

Ephesians 3:2–13: Pointless Digression, Or Epitome Of The Triumph Of God In Christ?

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I. Introduction

Ephesians 3 consists of a prayer report by Paul,¹ which is interrupted just as it begins by a long digression (3:2–13), wherein he discusses the ministry given to him by God on behalf of his readers. He then returns to the report of his prayer (3:14–19) before concluding with a doxology (3:20–21). While many regard the whole of Ephesians as an enigma,² this passage is perhaps more puzzling than any other, as commentators have had difficulty discerning the logic that drives it, and the manner in which it relates to the rest of the letter.

Martin Kitchen has concluded recently that the digression simply is irrelevant to the argument of Ephesians—an unnecessary and distracting detour. He regards the letter as pseudonymous, claiming that Eph 3 is the post-Pauline author's "construction of Paul," whereby he portrays Paul as a person of prayer, the ideal self-sacrificial minister, and as one who has received a divine commission. But with respect to the purpose of the digression, Kitchen concedes that "one is still left wondering why the writer devotes twelve verses to an exposition of Paul's status."³

WTJ 66:2 (Fall 2004) p. 314

More typically, the digression is viewed as an apostolic defense, much like those found in other Pauline letters. Ernest Best, for example, argues that the digression is a justification of Paul's unique apostleship and message. Paul was not just one of the apostles, he was *the* apostle to the Gentiles, and the digression provides the grounds upon which he can describe himself in this way, recounting how he was made an apostle and describing the authority with which he speaks.⁴ Clinton Arnold reads this passage along a similar line, claiming that the digression is aimed at establishing Paul's apostolic credentials.⁵

These readings, however, fail to do justice to key features of this passage. The digression is not in any sense an explanation or defense of Paul's apostleship, nor an account of how he came to be the ap...

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