

## Ephesians 1:1-3

### “Opening Greetings”

**“Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Messiah Yeshua: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah.”**

The Epistle of Ephesians has many high laudatory remarks to the Believers in Asia Minor about the work of Yeshua the Messiah in their lives, and how they have lived appropriately for Him.<sup>1</sup> Paul opens his letter with an assertion of how his audience is not just to be classified as “saints” or “holy people” (NLT), but also how they have been found faithfully trusting in the Messiah: “Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Messiah Yeshua” (Ephesians 1:1, PME).<sup>2</sup> This is followed by the more formal, opening greeting, “Grace to you and *shalom* [peace] from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Ephesians 1:2, CJB/CJSB).

Within the opening greeting of Ephesians, one sees how Paul commonly uses some specific terms for the Father and Son, referencing God as “Father” (*patēr*, πατήρ) and Yeshua as “Lord” (*Kurios*, κύριος). This is, to be sure, very significant, given how the title *Kurios* was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Divine Name YHWH (יהוה). It would not have been improper for Paul to have employed the term *basileus* (βασιλεύς) or “king” to refer to the Son, with Ephesians 1:2 instead reading as, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the King Yeshua the Messiah.” But with the Son referred to as *Kurios*, the term used to represent the Divine Name YHWH in the LXX, it demonstrates how Paul’s theology of the Godhead is carefully balanced, with a close relationship between the Father and Son recognized. The Father is mentioned first as God,<sup>3</sup> but Yeshua is also recognized as a part of the Godhead as “Lord.” By no means does Paul simply consider Yeshua to be a human master by calling Him *Kurios*. By being referred to as *Kurios*, Yeshua is regarded as being integrated into the Divine Identity.

Following this, some of the relationship of the Father and Son is elaborated upon, as God the Father is issued blessings, and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah is asserted to be the means by which those who have trusted in Him, are blessed: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah” (Ephesians 1:3, TLV). Readers should be able to see an important parallel between the blessing emphasized in Ephesians 1:3 and Colossians 3:1-4:

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Messiah, keep seeking the things above, where Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Messiah in God. When Messiah, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

The location of the spiritual blessing is *tois epouraniois* (τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις) or “the heavenly places” (NASU). This is a different description when compared to the more common *ouranos* (οὐρανός), which can refer to the sky, the stars, or Heaven as the realm of God, each contingent on context. Here, the “heavens” (HCSB) are a more general description of where God’s blessing

<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Various early witnesses of Ephesians 1:1 lack *en Ephesō* (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) or “in Ephesus” (among major versions, see RSV). This points to the letter called “Ephesians” ultimately being a circular epistle written to assemblies in the vicinity of Asia Minor.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. Guthrie and R.P. Martin, “God: God as Father (2.2),” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 357.

As is noted in this article: “In the opening salutation in all the letters under Paul’s name God is described as Father. It forms a basic assumption behind all that the apostle writes in these letters.”

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resides. While God's residence is by no means excluded, Victor Paul Furnish points out, "it is also a realm where the powers of darkness and evil are still active (3:10; 6:12)."<sup>4</sup> Witherington considers that here in Ephesians 1:3 it is akin to "the invisible spirit realm,"<sup>5</sup> which includes both good and evil.

Some have thought that Paul's emphasis of God's blessing originating in the (general) Heavens are delivered to combat Gnostic thoughts of a multi-leveled Heaven, yet are still largely blessings which are unattainable in the present world. Peter T. O'Brien, however, would emphasize "The blessings of salvation which believers have received from God link them with the heavenly realms. These gracious gifts are not simply future benefits but are a present reality for us, since they have already been won for us by God's saving action in Christ."<sup>6</sup>

While those of us who affirm a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity, may find some strong support from the greeting of Ephesians 1:2, the praise issued to the work of the Father in Ephesians 1:3, realized via the work of His Son, does demonstrate that the Son is the Father's agent. The only way that mortals can realize "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies" (LITV) is to be "in Messiah" or "in Christ."<sup>7</sup> At the very least, as proponents of a low Christology of Yeshua being a created agent of the Father would widely conclude, this requires Yeshua to be uniquely supernatural and multi-dimensional. Proponents of a high Christology, would conclude on the basis of a wide number of statements and assertions seen throughout the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, that while the Son is indeed the Father's agent in His mediation of redemption to human beings—that the Son has authority, can perform activities, and has a nature that points to Him being far, far more than just a created, supernatural entity.

### Ephesians 1:17-23

#### "He who fills all in all"

"that the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the [assembly], which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

What Paul specifically prays for concerning his audience in Asia Minor, is, "I never stop giving thanks for you as I mention you in my prayers—that the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, our glorious Father, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in knowing Him" (Ephesians 1:16-17, TLV).<sup>9</sup> Proponents of both a low Christology of Yeshua being a created supernatural agent sent from God, and of a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians," in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 836.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 232.

<sup>6</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Grk. *pasē eulogia pneumatikē en tois epouranois* (πάση εὐλογία πνευματικὴ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις)

<sup>8</sup> Grk. *en Christō* (ἐν Χριστῷ).

<sup>9</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.