is used in the context of their answer to the gospel which was proclaimed to them, by believing in Him (the Messiah/Christ). Then, the pronoun “*we*” is used in the context of the election of some by God according to His plan (v. 11). If “*you*” refers to Gentiles, then “*we*” refers its antithesis, either to Jewish Christians or to Jews. However, if “*we*” in verse 11 refers to Jewish Christians it would mean that Jewish Christians had been designated in Christ earlier than Gentiles (v. 13),

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<sup>37</sup> See: C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, p. 89; M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, p. 203; B. Witherington III, *The Letter to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, p. 237; P.S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> J. Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 58-59.

which is an idea that would contradict the author's perspective on this issue as presented in verse 4. Verse 4 says that God chose "us" in Christ before the foundation of the world, without indicating any chronological difference that is clearly present in the section Eph 1, 11-13. For this reason it seems better to take "we" in verse 11 as referring to the Jews. In support of this interpretation Eph 2, 1-22, especially Eph 2, 11-13, can be introduced, where the dichotomy Jews-Gentiles is explicitly expressed. In Eph 2, 12 the author describes the situation of the Gentiles before they believed in Jesus the Messiah<sup>39</sup>. Five elements are mentioned – life without the Messiah; not being included in Israel; not sharing in the covenant and the promise; lack of hope; life without God – to indicate how the Gentiles were at a disadvantage. Among these "not being included in Israel" and "not sharing in the covenant and the promise" indicate that they are not the part of God's people, and this is the cause of their lack of hope and their lack of knowledge of God. All of this was the cause of their total inability to understand the idea developed within Judaism regarding the Messiah of Israel<sup>40</sup>. Since the very beginning, the plan of creation and the plan of salvation included the idea of the Messiah. This was recognized within Judaism and developed within its system until it found its final expression Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah<sup>41</sup>. The Messiah is designated by God for the benefit of the whole universe (v. 10), including both Jews and Gentiles, but the plan unfold historically first through the Jews and then the Gentiles. As the authors of the New Testament writings frequently repeat, the Jewish religion, with its tradition, scriptures and history, was the environment in which God prepared the way for the Messiah, and the Messiah was for the Jews the One through whom the great promise of God

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<sup>39</sup> Eph 2, 13 shows some similarity to Rom 9, 3-5 but in an inverse way, since it presents the blessings and advantages of the Jews.

<sup>40</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>41</sup> Put in simpler terms this means that God's Messiah became Jesus of Nazareth, not that Jesus of Nazareth became the Messiah.



would be realized. It is God who in the Messiah chose the Jews as His nation, in order that they would be the first to put their hope in the Messiah (v. 12).

Another argument for our proposal lies in the use of the verb κληρώω – *to appoint; choose by lot*. Used here as a verb it is a *hapax legomenon* of the New Testament, but the cognate noun κληρος – *portion, share, possession* – is found in Col 1, 12, where it refers to the fact that believers in Jesus have a share in the lot of the holy ones, but without reference to the dichotomy between Jews and Gentiles that is characteristic of the context of Eph 1, 11. In Eph 1, 11 the term expresses the idea of being “appointed by God or to have been allotted a destiny”, while in Col 1, 12 the term is used as meaning being “qualified by God for a certain lot or destiny”<sup>42</sup>. Since in LXX one meaning of the noun κληρος refers to Israel as being God’s portion or lot (Deut 9, 29), the interpretation of the term κληρώω as referring to Jews seems to be justified.

## 2.9 Eph 1, 13

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον  
τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ  
πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ,

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your  
salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised  
Holy Spirit,

Verse 13 again contains the pronoun “*in Him*”, which is used twice in the context of teaching referring to the Gentiles. It indirectly supports our interpretation of verses 11-12 because after referring this personal pronoun to

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<sup>42</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 36.

the Jews in the previous verses, now following the historical order the author focuses on the way the Gentiles were included in the covenant with God. God not only chose the nation within which He prepared the way for the revelation of the Messiah, but also, through the Messiah, enabled the Gentiles to enter into the covenant that the Jews enjoyed long before them. The Gentiles' path to the covenant is totally centred on Jesus the Messiah, since they heard the good news of their salvation as part of Jesus' teaching proclaimed by His apostles. The phrase "*who have heard the word of truth*" refers to the proclamation of the Gospel and it indicates the first step in the process of conversion<sup>43</sup>. This leads to the second step in the process of joining the covenant with God, which is accepting faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This step is closely related to gift of the Holy Spirit, presented here as the seal for believers, who is the gift promised by God to all who believe. This theological theme is characteristic of Paul's writings (see, e.g., 2 Cor 1, 22) as well as writings strongly influenced by his theology, such as Luke's Acts of the Apostles (cf. Ac 10, 47; 11, 14-17; 15, 8), where the gift of the Holy Spirit attests the faith of those who received it<sup>44</sup>. Gentiles not only joined the covenant with God by faith in Jesus, but also by the same faith in Jesus they received the gift of the Holy Spirit as the sign of this covenant.

#### 2.10 Eph 1, 14

ὁ ἐστὶν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς  
περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession  
of it, to the praise of his glory.

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<sup>43</sup> M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians*, p. 203

<sup>44</sup> C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, p. 92.

In verse 14, the author praises God's glory for giving the believers the seal of God's ownership (the Holy Spirit), which preserves God's possession (the believers) until He takes full and complete possession of believers who have already become His. The full and complete possession regards God's adoption of the believers (v. 5), who have been redeemed by the payment of Jesus' blood<sup>45</sup>. While this status of the believers was already decided, it has yet to be accomplished in the future. Verse 14 contains one pronoun αὐτοῦ with reference to God as the subject of the praise – more precisely God's glory is the subject of the author's praise<sup>46</sup>. In this way the author ends the eulogy that begins with praising God (v. 3) and ends with praising God's glory (v. 14). Although in both cases the subject of praise is the same, the reason for the author's praise in verse 3 refers to spiritual blessings in Christ, whereas in verse 14 the reason is the insurance of the believers' inheritance.

### 3. Christ in God's plan of salvation

The analysis of each verse of the eulogy shows that the main concern is the Messiah, for Whom God is praised by the author. Although the praise is given from a strictly Christian perspective on the salvation history, however it is shaped in much wider terms, extending as far as to the very source of creation. This approach by the author presents the salvific plan not as an additional alternative that resulted from human disobedience, but it is genuinely a part of God's act of creation. This is not understood merely as the beginning of the universe, but as a complex and holistic act of God, which contains both the beginning and also the end, as well as everything between these two defining

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<sup>45</sup> A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>46</sup> This interpretation is supported by verse 12 where a similar phrase is used in a context regarding God.

points. From the author's perspective the center of God's plan is His Messiah, who is identified as Jesus Christ whom the author addresses as Lord in verses 3 and 5. After that the simple term "Christ" and its equivalent pronoun are automatically interpreted as referring to Jesus of Nazareth. While this understanding is probably correct, it probably narrows the sense of the term as used by the author in this hymn. Beyond any doubt in the majority of references the term "Christ" and its equivalent pronoun refers to Jesus of Nazareth. However, in verse 11, which contains the pronoun "in Him" with reference to Christ, according to our understanding the "we" refers to Jews. According to the biblical tradition, the Messiah is the One promised by God and expected by Israel, which directly points to the concept of the Messiah as it originated within the Jewish religion. The Jews, then, were the first to expect him, and the first to be chosen by God to put their hope in him. This hope led the Jews to praise God. Non-biblical sources often speak of men who claimed to be the Messiah, however their claim was always found to be false. In the New Testament writings the Messiah is always sent first to Jews (Mt 10, 6; 15, 24) and then to Gentiles (Ac 9, 15; 28, 28), which corresponds to the author's presentation in verses 11-13. The Jews were the first to put their hope in the Messiah (despite the fact that the idea changed its meaning during the long and dramatic history of Israel), and finally some of them started to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, which created the movement within Judaism that led to the establishment of the group called "Christians" – a group that at first consisted exclusively of Jews but then also included Gentiles<sup>47</sup>. Since the idea of Messiah is prior to the recognition of Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah, and recognition of Jesus of Nazareth would be impossible without the development

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<sup>47</sup> The problem of the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is an issue raised in Paul's teaching in Rom 11, where he expressed his strong hope concerning their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah at the time of His second coming.

of this idea within Judaism, we opted for the interpretation of the pronoun “we” as referring to Jews<sup>48</sup>. In the God’s plan of salvation the Messiah plays the central role both for Jews and Christians. What makes the difference between these two religions is recognition or non-recognition of Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Note that in verses 11-12 the author speaks only about the Jews’ hope in the Messiah, and then in verse 13, he speaks about the Gentiles’ faith in the Messiah.

<sup>49</sup> Fee also admits “the context of Jewish messianism” in which the Christology of the Ephesians is presented, however, he bases his statement on Eph 5, 5. G.D. Fee, *Paulin Christology, An Exegetical-Theological Study*, Peabody 2007, p. 342.

