INTRODUCTION

TODAY, BEGIN NEXT SECTION OF EPH., ~ 3:1-13, ~ WHICH WE CAN CALL Paul's Detour.

BUT, BEFORE WE DO THAT, IT IS IMPORTANT, IN ORDER TO KEEP THE BIG picture of Ephesians in mind, to once again briefly set the overall context of the letter.

As said, Ephesians can be divided into three consecutive overarching themes.

1. The first central theme is brought out in chapters 1-3. In short, Paul explains the doctrine of salvation and its accompanying blessings.

2. The second overarching theme is brought out in ~ 4:1 - 6:9, in which Paul highlights and describes how we, who have been given this salvation and its accompanying blessings, are to live as a result.

3. The third central theme of Ephesians is brought out in 6:10-20, and deals with the spiritual warfare of the Christian.

OK, NOW LET'S BEGIN THE NEXT SECTION OF EPHESIANS, ~ 3:1-13, ~ WHICH WE CAN call Paul's Detour.

In 3:1, Paul begins to pray for Ephesian believers, then abruptly digresses, or takes a detour and focuses on "the mystery of Christ" in verses 1-6.

and then in verses 7-13, Paul focuses on the gospel and his role in preaching it.

So, his detour consists of two parts.

He then resumes his prayer in verse 14.

The fact that the beginning of verse 1 and of verse 14 are identical, "For this reason," shows us that this is the case: Paul begins, digresses, and resumes.

And it is this digression, ~ 3:1-13, which we will look at next in our study of Ephesians.

NOW, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS IS A DETOUR, we should not look at this section as unimportant.

Everything the biblical authors wrote, digression or otherwise, is important, is supposed to be there, and is exactly what God wants us to know.
As Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, ~ for reproof, ~ for correction, ~ and for training in righteousness, ~ that the man of God ~ [i.e., ~ the believer in and follower of Christ] ~ may be complete, ~ equipped for every good work."

And as Peter says in 2 Pet. 1:21, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, ~ but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

What we have pictured here is the cooperation between the authors of Scripture and God the Holy Spirit.

Through the authors' own unique personalities, ~ styles of writing, ~ and vocabulary, ~ God the Holy Spirit moved each of them to communicate God's truth.

Considering that Paul was under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, we can be 100% assured that what Paul wrote in this detour in Ephesians ~ is important, ~ supposed to be there, ~ and is exactly what God wants us to know.

We could say for certain ~ that Paul's detour in Eph. 3:1-13 ~ "is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, ~ for reproof, ~ for correction, ~ and for training in righteousness, ~ that the person dedicated to God may be complete, ~ equipped for every good work."

Simply put, ~ we could say that Eph. 3:1-13 ~ is a divinely-inspired detour.

AS WE NOTED, ~ PAUL'S DETOUR CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS.

In verses 1-6, ~ he focuses on describing "the mystery of Christ."

Now, ~ Paul will define it for us in verse 6. ~ Suffice it to say at this time ~ that "the mystery of Christ" has to do with a plan for the inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation.

And in verses 7-13 of his detour, ~ Paul focuses on the gospel & his role in preaching it.

THIS A.M., ~ WE WILL BEGIN LOOKING AT THE FIRST PART OF PAUL'S DETOUR, ~ verses 1-6, ~ BY zeroing in on verses 1-3a.

VERSE 1, ~ NASB ~ "FOR THIS REASON I, ~ PAUL, ~ THE PRISONER OF CHRIST Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles."

VERSE 1, ~ OF COURSE, ~ IS THE ORIGINAL BEGINNING TO PAUL'S PRAYER. 11/29
If we combine the beginning of 3:1 with 3:14, we can pretty much piece together what Paul would have said had he not digressed.

And we can read it this way: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, bow my knees before the Father."

Paul says, "For this reason" he's going to pray.

Most likely "for this reason" points back to what he taught in 2:11-22, and that forms the reason he was going to pray. We'll come back to this when we get to verse 14.

Paul says, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus."

Paul was probably writing during his two-year imprisonment in Rome.

But whereas we might expect Paul to say that he is a prisoner of Caesar, he clarifies that he is "the prisoner of Christ Jesus." Paul considered himself Christ's prisoner, not Caesar's.

From a strictly human level, Paul was in Rome, a prisoner of Caesar, awaiting trial before Nero.

But Paul refused to look at things on a human level. He looked at everything totally from a spiritual level, which is evidenced by what he said in 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison," 7 7

as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

And this is the correct perspective for all believers. We've talked about this before, earlier in Ephesians.

And that is: believers need to begin, and I fail miserably at this at times, believers need to begin to think more on a spiritual level rather than on a physical, only what we see level.

As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:7, "for we walk by faith, not by sight."

So, like Paul, refuse to look at things on human level...
"I, ~ Paul, ~ the prisoner of Christ Jesus." ~ Paul knew and understood that Jesus is in control of history ~ and all of life ~ not Caesar. ~ It only looked like Nero was in charge.

The point is seen in Jesus' response to Pilate before Jesus' crucifixion, ~ recorded in Jn. 19:10-11a.

"So Pilate said to him, ~ 'You will not speak to me? ~ Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' ~

Jesus answered him, ~ 'You would have no authority over me at all ~ unless it had been given you from above.'"

It is also seen in the believers' prayer recorded in Acts 4:23-31. ~ They address God as, ~ and rightly so, ~ "Sovereign Lord" and say in verses 27-28, ~

"for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, ~ whom you anointed, ~ both Herod and Pontius Pilate, ~ along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ~ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." ~ Crucifixion . . . .

Judas not in control ~ Jews not . . . . ~ Romans not . . . . ~ Satan not . . . . ~

It only looked that way.

God in control, ~ & everything proceeded according to His sovereign plan.

Likewise, ~ Paul knew and understood that it only looked like Nero was in control.

In reality, ~ by saying "I, ~ Paul, ~ the prisoner of Christ Jesus," ~ Paul was declaring the absolute sovereignty of Jesus over history and all of life.

Pharaoh . . . .

Nebuchadnezzar . . . . ~ **Esther . . . .**

Jesus is sovereign over all of history ~ and all of life.

And recall once again what we said in the past about Heb. 1:3, ~ where it says that Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of his power." ~ The Greek word for "upholds" means "holding ~ and carrying ~ from one place to another."

What we are saying is that Jesus sustains the universe in its existence and operation, ~ and is carrying it forward, ~ or guiding it, ~ to its divinely appointed end. 4/9
This is a tremendous lesson for us, who sometimes become worried and anxious about what's happening in our lives and what the political powers-that-be are doing in the world today.

Contrary to appearances, Jesus is in control, not anything or anyone else.

AND SINCE PAUL KNEW JESUS WAS IN CONTROL, HE MOST LIKELY ALSO KNEW that the only reason he was in prison was that Jesus allowed it and had a purpose for it.

There are two important lessons for all believers to learn here.

1st, nothing can happen to us and no one can touch us without Jesus' permission. Scripture makes this abundantly clear.

E.g., in Lk. 22:31, on the night of His arrest, Jesus said, NASB “Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat.”

“you” in the Greek is plural, so Jesus was referring to all the apostles, not just Peter. Para., “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat.”

The point: Satan could not touch them without God's permission.

Job . . .

The 2nd important lesson to learn is that whenever we go through trials, Jesus has a purpose for it.

In 1 Pet. 1:6, Peter writes, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if [or, could be translated as since it is] necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”

Peter says that the trials we go through are necessary. This means that the trials in a believer’s life are no accident. They are part of God’s sovereign plan for us.

This shows us that there is always a purpose, more specifically a divine purpose, for our suffering. God always has a purpose for allowing trials to come into our lives.

It should be reassuring to us to know that God’s people are never needlessly afflicted.

Paul . . . 11/5/9
CONTINUING IN VERSE 1, ~ PAUL SAYS THAT HE IS “THE PRISONER OF CHRIST JESUS for the sake of you Gentiles.”

►►The primary meaning for the Greek word translated as “for the sake of” is that Paul was imprisoned because of his ministry on behalf of the Gentiles.

►►Recall, ~ Paul's special mission was to the Gentiles. ~ Because of this, ~ the Jews claimed that he was distorting God's revelation.

◄◄And thus they were instrumental in obtaining his imprisonment in Jerusalem, ~ from where he was taken to Caesarea, ~ tried, ~ and appealed to Caesar.

◄◄He was then taken to Rome and imprisoned while waiting for his accusers to arrive.

►►Therefore, ~ because of his mission to the Gentiles, ~ Paul suffered incarceration.

►►In addition to the primary meaning, ~ the word “for the sake of” implies that Paul’s imprisonment benefited the Gentiles.

►►So there was a definite purpose for Paul's imprisonment, ~ and he knew it. ~ As we said earlier, ~ God always has a purpose for allowing trials to come into our lives.

◄◄And Paul serves as a perfect example. ~ In this case, ~ it was to benefit the Gentiles.

►►Now, ~ Paul does not say how his imprisonment was benefitting the Gentiles. ~ But we do know the greater principle here. ~ And that is that God's people are never needlessly afflicted.

►►And in the much larger context of suffering, ~ we must always keep Rom. 8:28 in mind.

►►Paul says, ~ NASB ~ “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, ~ to those who are called according to His purpose.”

◄◄Suffering will still bring pain, ~ loss, ~ and sorrow. ~ But under God's control, ~ the eventual outcome will be for our good. ~ Joseph . . . .

IN VERSE 2, ~ PAUL BEGINS HIS DIVINELY-INSPIRED DETOUR.

HE SAYS, ~ “ASSUMING THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ~ [SOME, ~ “IF INDEED YOU HAVE heard] ~ of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you.” 11 6/9
JUST A QUICK TRANSLATION NOTE ABOUT "ASSUMING" OR "IF INDUE.

Although this phrase is constructed as conditional ~ and translated that way in many EV, ~ it is one of those expressions in Greek ~ where it is clear that Paul has no doubt about its truth.

The phrase means that the Ephesians had heard this, ~ and it is said that this grammatical construction is Paul's delicate or polite way of reminding them of it.

As I understand it, ~ it could be paraphrased, ~ "you have, ~ of course, ~ heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you."

PAUL IS REFERRING HERE TO HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO PREACH TO THE GENTILES.

Although Paul preached to Jews, ~ his primary ministry was to the Gentiles.

Simply put, ~ Paul's saying, ~ "you have, ~ of course, ~ heard about my responsibility to bring the message of God's grace to you Gentiles."

Difficult . . . . If you recall, ~ Scripture defines "grace" a number of ways.

Free and undeserved favor . . . . Also divine enablement, ~ empowering us to live the Christian life and to serve God. ~ And Peter defined as teaching of God . . . .

Of course, ~ as we know, ~ context always determines meaning.

And in the immediate context of verses 1-6, ~ "grace" appears to refer to "the mystery of Christ," ~ which is the key phrase and focus of these verses.

Especially noteworthy is verse 3's mention of "the mystery," ~ which grammatically seems to refer back to the word "grace" in verse 2. ~ Context = Equivalent . . . .

That this is how Paul is using the word "grace" here is seen in the parallel passage in Col. 1:24-27, ~ in which Paul also talks about "the mystery of Christ." ~ Albeit a diff. aspect . . .

In verse 25, ~ Paul writes, ~ "of which ~ [speaking of the church] ~ I became a minister according to the stewardship ~ [or, ~ responsibility] ~ from God that was given to me for you, ~ to make the word of God fully known."

In the context of verses 24-27, ~ "the word of God" refers to "the mystery." ~ Paul says that he was given the responsibility from God to make "the mystery of Christ" fully known. ¶ 7/9
So, even though he is using the word “grace” to refer to “the mystery of Christ” in Eph. 3:2, Paul is basically saying the same thing as he did in Col. 1:25.

And we can paraphrase Eph. 3:2 this way: “you have, of course, heard about my responsibility to make the mystery of Christ fully known to you Gentiles.”

Now, we should mention here that since “grace” normally means free and undeserved favor, Paul may have used it to refer to “the mystery of Christ” to emphasize that this plan that has to do with the inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation, like every other aspect of salvation, is an act of God’s free and undeserved favor, God’s grace.

In verse 3a, Paul introduces a second thing that the Christians in Ephesus have of course heard about.

And that is how Paul received “the mystery of Christ.”

We could paraphrase and for context read it from verse 2 this way, “you have, of course, heard about my responsibility to make the mystery of Christ fully known to you Gentiles; and how the mystery of Christ was made known to me by revelation.”

Simply put, in verse 3a, Paul is saying “you have, of course, heard how God let me know the mystery of Christ.”

And Paul says that God gave him the knowledge of “the mystery of Christ” by direct revelation.

Paul points this out in Gal. 1:11-12.

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel [i.e., it’s not of human origin]. For I did not receive it from any man [i.e., he did not receive it from any human source], nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ [“of” means “from.” I.e., Paul received the gospel that he preached from Jesus].”

And “the mystery of Christ” would have been part of that revelation since it comes through the gospel as we’ll see.
SO "THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST" IS NOT SOMETHING THAT HUMAN BEINGS, ~ including Paul, ~ dreamt up.

This plan that has to do with the inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation comes directly from God.

Since this is so, ~ it means that what Paul writes here is God's word and not man's.

And that means that what Paul wrote is 100% absolute truth and 100% without question trustworthy. ~~ The psalmists testify to this about God's word.

In Ps. 119:142. ~~ "Your righteousness is righteous forever, ~ and your law is true."

In Ps. 119:151, ~ "But you are near, ~ O Lord, ~ and all your commandments are true."

And in Ps. 111:7-8, ~ speaking of the Lord, ~ declares, ~ "The works of his hands are faithful and just; ~~ 7 7

all his precepts are trustworthy; ~~ they are established forever and ever, ~ to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness."

And since what Paul writes is God's word, ~ it is incumbent upon Christ's followers ~ to study it, ~ to try to understand it as best we can, ~ and to obey it and apply it in our lives.

CONCLUSION.

I THINK PERHAPS WE ARE BEGINNING TO SEE THAT EVEN THOUGH PAUL TOOK A detour, ~ it was definitely a Holy Spirit-inspired detour.

And that what we are learning here is important and exactly what God wants us to know in order to grow in our faith ~ and in the knowledge and understanding of His word ~ 7 7

and that we "may be complete, ~ equipped for every good work."

"Now to the King eternal, ~ immortal, ~ invisible, ~ the only God, ~ be honor and glory forever and ever." (1 Tim. 1:17a)

LET'S PRAY . . . . 9/9