

# The Compass

Week 38

OT Readings: Isaiah 25:1 – 43:13

NT Readings: Galatians 3:10 – Ephesians 2:22

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- Isa. 36:1-39:8 repeats the narrative found in 2 Kings.
- Isa. 40 marks a decisive change in the flow and historical context, now the Exile. These are words of hope; there is to be a new “Exodus,” a return home that is God’s doing.
- Note the first of several “Servant” passages. These become part and parcel of our understanding of Jesus, the Servant King.<sup>1</sup>

### New Testament

- In Galatians, Paul’s argument against the “agitators” continues.<sup>2</sup> Notice his appeal to both their experience with the Spirit (3:1-5) and to a careful reasoning from the OT Scriptures.
- Paul argues that the time of the Torah (law) has come to an end in as we express our faith in Christ. The Spirit is the evidence and the fulfillment of the OT promise to include the Gentiles in the people of God.
- Eph. 1-3 is big-picture, “...Paul is...telling the ultimate story – God’s story – and putting the Gentile believers - and us - into it.”<sup>3</sup>
- In Ephesians, notice the repeated reference to “heavenly realms.” These are not references to “heaven” rather to the place where the powers of darkness dwell.<sup>4</sup>

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**Isa. 43:1-13.** Having experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and the disequilibrium of exile to Babylon, God’s people entered into a period of reflection and rethinking, “Who are we now? We have sinned against God and He has disciplined us for our good. But what is next, what does the future hold for us?” Despair and hopelessness was a real possibility, even the loss of their faith. Then these words!

“I am He your God...who can reverse my decisions. I will be with you, I will redeem you, I am your savior, you are precious in My sight and I love you...Do not fear!” Words of comfort and a future hope (Jer. 29:11-13), all firmly resting upon God’s incredible character and ability!

Read this passage slowly, reflect on the heart and character of God toward His people, yes, the very descendants of those who failed Him so miserably. In Him there is no vindictiveness, no “I told you so,” no “You need to suffer a little longer and learn your lesson!” No, no, no – not our God!

No matter our weakness, failure or situation He calls out to us – “I am with you, you are precious to Me, I will redeem...” What is your situation today? What are you facing? This is Who He really is, and toward you!

## Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

**Gal. 5:13-6:10.** This “fruit of the Spirit” passage is very familiar to most believers. What might be missed is Paul’s *corporate* emphasis; read it again thinking about how it applies to us *together* as God’s people, the church.<sup>5</sup> For Paul the “flesh” (translated “sinful nature” in the NLT) is past time, the old way of life, it is life outside of and contrary to God’s way of thinking and doing. It is the world’s way; and we are now to live in a radically different way.

For those of us who “Spirit-people,” the Spirit is to guide us and lead us, we are to keep in “lockstep with Him.” If we do so, then we will experience the kind of relationships and life *together* that God intends for us; we will produce the fruit in our life *together* that God wants (5:23).

Does this mean that the passage doesn’t apply to me personally, only us together? No, but how we do life together really matters. Our quality of life together makes Jesus known to the world (Jn. 13:34-35).

How are you doing with your family, the Body, those with whom God has joined you together? Are you disconnected? Not involved? Then the Body suffers because it lacks what you alone can contribute. Is there some unresolved offense, strained or broken relationship? What will you do about that *now*? The health of His Body is critically important to Jesus.

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### Eph. 1:3-14. “What are we to think about the idea of ‘predestination’?”

While the NLT does not use the word “predestination,” it occurs twice in this passage: “He *predestined* us to adoption...” (1:5 NAU) and “having been predestined” (1:11 NAU). The nature of predestination has been the raging debate of centuries of theological reflection. Yet, Paul seems clear enough here and we must take careful concern for the context of this passage. Paul’s concern here is not the niceties of theological debate, though this is clearly a very important theological passage.<sup>6</sup>

Paul’s heart overflows in thanksgiving, a blessing toward God, a “berakah.” God has achieved the purpose of the ages, bringing about the longing of the Father’s heart – to have a people to love and be loved by. All of this has occurred *in Christ*.<sup>7</sup> This people, who began with Israel, now includes all peoples (1:13-14). This is the “mystery” now revealed (1:9, 3:1-13), His kind intention (1:5).

In a huge oversimplification, we might say it like this: God’s grand purpose, which began even before He made the world was to have relationship with us; to have a people. In other words, God had a “pre-destination,” a desired outcome, a “destination” for everyone: *to be in Christ*.

How does one become part of this *people*? Paul is clear, “when you believed in Christ” (1:13), i.e., by faith and trust in Him. How do we enter into God’s “destination” for us? By giving our lives to Jesus and becoming His own.<sup>8</sup> Yet not all choose this destination, some clearly are not saved. But God’s heart is on display, He is not arbitrary or operating out of some secret will which we cannot know – He longs for **all** to be saved, “He does not want anyone to perish...” (2 Pet. 3:9). He longs for all to be in Christ, part of His people.

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<sup>1</sup> You will notice that the servant motif moves back and forth between an individual (42:1) and the corporate/group (44:1).

<sup>2</sup> These “agitators” were Jewish Christians who had come to the churches Paul planted bringing an “addition” to Paul’s gospel, “If you are to be part of God’s people and walk with God, you must be circumcised and keep the Torah (law).”

<sup>3</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 347. Ephesians is theologically dense and filled with important truth. However, and as with any book of the Bible, we must stay focused on what the author intended his original audience to hear and know. God has formed a new people of God that includes both Jew and Gentile in accordance with His cosmic purpose.

<sup>4</sup> Read Acts 19-20 for the historical background of Ephesus and the establishment of the church there. Magic practices were intimately connected to the worship of Artemis at Ephesus and were used to manipulate these powers. Once the new believers abandoned their magic they would have found themselves wondering how their new faith would deal with these very real powers of the spirit realm. Paul answers that question by these repeated references to their new standing in the “heavenly realms” because of Christ. All of this may seem a bit odd to Western Christians, but makes perfect sense to Christians in many other places in the world where the spirit powers (demonic) are very well understood and experienced. For more on the historical situation at Ephesus and the place of magic in the first century see Clinton Arnold, *Power & Magic*.

<sup>5</sup> Notice Gal. 5:13-15 (all about how we do life together), 5:19-21 (many of these “desires” are about disunity with other believers), 5:26 (“one another”), 6:1-2 (restoration *within* the Body), 6:10 (doing good to our brothers and sisters).

<sup>6</sup> All parties in the debate agree that predestination/election is in fact a Biblical idea, however, that is where the agreement often ends.

<sup>7</sup> In these twelve verses Jesus is mentioned seventeen times, thirteen are “in Christ.”

<sup>8</sup> Herein lies the rub. Those of one camp will contend that *individuals* are predestined, i.e., God chose some individual persons to be saved, to be “elected” before the world began – they have no choice in the matter. By implication, the rest will be lost. In the other camp (including me) are those that hold that God chose a *people* and that individuals become part of that people as a matter of their own faith in Christ – they have a choice. If you want to evaluate differing positions on this issue, see *Perspectives on Election, Five Views* (B & H Publishing Group, 2006).